

Introducing Network:

During its first two years of publication, Network has been distributed (free of charge) at a variety of points in Ottawa. Starting with this issue, it will also be distributed at certain points in Toronto. It publishes approximately once a month, though occasionally (as was the case in January) a month is missed.

The purpose of Network is to promote discussion and thought about radical social change, the ultimate goal being an anarchistic society of networked small communities. A growing number of people sympathize with this goal, but far too little thought has been given to the question of getting from here to there. Too often our energy is so drained by single-issue movements such as refusing the cruise and freedom to choose abortion that we lose, or never attain, perspective of the basic social conditions that make such reforms virtually impossible to obtain. Network contends that it is useless to petition the state or its elected politicians for reforms; we must put some energy into liberal protest movements as a rearguard action attempting to slow the rate of deterioration of our social and environmental conditions, but the main thrust of our energies must go into creating an alternative society managed by the people themselves rather than elected representatives.

The free university proposed on pages 4-8 of this month's issue will hopefully provide a framework around which discussions and practical action for creation of an alternative society can proceed. Readers in Toronto are invited to attend the meeting February 9; those in Ottawa are invited to contact Network regarding the possibility of setting up a parallel free university in Ottawa.

Submissions from readers about any aspect of these questions will be welcomed.

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FREE UNIVERSITY TO BE DISCUSSED FEBRUARY 9 pp 4-8

At a Search Conference on Alternative Futures held in Toronto in January, it was decided to organize a free university whose main purpose will be to study and implement measures for establishment of an alternative economy. The founding meeting will occur February 9, noon-6 p.m. at 519 Church (near Wellesley.) All are welcome. People in other cities interested in possibly starting a parallel free university in their own city can attend or write Network.

In this issue, a description of the group process used by the Search Conference and suggestions for some of the questions the free university might tackle. (it should be noted that views expressed are those of one participant in the conference, not necessarily those of the group as a whole.)

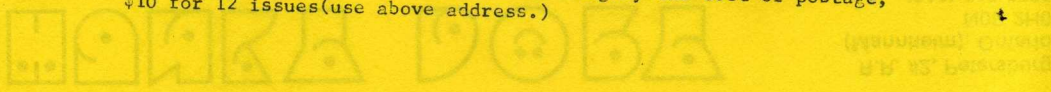
THE GREEN MOVEMENT pp 9-11

News and views about the green movement; to what extent can or should it divorce itself from the green political parties that are springing up?

PRISON ABOLITION pp 11-12

Claire Culhane, Vancouver grandmother and prison abolition activist, offers relevant information and reminds us of 25-day demonstration planned at Parliament Hill May 13-June 3.

a word about our appearance: Network is printed on scrap paper, both to make production affordable and to make some sort of statement about conservation. So skip the reverse side of each page. This enables us to offer subscriptions for roughly the cost of postage, \$10 for 12 issues(use above address.)



Military Boost for Japan

JAPAN-Prime Minister Nakasone has proposed increasing Japan's defence spending by 6.9% to almost \$13 billion in the coming fiscal year, pushing it above the 1% of GNP which was adopted as both an official and psychological ceiling in 1976. (Washington Post 30-12-84 pA17.)

Reagan Murder Count Rising

NICARAGUA-A report by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, a nonprofit organization that monitors human rights in Latin America, charges the U.S. administration with responsibility for facilitating Contra violence in Nicaragua. The Contras have killed over 880 non-combatants after capture, and a total of almost 5,000 Nicaraguans have died as a result of contra violence since 1981. The Council also blames the Peruvian Sendero Luminoso (Shining Light), a leftist guerilla group, for systematic brutality against a civilian population, and the U.S.-backed government of Guatemala for killing 3-5,000 civilians over the past 12 months. (Washington Post 30-17-84 pA21.)

NDPers Back South Africa

TORONTO-Stephen Lewis isn't the only NDP MLA defending Canada's ties with South Africa. Dr. Morton Shulman has announced in his Toronto Sun column: "Since returning from South Africa I have increased my investments in that country--I truly believe it is in the best interests of most Blacks." (quoted Canadian Tribune 10-12-84.)

Olympic Priority for USA

WASHINGTON-While withdrawing from UNESCO and cutting back the budget of Medicare, Medicaid, farm subsidies, veterans' benefits, civil service retirement programs, education, urban development, the Job Corps, Amtrack, public libraries etc., the USA will spend \$40 million to build a new yacht to win back the America's Cup in 1985. (Can Tribune 10-12-84.)

Thatcher Started Falklands War

GREAT BRITAIN-New data reveals that, during the Falklands War of 1982, the British government ordered its nuclear submarine HMS Conqueror to sink the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano, murdering 368 crew members, although the Belgrano had remained outside the 200-mile limit Britain itself had decreed. The government is believed to have done this to destroy the possibility of a peaceful settlement favoured by much of the British public. (Washington Post 23-12-84 pA1.)

South Africa Torpedoes Angola Settlement

MOZAMBIQUE-Mozambique and Angola have announced that they will take a tougher line in negotiations with South Africa because Pretoria is failing to keep its agreements and making unacceptable demands for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. (Washington Post, 13-12-84 pA21.)

Indonesia Death Squads Active

INDONESIA-Death squads of soldiers have killed 3-5,000 people here since 1982. Originally formed in public view to kill criminals, the squads in 1983 went underground and expanded their targets to include political dissidents. The press is not allowed to report murders of dissidents, and three major weeklies were shut down in 1983. (Nation 8-12-84)

Europe Reels From Pollution

EUROPE-Industrial pollution has damaged every third tree in West Germany's forests, turned 16,000 Swedish lakes into virtual acid pools and so polluted 2/3 of Poland's rivers that the water is not fit even for industrial use without purification. A Norwegian study of 4,800 lakes found that all the fish had died in over 1,000 of them; 90% of the pollution that produced the acid rain that killed them came from outside Norway, mostly Britain (whose daily tons of contaminants are carried away from Britain to Europe by prevailing winds.) Czech power plants are killing the forest in the huge Erzgebirge mountain range, with 247,000 acres already dead. (Nation 8-12-84)

Religious Dissident Hanged

SUDAN-The government has publicly hanged Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, leader of a party opposing Islamic law; 4 followers were reprimanded after repenting. (Washington Post 20-1-83 pA30.)

NEWS BRIEFS

Multiple Charges Against Protesters

MICHIGAN-Civil disobedience demonstrators against the Williams International Company in Detroit, which makes the jet engines used to power the cruise missile, face several years in jail because of multiple charges; this is the first time in the USA that anti-nuclear activists have been charged with multiple criminal offences for nonviolent civil disobedience. Protests continue nonetheless. (Nation 8-12-84.)

Exit the Family Farm

USA-Only 3% of Americans now live on farms, compared with 25% 50 years ago; most depend on outside jobs to make ends meet, and the large agribusiness farms produce the bulk of the food. The feds paid out nearly \$28 billion in price supports and other payments to farmers in 1983, nearly double the net farm income that year; nonetheless as many as a quarter of the country's commercial farms are in serious financial trouble. With few additional markets available and Reagan determined to reduce price supports (which in any case go mainly to big farms) the family farm may be doomed. (Washington Post 20-1-85 pC1.)

LATIN AMERICA-The IMF's austerity program is working out well-for the banks. Latin American countries who a year ago appeared to be on the brink of defaulting on hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of international loans now appear to be working their way out of their worst economic difficulties by imposing starvation wages and high unemployment on their citizens. (Washington Post 20-1-85 pH1.)

U.S. Funds to Afghanistan Mushroom

AFGHANISTAN-U.S. aid to anti-Soviet insurgents here has mushroomed into the largest covert action since Vietnam, totalling about \$250 million for this fiscal year. Some of the aid is in the form of advanced anti-aircraft cannon, which escalates the war and repeats the Vietnam mistake of overtechnologizing primitive people. Numerous atrocities on both sides have been reported. Congress approved this program while attention was focussed on its cutoff of aid to Nicaragua's invaders. Channelling of the aid through Pakistan gives the despotic Zia regime leverage to demand more U.S. aid, possibly including assistance in building his nuclear weapons. (Washington Post 13-1-85 pA1.)

Soviet Arms Buildup Disproved

WASHINGTON-Recently released CIA estimates show that Russian spending on armaments slowed down markedly in the mid-1970s, from a nearly 5% increase each year to 2%, much less than the growth of American spending. Reagan claims that this was a period of relentless Soviet buildup, but defence spending actually fell by more than half. (Washington Post 13-1-85 pB5.)

Puppet Regime in Grenada

GRENADA-Elected because of massive U.S. financial backing, new prime minister Herbert Blaize promptly requested the USA to delay troop withdrawal until "a fully-trained police force" is ready. The one opposition member elected promptly resigned his seat because of irregularities in the election. (Canadian Tribune 10-17-84)

Dangerous Chemicals in Georgia

GEORGIA-After the Indian gas leak, France and Brazil cancelled orders of the chemical responsible, methyl isocyanate. So the chemical was shipped back to Union Carbide's facility in Camden County Ga, still in the 55-gallon export drums which have a greater chance of an accident than the tanker trucks normally used for internal shipment in the USA. (Christian Science Monitor 14-12-84 p5.)

Ayatollah Wants Nukes

IRAN-Khomeini is attempting to resurrect the Shah's plan to build a nuclear reactor, and possibly an atomic bomb, with a West German engineering firm studying the feasibility of completing at least one of the two reactors that had been under construction before the revolution. Nuclear proliferation is expected to increase in the Middle East as countries such as Argentina, Brazil and India that are not part of the Nonproliferation Treaty, sell sensitive facilities. (Nation 8-12-84.)

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FREE UNIVERSITY WILL STUDY ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY
a report on the Search Conference on Alternative Futures
by Gary Moffatt

A free university will be created in Toronto, with the first planning meeting Saturday, February 9 noon-6 p.m. at 519 Church Street. This university will sponsor workshops on various aspects of creation of an alternative economy and social system, and initiate action on the proposals that emerge from these workshops. The university will also sponsor a variety of programs to exchange skills, knowledge and labour. Anyone interested in participating is welcome to attend.

The plan to create a free university is the outcome of a Search Conference on Alternative Futures which was held in mid-January. This Conference was called to explore the need for basic social change, and for finding the means to initiate action to create the social system we consider necessary rather than expending all our energy reacting against the present social system (ie demonstrating against government actions.) This conference touched on many of the questions we will have to deal with in order to create an alternative society; to deal with each question at the length required will require breaking our needs down into various categories and forming groups to discuss and research each of them. The university will provide a framework for undertaking this task.

Following is a report on the conference and my own initial proposal (for consideration and amendment February 9) of what some of the free university's workshops might focus upon and discuss. The conference followed a structure for search conferences which envisualizes five separate stages (we did all five in a period of less than 24 hours, which entailed a certain amount of brainstorm burnout. A total of about forty people participated, though there were never more than 25 at one time. Feelings about the usefulness of this structure were mixed--for those with some previous familiarity with concepts of building an alternative society it meant that most of the time was spent going over ideas they were already familiar with, and postponing consideration of possible courses of action until the closing hours of the conference. However, not all the participants had this previous familiarity, and by building together an evaluation of the need for basic social change we hopefully laid a foundation for working together to create such change. This report will list the five stages of a search conference and the major points that were brought up at each.

Session 1: Participants take the "wide view", focusing on the past 10-15 years and the present, looking at how the present evolved from the past, not only for the participants' situation, but also in the context of the wider society. This is so participants will develop a shared understanding of the identified problem and a shared appreciation of the complexity and interrelationship of this problem to other factors in the wider environment.

Positive Factors identified:

- communal living
- sense of community
- questioning dominant values
- consciousness expansion
- greater public awareness
- personal contacts increased
- change to create indirect
- change first

Negative Factors identified:

- self-destruction
- sexism
- over-optimism
- commoditization of alternatives
- cliqueishness of social change groups
- cynicism about ultimate answers
- lack of unitary goal
- too much moralism
- double standards
- repetition of previous mistakes
- too narrow a focus
- too much labelling
- media distortions and influence; too much concern with media

Session 2: Having identified the issues and trends which have led to the present, participants shift focus to the "long view" by projecting these issues and trends 10-15 years into the future. This develops a shared picture of the "probable future."

factors seen as contributing to probable future:

- disempowerment of people
- decentralized power structures
- greater access to information
- genetic alienation
- greater alienation leads to simplistic solutions (Reaganism)
- single issue orientation
- alienation from the land
- manipulation of information

aspects of probable future foreseen:

- dependence on high technology
- greater gaps between poor and rich
- greater gaps between skilled and unskilled
- polarization of radicalism and extremism
- increased harrassment of activists
- erosion of civil liberties
- more poverty, fewer social services
- increased segregation of poor
- deterioration of health, especially poor
- greater conformity
- one-sided approaches to issues
- more birth defects
- individual solutions open only to those with money and power
- social change ideas co-opted by state
- growing militarism and conflict
- growing superpower control

- emotional grinding down of activists
- political careerism
- pessimistic thinking vs positive visualization
- fractionalization of reality by media and computers
- proliferation of co-ops
- growing resistance to technology
- lack of space
- renewed cultural and political rebellion
- increased isolation
- growing recognition of need for "macro" solutions
- growing desire for minimum platform
- infighting of movement activists
- techno-fixism
- diminishing superpower control
- obsolescence of nation-state

Session 3: Still focusing on the "long view", participants look for an alternative to the "probable future" by "dreaming" what they would like the future to be. This develops a shared vision of the "desirable future" and an awareness that, no matter how diverse the participants' interests may be in the present, they all share more basic long-term goals

participants wanted their future to include:

- a sanctuary for personal fulfillment
- decent & secure living for people with limited resources
- decent jobs and incomes
- political freedom
- peace and trust
- no landlords, bosses, poverty, private property
- meaningful work
- cultural freedom
- individual development in context of human community and stewardship of nature
- bottom up control; more connection to nature of production and consumption
- liberation of land and countryside
- value difference, change and spontaneity

- freedom to live as one wishes, autonomous housing
- diffusion of skills and self-reliance
- no greed and fear
- fulfillment in life, peace in death
- meaningful work with tasks shared, all work valued, freedom for meaningful leisure
- cultural, political and religious autonomy
- responsible and moral world
- replace money with usufruct, gift-giving
- cybernetics/equality of wealth
- freedom to succeed
- bio-regions instead of nation states
- absence of competition
- eco-communism

at this point in the conference, it seemed clear that we all had a somewhat similar vision of the direction we wished to go in towards the ultimate goal of a decentralized society, though opinions varied as to the extent to which modern technology would help or impede this path and should be used in the society we desire. One participant drew our attention to Schumacher's distinction between a tool and a machine.

Session 4: Participants narrow the focus once more to their identified problem or issue, seeking to identify what, in the present situation, inhibits participants from moving in their desired direction ("obstacles" or "constraints") and what could encourage their progress towards their "desirable future" ("opportunities.") Having set their problem in the "wide" and "long" contexts, participants can begin to explore the possibilities of the present situation with much more information and understanding and with long-term goals in mind.

Obstacles:

- irresponsibility
- fear, lack of trust
- intolerance
- self-righteousness
- need for security
- lack of energy
- lack of initiative
- lack of skills
- hypocrisy
- insensitivity
- people easily swayed
- absence of co-operative training, preparation in our experience
- many who question status quo fail to see broader picture
- we focus too much on ourselves, not the system, as the problem
- lack of good methodology; older strategies don't take the new forms of oppression into account
- acceptance that society will always stay the same although it is constantly changing
- we're uncertain how to convince people that we can't change the system by working through it
- lack of clarity of approach to tactics; do we wish to be a vanguard to develop new ideas for others to use, or wait until large numbers are ready to work on them?

- internalized roles & limitations
- negative prophecies self-fulfilling
- lack of awareness, knowledge, wisdom
- scarcity of advertised alternatives
- lack of resources--money, land
- earning a living takes too much energy
- lack of leadership and analysis
- no definition of problems and goals
- repetition of same old tactics
- failure to imagine new tactics
- dogma impedes search for new ways
- absence of co-operative training, preparation in our experience

Opportunities:

- more social tolerance
- ie of ethnics, gays
- multiculturalism
- organic gardening (some control of food)
- more sharing of skills and knowledge
- many are questioning their roles and willing to change
- there are ways of obtaining and raising money
- automation is both an obstacle and an opportunity
- multiplicity of tactics
- develop means of building a new world within the shell of the old while maintaining a revolutionary perspective

Session 5: Each participant chooses which of the issues or areas of concern (as identified by the large group) s/he would like to work on as part of a "task group." Each task group concentrates on one of the identified areas of concern by considering precisely how to maximize the identified "opportunities" (and, also, how to create new ones), and how to minimize or eliminate the identified "obstacles"--thereby establishing guidelines by which to begin to work towards their shared "desirable future."

- participants identified the following tasks they would like to work on:
- free university to sponsor workshops, skill sharing and exchange, etc.
 - centre for bookstore, coffeehouse, films etc.
 - create alternative economy as means of radical social change
 - create work that is humane, will benefit society
 - create property for community use
 - create information/resource centre
 - network existing projects
 - do more organizing and educating
 - establish Mondragon-type experiment
 - establish squatters movement
 - create federation of alternative economic experiments
 - conduct workshops on various aspects of alternative economics culminating in large conference
 - create institute of human-scale research, organizing and educating
 - run anti-political, anti-electoral campaign during elections
 - preserve agricultural lands and grow food on them
 - establish new age summercamp (rural retreat)
 - establish self-sufficient work network to engage people in such jobs as recycling and food production (could include work exchange networks of likeminded groups and individuals)
 - examine components of existing "economy" to learn how to create alternatives

There was not time for a specific discussion of most of these ideas. It was decided to establish a free university as a framework through which specific discussion and action around these and other ideas could be initiated.

Although it has not yet been decided what specific workshops the free university will offer, I would propose that we break the economy down into its various components and analyze methods of creating alternatives for each. This would likely necessitate having an ongoing working group in each area. Just to start the ball rolling, I shall outline a few of the subject areas we might create working groups in and some of the questions they might ask:

FOOD

Why are food co-ops used mainly by the middle class rather than low-income people who have a greater need for inexpensive food?

What steps can we take to make people more conscious of what they are eating from a nutritional, economical and political standpoint?

Why are so many small farms folding? How feasible is it to run farms, whether community or individually owned, in accordance with our principles?

Do we accept Lappe's thesis that there can be enough food in the world to feed an expanding population and the only causes for world hunger are political, or must we work for population control?

Assuming that we accept the analysis of what is wrong in the food industry presented in the report of the People's Food Commission, what can we do about it?

Can we work out a program for city people to assist with farm work at harvest time, trading their labour for board and the opportunity to learn skills?

What steps can those of us in the city take to produce more of our own food (i.e. hydroponics, buying land near city, growing things indoors and on roofs, etc.)?

How important is it to encourage one another to build our diet around locally produced food?

Is there any way we as individuals can help alleviate Third World hunger (other than contributing to Establishment charities?)

HOUSING

Would a community switchboard be a useful means of helping co-op households and people seeking co-op living situations to find each other? What other functions could a community switchboard serve?

What resources are available for groups wishing to start a co-op housing project? How much money will they need?

In view of rising property taxes and the precarious nature of rent controls, is urban living a viable option for low-to-medium income people? What are the options? (ie moving to suburbs, small city or town, farms; taking over abandoned or semi-abandoned town etc.)

If we do decide to remain in the city, how can we make it more affordable?

HEALING

To what extent is access to the means of healing hampered by government legislation? What can we do about it?

Now that Ivan Illich has us all scared to go to the hospital, what alternatives do we have when we get sick?

How can we help alternative medicine groups already organized (ie midwives) promote their goals?

Should and can we distribute information re such controversial areas as birth control, abortion, growing and using illegal drugs, suicide?

How can we combat the state's growing tendency to prevent us from having access to medicinal herbs?

How can we promote the wish and means for people to assume control of their own bodies?

If we reject the state's right to determine what means of healing we can use, what steps can we take to protect ourselves from dubious or quack healers?



ECOLOGY

- Is environmental preservation too big a problem to be approached at other than governmental levels; will personal practise of sound ecological procedures really help?
- Is it feasible to start small communities which by following sound ecological practices can encourage the rest of society to follow suit?
- To what extent will removing ourselves to sparsely-populated areas such as Northern Ontario increase our chances of surviving an ecological disaster?
- To what extent can urban homes follow sound ecological practices and procedures?
- What opportunities for creating small businesses does the need for sound ecological procedures create?
- How can the movement to create an alternative society link with the ecology movement to further the goals both share?
- Can we demonstrate the expendibility of the automobile by removing it from our own lives?

CULTURE

- How do we analyze the development of the alternative culture to date? What is good, what is bad? Have the counter-culture press, various forms of rock music, the drug culture etc really created a feeling of solidarity, or have they created wide understanding gaps between the counter-culture and mainstream society, even between various age groups within the counter-culture?
- Can the alternative society support people whose primary contribution is artistic rather than economic? Can we barter a song or a poem for a pair of mocassins?
- How justified is the often-held assumption that songs or plays advocating political consciousness and revolutionary lifestyles will cause audiences to practise them?
- How can we protect the alternative culture from co-option by the establishment?

MANUFACTURE

- Is it feasible for us to try to manufacture all the articles we need for our own use ourselves? If not, where do we draw the line? Is it hopelessly more expensive to make clothes, shoes etc. in cottage industries than on assembly lines?
- Can we establish apprenticeship programs for people to learn necessary skills? To what extent should we encourage people to use existing job training programs?
- To what extent can we supply our need for products by barter rather than purchase?

EDUCATION

- How can we make free school and home schooling alternatives to the present education system accessible to more people?
- Do what extent do existing free schools provide a real alternative to the present school system? Do we wish to promote them or establish more Summerhillian models?
- How do we prepare children to live in a society where salaried jobs will be at a minimum and most people must survive without a salary?
- How can the process of education be extended throughout life? Can we establish a suitable skills exchange program for all ages?
- If we do establish free schools, what values do we want them to promote?

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER (possible discussions for plenary)

- Should we attempt some sort of grand overall design for an alternative society, with clearly marked entry routes so that anyone who wishes to join it can be encouraged to do so, or should we limit ourselves to networking small groups supplying individual goods or services and leave each individual to try to find a place in one of them?
- How feasible would starting an alternative community (in the country or a semi-abandoned small town) actually be? What would be the advantages? How could such a community work with those who remain in the city?
- What can we do to encourage people in an alternative economy to make more use of each others' services? (barter system, print our own money etc.)
- On the basis of experience to date, can we really trust each other more than the state?

Synthesis, a social ecology newsletter from San Diego, keeps its readers abreast of progress in the Green Movement both at home and abroad. (P.C. Box 1858 San Diego CA 90733 USA /\$4 U.S. for 5 issues.) Here are extracts from some of the reports in the current issue #18

WEST GERMANY-Election gains were reported by the Germany Greens last October 30; in the university city of Tubingen they outpolled the left-of-centre Social Democrats 20.9% to 20%. In North Rhine-Westphalia, West Germany's most populous state, they received 8.2% of the vote as compared to 2% in the last election five years ago. General gains were also made in the southern state of Baden-Wurttemberg.

GREAT BRITAIN-Ecologists with reservations about the Ecology Party (and its necessarily hierarchical party-political organization) have organized a "Green Group" which maintains that party branches should convey local views to the national party, rather than the other way round. The Green Group is envisaged as ideologically autonomous, affiliated to several national groups or to none. It stands half inside local politics and half outside--whilst it may fight local elections in its own name, it does not define itself as a machine for fighting elections, but more broadly, as an instrument for bringing about change. It may focus on creating space within, for its members to grow together. Or it may focus on creating economic change such as setting up a local Skills Exchange or building a windmill. Rather than a centrally-commanded national party, it proposes a network or federation of autonomous groups. This idea isn't really new--for example, Spanish anarchists successfully organized in this way on a large scale--but what is exciting is that the issue of green groups vs Eco branches is surfacing in the UK now.

In particular, the "Green Collective" has come into being to network Green Groups together and provide an alternative medium for internal communication to that within the Ecology Party. The idea here is that it would be impossible to convert the Ecology Party to the networking, anti mass-ideology approach, in a wholesale manner by a vote at national conference. The Green Collective therefore invites Eco branches to make the change individually and unilaterally. Whether the call will be heeded remains to be seen. At its inception the Green Collective can only boast about 20 green groups. However, as a result of the failure of most Eco branches to surpass 1% or 2% at elections, or to increase their number of activists, there has been a casting about for something new, and a trend has arisen for some Eco branches to approach local Friends of the Earth groups, animal rights groups, Conservation Society branches, etc. and propose joint meetings and joint local newsletters. This may well be an advance signal of a move away from national ideology and towards local specifics. Should the Conservative Party succeed in its avowed aim of abolishing elections to various county councils, and in raising the deposit for Parliamentary elections to 1,000 pounds, this could only accelerate such a move away from talking about green ideas to actually beginning their practice locally.

NEW ENGLAND-Last October people from the Institute for Social Ecology, New Hampshire Clamshell, the Maine Green Party and a variety of local Green and Bioregional study groups came together to discuss the possibility of a region-wide alliance. In New England as well as other parts of the Northeastern USA, activists of varying backgrounds, but with a common anti-hierarchical ecological perspective, are hoping to create working Green alliances in a fully decentralized grass roots-oriented manner. Many are concerned that their commitment to decentralism and grass roots democracy, which are crucial elements in the European Green movements, may not be fully shared by people who are representing themselves as Green spokespeople...there are rumours of plans for national offices, large foundation grants, paid travelling organizers and a national "Green" program to be drafted by a closed network of "experts." Many believe that this is completely antithetical to democratic Green principles, citing experience in the anti-nuclear power movement of the late 1970s and the anti-Vietnam war movement of the sixties to show that real communication and solidarity suffers under centralized coordinating committees and offices and national media figures, but thrives on direct personal contact among individuals corresponding and travelling on their own or with LOCAL group sponsorships.

GREEN POLITICS: CAN IT WORK HERE?

by Don Alexander

Recent years have seen the phenomenal growth of "green" politics in Europe. This has given rise to attempts to apply the Green "formula" to North America. While the philosophy underlying the European Green movement is largely unfamiliar to Canadians, the North American "New Left" had a hand in creating it with its emphasis on humanism, democracy and non-violence (as in the early SDS.) The success of the Greens has a number of interesting aspects. Inasmuch as the Greens are "left," they represent the first major breakthrough progressive force: in the West have scored in 15 years (apart from the women's movement.) That the traditional left becomes more marginalized by comparison is cause for reflection.

But success has its seamy side. There are those who, with the best of intentions, would import Green movement slogans, lock, stock and barrel with little regard for Canada's unique conditions and traditions. And there are always opportunists willing and anxious to jump onto trendy new bandwagons. In Canada, in the past couple of years, Green parties have sprung up, beginning in B.C. and spreading into Ontario. A "founding convention" for a national Green Party was held a year ago last November, but participants were unable to agree on structure and goals. At present, a loose federation exists with chapters in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and the prairie provinces. The distinguishing feature, for me, of the Canadian Green effort is its overemphasis on electoral politics and its attempt to build a party within a movement. Whatever the wisdom of forming parties, in Europe the parties developed organically out of a Green MOVEMENT (ecology, peace, squatters, counter-culture.) Green Party spokespeople claim to represent such a movement here, but a handful of individuals working around peace and ecology issues does not a movement make. Except for B.C., where the Party plans to run in municipal elections, the Greens' electoral efforts have been devoted to politicking at the federal level, rather than working from the grassroots up. Despite statements to the contrary, running in elections seems to have been the Greens' sole activity to date.

In the U.S., the "green" phenomenon has followed a somewhat different course. In May of 1984, a North American Bioregional Congress got the "green" ball rolling, inspired in part by Pritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnak's book "Green Politics: The Global Promise." In August, a national meeting was held in St. Paul's, Minnesota where it was decided to go back to the regions to build up strength before reconvening on a national level. Regional meetings since have been held in areas like New England, where the resulting "Committees of Correspondence" have produced a bold and interesting document entitled "Green Politics in New England?" In it they elaborate a "traditional programme" for dismantling technocracy and setting up a decentralized, ecological society. For instance, they advocate an interim programme of "non-nuclear, no surrender border defence," which involves the destruction of 99% of the U.S.'s nuclear arsenal, the reactivation of citizen's militias, and the retention of some non-nuclear weapons for territorial security. Some would argue that their programme for disarmament concedes too much to the military, but the point is they tackle the difficult problems of "how do we get there from here" and take into account the public's desire for defensible borders. That such a visionary document is appearing at the beginning of the "Party-building" process and not at the end (the Canadian Greens have yet to produce one) is indicative of a difference in approach.

The significant features of the document (which Canadian Greens would do well to learn from) are its emphasis on being rooted in native traditions, and the importance of strengthening community. This no doubt reflects the influence of Murray Bookchin, long-time writer and activist, whose work "Post-Scarcity Anarchism" achieved a fairly wide circulation in the early 70's. Bookchin, who moved from New York to Vermont and founded the Institute for Social Ecology in 1973, has written extensively about these issues. For instance, in a recent article in Vermont's River Valley Voice, he writes:

We have radical libertarian, populist traditions of our own that are more meaningful to the American people at large than the European radical traditions that have been declining in Europe itself over the past few decades. Our libertarian traditions, stripped of their egoistic and proprietarian features, are worth preserving in themselves, not as a means to achieving more radical ends.

The same point is relevant to Canada. Our libertarian traditions are disjointed, but are worth unravelling. They include the spirit of self-reliance and human scale characteristic of the Maritimes, the populism of the prairies, the spirituality and respect for Earth of Native and Inuit peoples, the I.W.W. tradition in B.C., the Doukhobors, the strong communitarianism of French and English settlers, the Mennonites and Amish, and a variety of impulses from Canada's immigrant population.

In contrast with the Canadian Green Party's emphasis on elections, Bookchin notes that: "...there is another kind of politics that we often ignore in the name of "electoral politics" or "independent political action." This type of politics includes extraparlimentary forms like peace and antinuclear groups, food cooperatives, communes, affinity groups, feminist, ethnic and religious organizations. It is an ORGANIC politics that is based on grassroots education, not mass mobilization. The power it primarily seeks is empowerment of citizens rather than the election of officials--citizens who can freely associate and mutually support each other with a view toward re-empowering the public as a whole. It seeks to create a body politic and a meaningful public opinion oriented toward a broad vision of social change and public involvement in the problems of our time. Such a politics is institutionalized not around a party structure, but genuine popular forms like neighbourhood councils, town meetings, local associations and citizens' initiative groups, as well as the countercultural forms that remain from the sixties. Coalitions of this kind are ongoing forums for enlightening people as well as politically activating them. This kind of politics represents the only real break we can make with the long, dismal history of failures and betrayals that mark so many earnest efforts for "independent political action."

For Bookchin, the community is the authentic locus for social change, and not the factory or electoral district:

To disengage ourselves from the existing social machinery, to create a domain to meet one's needs as a human being, to form a public sphere in which to function as part of a protoplasmic body politic--all can be summed up in a single word: reempowerment.

People cannot fight the system as individuals, but only as members of a social organism. Traditionally, the most powerful popular struggles have been waged not by people imbued with dogma, but communities whose integrity and way of life have been threatened by hostile forces. The farmers and fishermen of Cape Breton (in the recent herbicide battle) are a case in point. As individuals and as "masses," people are so much grist for the mill of manipulative politics, but in communities they recover their humanity. Politics becomes an expression and defence of a community's life energies--a natural extension of one's everyday concerns, drives, needs and passions. Moreover, revitalized communities offer the key to social reconstruction. Only when we live in a setting within the comprehension of a single human being will it be possible to humanize work, practice participatory democracy, and heal the rift between ourselves and nature and between ourselves and other human beings.

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PRISONERS A PROFITABLE BUSINESS
a letter from Claire Culhane

Building more prisons to cure crime is like building more toilets to cure diarrhea.
from: Prisoners Coalition Newsletter, Santa Fe New Mexico.

Thanks for NETWORK Solstice issue--much enjoyed, as always. Only wish you could find better facilities--I can just see the old-style Gestetner grinding away. At least so far I can manage to distinguish between "pariah" and "parish" from the contents of the sentence.

I'm just beginning to re-surface so forgive my giddiness. Final MSS rushed off to Black Rose which should see the light of day come end of March under the title STILL BARRED FROM PRISON; sub-title may be (but not decided yet) WHY PRISONS AT ALL? which is what the book is all about, providing firm reasons. Sure wish I could join your Search Conference later this month--one of the many times I curse the size of this country. It becomes so counterproductive when it comes to trying to get together--regional/provincial/neighbourhood conferences of course have to substitute--but, still!

Viewing the problem from prison abolition focus, the best way I can find to deal with it is to immediately settle for short term/long term goals. So, by striving to help keep prisoners alive and well, this does not conflict with striving to abolish the prison system altogether. In fact it is to ensure that there will be that many more around to help with the task. Keeping close to the guideline "as few prisoners for as short a time as possible" one is obviously not supporting and reinforcing the system, which must have growing numbers incarcerated to feed into the vested interests and prison industry. The Criminal (In)Justice System employs 108,366 of which the Correctional Service Canada--prison system to you--employs 10,833. Over 15% of the total figure of course are classified as administration, and the total bill has reached the three billion mark by 1984. Add to that picture the profits from CORCAN (derived from Corrections Canada) whose revenue (generated through sales of manufactured goods) amounted to \$10,308,000 during 1983, a 38% increase over 1981-82, and the value of agricultural products produced during 1982-3 was \$1,280,000, an increase of 28.5% over 1981-82.

While prisoners are considered liabilities to the tune of \$50,000 and \$62,000 per male and female maximum security prisoner respectively, they can also be seen to be assets as they generate hundreds of contracts, thousands of jobs and millions of dollars of profit for CORCAN (not for the taxpayer.) All of which--and more, much more--in forthcoming book. Place th. above alongside the rising number of suicides and deaths and what happened at Archambault, and the sneaky quiet construction boom as additions are being built to existing prisons all over the place--why upset the public about decisions as to WHERE to build the next prison.

To get back to your January conference, wish I had time to join in the very important debate on where the non-violent C.D. actions should go and all those ramifications. There hardly a question listed on page seven (of previous Network) which doesn't whet my appetite. However, must clear up mountain of backlog correspondence so I can get our 25 day/25 year campaign rolling. I hope you're reserving May 13-June 6 for our project on the Hill. I'll be getting back to you long before then with carefully laid plans for the 25 workshop we hope to offer in that period.

Editor's note: with her letter Claire sent an excerpt from Black Rose's 1984 and After: Canada jails more people than any other industrialized western country, except the USA. Canada's rate of incarceration is 150 persons out of every 100,000 (calculated from data in Solicitor-General's Report 1982-3). The USA's rate is 212. Other countries have much lower incarceration rate, e.g. "for England and Wales it is 85, France 67, Sweden 65, Netherlands 28." With a 27% increase in the Federal prison population since 1980--from 9,242 to 12,001--Dennis Finlay, spokesperson for the Solicitor-General (sportswriter turned instant prison expert) still maintains the penitentiaries are "coping fairly well...we can't build overnight, and it takes six or seven years' lead time to build a major institution." New institutions would thus have to be built every four months if they were to keep up with the dramatic increase in the prison population. Mr. Finlay offers the further insightful conclusion that since "...there are more prisoners coming in than going out...it puts a strain on resources." The latest estimates quoted from the construction costs for Renous Maximum Security--Canada's Alcatraz--(formally named Atlantic Institution...108 miles north-east of Moncton...works out to \$228,000 per cell or 30% more than any other Canadian stitution...and goes against what every study on the location of prisons has recommended, charges ReaL Jubinville of the Canadian Association for the Prevention of Crime.