
New Options

Mark Satin, Editor

March 30, 1987

Issue No. Thirty-seven

Let's Get Tiny Loans to the World's Poor

A new approach to helping the world's poor is taking shape in obscure corners of the Third World. Rather than giving money to Third World governments and their massive "national development" projects, and then hoping that some of it reaches the poor, the idea is to give or lend money to private, voluntary organizations (PVOs) in the Third World, which would then *lend* money—in tiny (\$50-60) chunks—to the poorest of the poor.

The idea is to induce development "from the bottom up," not just from the top down.

The new approach is being developed by activist-intellectuals like Dr. Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh and John Hatch of Arizona, in cooperation with PVOs such as Bangladesh's Grameen Bank and Latin America's Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA). Although the approach was initiated barely a decade ago, it has already bettered the lives of nearly one third of a million people—is about to be introduced by PVOs in 17 countries—and has incurred the wrath of many on the political left and right.

Unlike many of the initiatives described on these pages, this one is already being fought out in Congress in the form of a proposed piece of legislation, the "Self-Sufficiency for the Poor Act" (H.R. 910 and S. 998). The proposed bill—introduced two months ago—owes its existence largely to the work of Sam Harris and his RESULTS group, the post-liberal, post-socialist "citizens' lobby on hunger" profiled in NEW OPTIONS #19. "We at FINCA believe that H.R. 910 could be the most important piece of foreign assistance legislation since the Marshall Plan," Rupert Scofield, secretary of FINCA, testified before a Congressional subcommittee earlier this month. Few reporters were on hand to hear him.

"Village banking"

H.R. 910 seeks to foster the kind of development work being carried out by the Grameen Bank and FINCA. Mary O'Connell recently re-

ported on Grameen for the Center for Neighborhood Technology, a Chicago-based technical assistance organization, and here is what she found:

"The Grameen Bank (the name means 'village') was started in 1976 by an economics professor from Chittagong University, Muhammad Yunus. It began as a pilot project among the landless poor of a village near the university campus. It has since broadened to include over 250,000 borrowers, all of them people owning less than a half-acre of land and 60% of them women. The repayment rate has been above 95%. Money comes from the U.N. Development Program, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the governments of Norway and Sweden, and [private foundations].

"Yunus describes the Grameen project as an attempt to reverse the age-old vicious circle of 'low income, low savings, low investment, low income' into an expanding system of 'low income, credit, investment, more income, more credit, more investment, more income.' Key to breaking the cycle is the injection of credit—a point that's equally true in poor city neighborhoods in America as it is in rural Bangladesh.

"The basic unit of the scheme is a group of five unrelated people, all of the same sex and from similar circumstance. They come together initially with a bank worker for training and to elect leaders.

"Among themselves, the group members talk out ideas for generating income. They then pick which ideas, and which borrowers, hold the most promise. Initially, two of the five are given small loans (the average loan is \$60, which is close to half the per capita income), with a short payback period. After six weeks, if payments are on schedule, the next two borrowers are eligible, and six weeks later the last borrower.

"Each group member thus has an interest in the success of all the others—which not only adds peer pressure for prompt repayment, but also leads group members to keep a critical eye

on the ideas and prospects of the others.

"The loans finance a long list of small income-generating projects, including cows, small shops, sewing machines, weaving, fishnet production, food processing, and trading ventures of all kinds.

"Along with the borrowing is a forced savings scheme, with each member contributing one *takka* (about a third of a day's wage) to the group savings each week. This money can be borrowed, interest-free, by group members for personal emergencies. Additionally, a 5% 'tax' is taken out of each development loan, which then becomes the group's operating fund."

"Sixteen decisions"

"[The five-person] groups themselves come together into a 'center,' or collection of ten groups, for weekly meetings. The centers scrutinize loan requests, work directly with the bank staff, and also conduct other activities, such as building schools. Loan decisions, disbursements, and repayments all take place, not at a bank facility, but at the weekly center meetings.

"The center meetings have developed a whole social philosophy, expressed in the form of 'Sixteen Decisions.' They include resolutions to drink clean water, grow vegetables, build schools for children, refuse to give or accept dowries, and support each other in time of need.

"The 'decisions' represent a collective effort to improve living conditions. They fulfill another purpose of the development effort identified by Yunus: to bring people 'within the folds of some organizational format which they can understand and operate, and can find socio-political and economic strength in it through mutual support.'"

Revolving loan funds

John Hatch, FINCA's founder and president, explains FINCA's philosophy from his office in Arizona:

"Founded in 1984, FINCA has so far or-

Corridors of Power

ganized village banking programs in Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Costa Rica and El Salvador. Already more than 600 rural villages and 32,000 farm households have benefited from self-help loans with a total value of over \$1 million. A surprising 97% of FINCA villages have repaid their credit obligations on time.

"For every \$60 it collects, FINCA is able to provide a \$50 self-help loan to a new rural household. When enough funds have been collected to cover all interested families—usually about \$2,000—FINCA makes a local currency loan to that village to capitalize a *community revolving loan fund* or 'village bank.'

"Loans from FINCA to start community loan funds are tailor-made to the needs of each village by means of a joint credit arrangement to which all participating villagers are signers. The repayment period can vary from 1-5 years. Interest rates vary from 6-15% depending on costs of obtaining and supervising the capital.

"The village is free to use its fund in one of two ways, or combinations of both. First, it can invest in *collective* self-help projects (for example a storage silo or road improvements). Or the fund can be used to make *family* loans to finance income-generating investments (for example, buying seed, raising chickens).

"But regardless of the use, at least once a year each participating household is required to replenish its share of the fund so that the village bank can finance new self-help ventures the following cycle."

"Minimum involvement"

"Village banks promoted by FINCA are democratically managed by local residents, not outside staff or advisors. Loan approvals, collections, etc. are often made in community meetings. FINCA does not suggest self-help ideas, nor impose lending criteria, nor require standardized bookkeeping; these too are left to village creativity.

"In keeping with minimum involvement, FINCA does not establish field offices tightly controlled from a U.S. home office. Instead, when establishing a country program, FINCA organizes a host-country non-profit organization to run it. These entities are entirely staffed by host-country nationals, never by *gringos*. Likewise, to supervise village banks in the countryside, FINCA employs farmer-leaders whom it trains to visit and assist up to 10 villages apiece on a monthly basis.

"For these reasons the administrative costs of FINCA's programs are exceptionally low: less than \$10 per family assisted per year.

"The economic benefits of village banking can be enormous. Even so, villagers usually consider the social benefits to outweigh the economic. They cite increased community solidarity, more cooperation among neighbors, new opportunities for women, renewed hope

for the future of their children. But most of all, villagers express a deep pride in having planned, managed, and financed their own progress through their *own* efforts. This sense of ownership is a very empowering experience for people who have lived in scarcity all their lives."

Deeply opposed

The "loans for the poor" approach is deeply opposed, both by many in the traditional "foreign aid" community and by many on the political left.

Earlier this year, 27 Congresspeople were treated to a blistering attack on the "Self Sufficiency for the Poor" legislation in the form of a letter from Peter McPherson, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). McPherson wrote that the legislation would cut down on the "flexibility of our foreign aid program" and increase the "administrative burden on AID."

Of course, those are merely paper objections; you could apply them to any proposal. What were McPherson's real objections? According to RESULTS' Sam Harris, it's that AID simply doesn't believe that the poorest of the poor "are able—or enable-able." Another lobbyist says that one AID administrator told him this: "If you want to make the bucks, you've got to get money to enterprises of 10 people or more."

On the left, one standard objection is that, if you get credit into the hands of individual poor people, they'll end up competing against each other economically . . . whereas they "should" be seeking to improve their situations collectively. In doing research for this article, we were even told that the Self-Sufficiency for the Poor Act is a plot to keep the Third World poor divided! In their massive study of the Grameen Bank for the Norwegian government, sociologists Andreas Fuglesang and Dale Chandler come to a different conclusion: "Throughout Grameen Bank the prevailing attitude is that the group must progress as a whole. If one member is lagging economically behind and another is forging ahead, the prospering member's new loan will be delayed until the others achieve the same standard."

Another common leftist objection is that, by extending credit, PVOs are making it harder for the left to engage in "conscientization" (consciousness-raising) of the poor. Fuglesang and Chandler would agree—if "conscientization" is defined as making a bunch of poor people mad, and making them receptive to strong central leadership. But they feel that true consciousness-raising requires giving people an experience of their own competency and personal responsibility—not just an understanding of their own victimization. "[By teaching the poor] to generate cash income and . . . manage it well, the issue of conscientization of the poor

is concretized, becoming the more practical issues of productivity [and] organization development."

The good fight

In the teeth of opposition from many in the development community and many on the activist left, it is astonishing that the Self-Sufficiency for the Poor Act has been able to get as far as it has. Introduced two months ago, it has already garnered over 100 sponsors on the House side, and gone through its first round of hearings.

Much of the bill's success is due to the indefatigable work of Sam Harris and his RESULTS volunteers. Harris helped write it. Then, RESULTS briefed its members through a series of regional conferences. The regional conferences gave RESULTS members the tools they needed to generate editorials in dozens of newspapers. A RESULTS volunteer worked on Cleveland Congressman Ed Feighan's re-election campaign, and used his "chips" to bring the proposed legislation to the 39-year-old Congressman's attention. Now Feighan is the bill's chief sponsor. Many of the other sponsors were won over by RESULTS volunteers' articulate presentation of the issues . . . plus all those editorials.

However, precisely *because* RESULTS has demonstrated support for the bill, AID's lobbyists are coming on strong. First they managed to strip it of 87% of its proposed funding. Now they're attempting to add a "to the extent practicable" here, an "approximately" there—phrases that would effectively strip it of its content.

RESULTS is fighting to restore the money and preserve the wording, and it shouldn't be counted out. We spent an afternoon watching Harris and his co-worker, Michael Rigby, as they lobbied Senate staffers on Capitol Hill. You couldn't help but admire their dedication (nei-

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NewOptions

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practical is-
on develop-
ment in the

Giraffe Project says: take risks!

For 20 years now, the social change movement in this country has failed to come up with a workable answer to the question: How do you get people to take responsibility?

Some groups, like Common Cause and National Organization for Women, seek to foster grassroots leadership within their own organizations. But what about the millions of people who'd never dream of joining a movement group? If we're ever going to build a decentralist/globally responsible society "from the bottom up," those people have got to be reached too.

Enter the Giraffe Project. "Our focus is on people who are a great distance from the critical-political world," Ann Medlock, Giraffe's founder and president, told NEW OPTIONS last week from her office in New York City.

Rather than building Movement Organization #1,422, the Project is going *directly* to the people via the radio. It is producing slick, inspirational messages about the Importance of Sticking Your Neck Out, and distributing them to 622 radio stations from coast to coast. Better yet, it's getting live-copy scripts into the hands of cooperating disc jockeys and announcers at 156 stations.

Surely you've heard one of these "Giraffe Spots" over the last 18 months or so. They tell the stories of "Giraffes," that is, ordinary people who are "sticking their necks out to care and to serve—who don't wait for someone else to do the job." The stories are so simple and moving that you're almost embarrassed to listen. But you do. Among those recently commended:

• **Dennis Littky** of Winchester, N.H., "for risking his job to better the education of his students. Littky, a high school principal, encouraged and defended the efforts of his teachers to more deeply involve the kids in the educational process, despite the pressure of a faction of the community that wanted Littky fired for stirring things up too much."

• **Beth Pena** of Gloucester, Mass., "for focusing the attention of city officials and landlords on the threat of eviction she and her neighbors faced when their neighborhood was being gentrified. Pena, the mother of three young children and wife of a fisherman, spoke out at community meetings with logic and conviction. Under mounting community pressure, Pena's landlord sold to a new owner who is restoring their dilapidated homes."

Besides producing radio spots, the Project gives workshops, lectures and business seminars. Its Schools Program is producing materials for teenagers. A couple of *television* public

service announcements are in the works.

Ultimate goal

The Giraffe Project's outreach strategy may be "absurdly simple," as executive director John Graham, 44, likes to say. But the thinking behind the Project is anything but. Graham and Ann Medlock, the Project's founder and president, have worked out an entire philosophy to guide the Project, a philosophy that stresses what we might call the "Three Needs": the need to take risks, the need to take personal responsibility, and the need to achieve reconciliation (with one's past, "enemies," self).

Graham came to the Project out of the U.S. foreign service. In a long, searching conversation with NEW OPTIONS from the Project's offices on Whidbey Island, in Washington state, he recalled how he often asked, "Why couldn't all those brains [I was working with] establish peace in southern Africa or make some progress on arms control? . . . I came to the conclusion that for every one of the world's problems there were maybe half a dozen solutions that would work. And with Ann Medlock I came to the conclusion that, by and large, *everybody* would like to make the world a better place.

"So it wasn't for lack of ideas or heart that the problems didn't get solved. It's that, when anyone is called upon to *apply* their ideas or their heart, it takes risk. People might laugh at you, you could fail the first 15 times, all sorts of things might happen. So that's what Ann and I decided to concentrate on—risk-taking.

"Our ultimate goal is a revolution in this country, a real revolution of spirit. We want to change the way all of us look at our roles in society, and at our responsibilities. Adam Michnik, the guy behind Polish Solidarity's key thinking, talks about 'autonomy.' You look outside and you see that you live in a world in which an enormous amount of power is still held by institutions. [But] you realize that institutions are made up of people, and that in no case does an institution have [ultimate] power over how you behave and think and feel. . . ."

"We come on day after day," adds Medlock, "with stories about people who have picked up some corner of a big problem and gotten to work on it. It's a very grassroots orientation and we just hope that like, you know, Chinese water-dripping, we will get through using this popular medium to just regular folks who'd given up any possibility of affecting the world."

C'mon

The traditional left is deeply suspicious of the

Giraffe Project, and not just because it's been successful in getting air time. One objection that Graham says he hears again and again in his talks and workshops is—what about people like Phyllis Schlafly and Oliver North? Wouldn't they be Giraffes too, by your definition?

Medlock has this to say about Schlafly: "She's out there all right, sticking her neck out all over the place. But she's divisive. That's where we draw the line."

Graham on North: "I knew a lot of men like Oliver North during the 15 years I spent in the U.S. foreign service. . . . The Ollie Norths I knew held intensely negative judgments of the world about them. They viewed that world as chaotic and threatening and only themselves as competent to deal with it. They perceived themselves as separate from other nations and cultures, certainly, but from their own institutions and peers as well. This distancing affected their ethics. . . ."

Abbie Hoffman recently sent the Project another common leftist objection: "I want to be listed as a critic of your project. It's not exactly 'sticking your neck out' just because Dick Cavett pats you on the head. You've taken a good idea and diluted it with the usual American bullshit. I'm surprised you haven't thrown in with Jerry Lewis and Sally Fields."

Here's a small part of Medlock and Graham's response: "We've known from the first that one [person's] Giraffe might well be another's Turkey. But what to say to those like you who believe that sticking your neck out can only mean whistle-blowing, head-knocking, law-breaking?"

"We have a wider definition of risk. We've come to define risk as whatever scares you. We say Giraffeness is stretching beyond whatever you feel your own limits are. That's different for everybody. What scares Lech Walesa isn't the same as what scares a bank teller in Kansas City. In the materials we're now doing for kids, stretching can be sticking up for the kid everybody's dumping on. Small stuff counts. Because the superheroes aren't enough. Real, life-serving change gets fixed in the social fabric by thousands of ordinary people being moved to do what, for them, is extraordinary—stretching. . . ." *Giraffe Project: 45 W. 45th St., #402, New York NY 10036. Graham and Medlock: 1-800-344-TALL.*

Where the visionaries are

Everybody knows where the beach bums are. But where are the political visionaries, those of us who are committed to long-term solutions rather than short-run palliatives and to a vision of the future that is not forever dependent on open-ended economic "growth"?

One way to measure, admittedly less than perfect, is to look at where the people are who've responded to NEW OPTIONS's advertising. That's what we did last week. We took our list of 7,850 current subscribers and added our most recent 2,000 expires, and found that the following 36 zip code areas held 50 or more current or former subscribers. (A zip code area, also known as a "poor man's bioregion," consists of *all* the territory covered by the *first three digits* of any zip code. The numbers in parentheses below refer to those digits. If *one* city is listed below, it's the *only* city in that zip code area; if more than one is listed, the zip code area covers more ground.)

1. Manhattan NY (100-102), 410
2. Washington DC (200-205), 388
3. Boston/Cambridge MA (021), 242
4. San Francisco CA (941), 200
5. Los Angeles CA (900), 167
6. Berkeley CA (947), 164
7. Chicago IL (606), 155
8. Seattle WA (982), 138
9. Minneapolis MN (554), 128
10. San Rafael/Mill Valley CA (949), 124
11. Santa Cruz/Los Gatos CA (950), 94
12. Philadelphia PA (191), 92
13. Oakland CA (946), 89
14. Bethesda/Chevy Chase MD (208), 87
15. El Cerrito/Walnut Creek CA (945), 84
16. Santa Rosa/Ukiah CA (954), 78
17. Brooklyn NY (112), 73
18. Ann Arbor/Dearborn MI (481), 72
19. Portland OR (972), 70
20. Beverly Hills/Venice CA (902), 69
21. Hoboken/Montclair NJ (070), 68
22. La Jolla/Del Mar CA (920), 65
23. Madison WI (537), 60
23. Miami FL (331), 60
25. Denver CO (802), 59
26. Menlo Park/Mountain View CA (940), 56
27. Bryn Mawr/Swarthmore PA (190), 55
27. Milwaukee WI (532), 55
27. San Diego CA (921), 55
30. Silver Spring/Takoma Park MD (209), 54
31. Amherst/Northampton MA (010), 53
32. Boulder CO (803), 52
32. Eugene/Roseburg OR (974), 52
34. Chapel Hill/Durham NC (275-277), 51
35. Austin TX (787), 50
35. Palo Alto/Stanford CA (943), 50

What does this list tell us about ourselves? We are not disproportionately concentrated in the great industrial cities, the Detroits, Clevelands and Pittsburghs—cities that were hotbeds of radical organizing in the 1930s. Nor are we disproportionately concentrated in the great Sun Belt cities, the Phoenixes, Houston and Atlantas—supposedly the cities of the future. (Note, though, that we are definitely present in both kinds of cities—26-44 of us are in each of the above.)

We are, instead, disproportionately concentrated in a *third kind* of city (and region): in the great cultural centers of the east and west coasts, in high-tech suburbs and university towns, and in areas primarily known for their quality of life.

We know, we know: this list is less than a fully objective measure of anything. But the feeling persists that it points to something real. Consider that over half of the 36 places above have either officially

declared themselves to be nuclear free zones, or have NFZ campaigns underway. Consider that, in 1980 and again in 1984, third-party candidates did disproportionately well in every single one of them.

Update . . .

Shuman's vision

Michael Shuman is spearheading a drive to encourage communities to create their *own* foreign policies: their own economic ties abroad, their own positions on foreign affairs, their own Third World assistance projects. . . . When we reported on Shuman's work in NEW OPTIONS #23, many of you were intrigued but skeptical—"could be just another pie-in-the-sky," wrote one such subscriber. So you may be pleased to know that, last month, a major article by Shuman, "Dateline Main Street: Local Foreign Policies," was published in *Foreign Policy*, one of the most prestigious international affairs journals in the U.S.

"The article marks an important milestone in getting Center for Innovative Diplomacy's agenda broadly disseminated and appreciated," Shuman told NEW OPTIONS last week from CID's new offices in Irvine, Calif. "And I am following it up in two ways.

"First, CID has just started publishing a *Bulletin of Municipal Foreign Policy*, which will be a quarterly compendium of recent developments in the field. I've already gotten nearly 200 local officials to agree to serve as 'city correspondents.'

"Second, I just received a sizable MacArthur grant to write a book and law review article on the *legality* of municipal foreign policies."

The first issue of the *Bulletin* has just come out, and it demonstrates better than anything NEW OPTIONS can say how Shuman's vision is spreading. For nearly 50 single-spaced typewritten pages, in clear, no-nonsense prose, it goes on and on about dozens of local actions: "St. Paul's Resolution on Central America," "San Francisco Mayor Feinstein Visits Shanghai to Build More Economic Ties," "Oregon Health Division Sends Gorbachev a Bill for \$73,060 to Cover Its Costs from Chernobyl. . . ." *Shuman: CID, 17931 Sky Park Circle, #F, Irvine CA 92714; Foreign Policy reprint, \$4; Bulletin sample issue, gratis.*

Bicyclists' vision

In NEW OPTIONS #9 we reported on the work of Bikes Not Bombs, a national coalition of bicyclists and environmentalists committed to doing something *positive* to protest Reagan's policies in Central America. Its original goal: send 100 bicycles to Nicaragua.

Now, three years later, Bikes Not Bombs has evolved far beyond even "positive" protest. It has become part of the recently-formed Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), which has already become perhaps the primary U.S. group promoting what it calls "sustainable and ecologically sensible transportation policies" for the Third World. ITDP's sponsors include people from places

like the Salvadorean Center for Appropriate Technology and the Sudanese Ministry of Industry, as well as post-liberal North Americans like Hazel Henderson, Bill Ellis and Steve Hellingner.

"Our direct assistance projects continue to do well," Ken Hughes, ITDP's executive director (and a former Congressional aide), told NEW OPTIONS. "We've just passed the 900-bike mark in our quest to send donated bicycles to Nicaragua. [Our] Haitian Peoples Development Fund is sending bicycles to grassroots development workers in Haiti, [in part by] selling Haitian artwork in the U.S. . . ."

"Besides our direct grassroots efforts, we're submitting proposals to the World Bank to do an urban transportation study for Lome [capital of Togo, West Africa] and a nationwide study for Guinea-Bissau. I'm working to get language into the foreign aid bill to require U.S. AID to assess low-cost transport needs and carry out projects. . . ."

Michael Replogle, president of ITDP (and a professional transportation consultant), strongly supports this emphasis on Washington-based consulting and lobbying. "Major transportation investment decisions affecting developing countries are made every day in Washington," Replogle told NEW OPTIONS. "By *combining* a knowledge of Washington-based institutional systems with the energy of a grassroots activist network, ITDP holds great promise for effective action!" *ITDP: P.O. Box 5595, Friendship Stn, Washington DC 20016.*

Continued from page two:

ther was getting enough sleep); you couldn't help but admire their insistence on simple, unpretentious living, even in the thick of the battle (lunch that day had been fruit salad and peanuts, which they prepared themselves). You couldn't help but notice the clout that even a small lobbying group can have in Washington, so long as its lobbyists are respected and its members are seen as committed.

We left Capitol Hill convinced that the bill had been weakened not so much by AID's opposition, as by the lack of even greater organized support for the bill. On the subway back to our office, we marvelled that the April 25-27 Mobilization for Justice and Peace in Central America and Southern Africa had adopted four demands: one so abstract as to be meaningless and three beginning with "stop." No support for positive legislation there. We were embarrassed as we remembered all those "green" and "transformational" and "bioregional" groups that had declared their solidarity with the world's poor, but that would never participate in anything so trivial and corrupting as trying to get a piece of legislation through Congress.

Harris: RESULTS, 245 Second St. N.E., Washington DC 20002. Hatch: FINCA, 1031 N. Skyview, Flagstaff AZ 86004. O'Connell: "Learning from the Third World," The Neighborhood Works (July/Aug. 1986), 570 W. Randolph St., Chicago IL 60606, \$3/issue.

Letters . . .

Shallow base

I'm cancelling my subscription because I believe your rag continues to ignore key issues as a way of trying to broaden the base.

That can work for a while. But the history of movements shows that in the clutch you'll discover just how shallow was your base of support all along.

—Mark Gaffney
Oakland, Calif.

In the fall of 1969, after reading Mark Satin's *Manual for Draft-Age Immigrants to Canada*, I packed most of what little I owned in a rented Ford (paid for by my WWII veteran dad), and drove to Toronto. First stop: the Anti-Draft Office on Yonge St., just n. of Eglinton Ave. Got established as a newspaper reporter, fell in love with Toronto. Moved back to Wisconsin in 1976, the Bicentennial Year.

On one of my visits to Toronto afterwards, in 1978, I bought Satin's book *New Age Politics*. I had already adopted a lot of ideas from E.F. Schumacher, Bucky Fuller, etc.; Satin's book brought some of these "loose threads" together in new ways.

Now, all of a sudden, I get this [subscription-solicitation] mailing and see Satin's name again. My spouse and I have two small children, and we are not "well off," so it would not be fair to the family to send in a \$20 sub (though I'm sure the newsletter is worth it). But I will take you up on your cut-rate offer. . . .

—Dan Melton
Madison, Wisc.

Who's the ignoramus?

Having been branded "largely ignorant" in a letter in NEW OPTIONS #33 from John McLaughry, former Senior White House Policy Advisor, I thought I'd call him to see if, perhaps, he could help this "poor fellow" get his facts straight.

After a friendly hour-long conversation, we agreed that decentralized agriculture and energy systems could exert constructive, democratic pressures in the Soviet Union. But McLaughry continued to argue, as he had in his letter, that "the last thing the Soviet rulers want is decentralized anything."

I asked if he was familiar with Frank von Hippel's and Amory Lovins's energy projects with the Soviet Academy of Sciences, which suggest growing Soviet interest in renewables and conservation. No, he replied.

To understand McLaughry's pessimism about change in the Soviet Union, I then asked him when he had last visited the evil empire. After all, in the two years since Gorbachev has come to power, more than a few changes have occurred. Never, he said.

Under further scrutiny, McLaughry's authoritative pronouncements turned out to be little more than extrapolations from outdated history books bearing little relevance to contemporary Soviet society.

My main point in "Re-inventing Peace: Hawks and Doves Together" (NEW OPTIONS #30) was that there are a multitude of opportunities for change in the Soviet Union. But unless we have the openness, curiosity and initiative to discover and promote them, they will continue to pass us by.

—Michael H. Shuman
Center for Innovative Diplomacy
San Francisco, Calif.

Who's the laggard?

As a longtime feminist, I certainly agree with Jane Mansbridge about the need to avoid demonizing people who have different convictions, and to understand the values and beliefs behind their actions ("Losing and Learning," NEW OPTIONS #35).

I'd like to see the anti-ERA and anti-abortion folks do the same. We need to find areas of agreement and look for ways we could work together.

Here in Michigan, the abortion issue is heating up again over Medicaid-paid abortions, with the "Right to Life" organization starting a referendum petition drive. This will cost huge amounts of energy, time and money, and not help solve any of the problems that cause women to get abortions.

—Dolly Moss
Traverse City, Mich.

The new story (cont'd)

Michael and Anderson's article in NEW OPTIONS #33 does a good job of summarizing the six "stories" (or "ideologies" or "worldviews") that give form and direction to people's lives. They see the conflicting stories as the basis of much of the conflict that threatens us all. And they see more and better information as the basis for global culture and a reduction of conflict.

I don't disagree. But I believe they have not gone far enough.

What is the function of the various stories? What are the vital questions that the stories attempt to answer? I think that ultimately they are *personal* questions like these: What is the purpose of my life? What can I do to feel good about myself? What's going to happen to my

children? What's going to happen to me if I'm injured or get very sick?

If those are the questions, then the various stories differ in how well they handle them. The Fundamentalist, Islam and Marxist stories do the best job. But they leave a lot to be desired. The Progress and New Paradigm stories do the worst job. The Green story does fairly well for a privileged, educated few, but not for the general public.

What we need is not more and better information. What the world needs is a new story that provides convincing answers to the shared personal questions that cross all cultural boundaries.

I propose that if we put our hearts and minds to it we could design such a Common-Fate, Caring story. It would have to draw on hopes and fears that everyone could identify with. . . .

—James H. Craig
Synergy Power Institute
Greenbrae, Calif.

In their article "Now that 'Progress' Unites Us," Walt Anderson and Don Michael write about the six major competing "stories" motivating and directing cultural change at this point in history. They end by calling for a kind of meta-story: a story about stories.

They build up to precisely the right point from which to embark upon an exploration of that "story about stories" — then stop. They ask the right question, and implicitly invite us to answer it. But how should we proceed?

Should we discuss the cultural myths, paradigms, values [etc., of the past]? Or should we ask what kind of story is needed in our world today? Should we seek to literally write a story for all humanity and life on Earth? Or should we attempt to come up with a story that allows the other stories to coexist . . . a kind of story embracing all the others?

It's my feeling that *all* these questions should be answered "Yes." We need to explore this Big Story from every angle conceivable. And we should plunge in right now.

—Richard Register
Urban Ecology, Inc.
Berkeley, Calif.

Potentially hurtful

As editors of *Citizen Summitry* and *Securing Our Planet*, Don Carlson and I appreciate the substantial review our books received in NEW OPTIONS #33.

In many ways the review is exemplary. It identifies by rich example the community out of which the books arose. It recognizes the crucial point that our effort is directed not *against* war, but *toward* the conditions that will support peace.

However, you begin with what we can only

regard as a wild-eyed bit of praise, that the books somehow take us "half the way home," presumably to the peaceable kingdom. We will be happy if they simply help to point in useful directions, toward rich contacts with "the other side," and toward a radical enlargement of the constituency willing to build conditions for peace.

In this regard, you were "dismayed to see that, while much new ground was covered, much of the traditional peace movement was left out." And our sins were apparently not confined to omission—you also claimed that, in the books, "a certain distance from ordinary peace activists is noted and even celebrated." This is a potentially hurtful misrepresentation of our purpose.

What we set out to do was not discuss the traditional peace movement. Many other authors have done so. Instead, Carlson and I seek to appeal to broader constituencies which, if mobilized, would lend new meaning to the lonely, courageous, and persistent work of the traditional peace movement. I am sure that most readers of NEW OPTIONS would want this to happen. Preaching to the choir will not do the trick.

In quoting my comment that Yevgeny Velikov is "not a freelance peacenik," but instead a high official in Soviet science, you missed a double irony. First, the term "peacenik" was derived from a Russian suffix (as in "Sputnik"), and has of course been used by U.S. conservatives to discredit anyone who, as in *Securing Our Planet*, dares to question our "national security" arrangements. Second, the Soviet system does not allow free-lance peace groups, but sponsors an official movement that echoes government policy. I am sorry if my allusion to these points was confusing.

Finally, you are correct that *Citizen Summitry* and *Securing Our Planet* do not provide a "structural analysis of why these books' alternatives are still not part of the mainstream debate." I'd welcome a dialogue, perhaps less on why they aren't than on how they can be.

—Craig Comstock
Ark Communications Institute
Lafayette, Calif.

Incredible experience

I'm glad you did a piece on the second North American Bioregional Congress (NEW OPTIONS #35). It was an absolutely wonderful, inspiring event. A real "gathering of the tribe."

What impressed me most was the level of commitment of everyone there. Although we didn't always agree, there was a very strong foundation and knowing of ourselves as earth healers. And as our facilitator, Caroline Estes, stated in your article, the whole issue of spirituality was very, very interesting.

I feel a little differently about the fact that the Spirituality Committee's statement wasn't officially adopted. The foundation of bioregionalism—the *given*—is that all life is sacred, human beings, the earth, the animals, the plants . . . even the elements. This is essentially a spiritual belief. The main objection, as I saw it, of the person who blocked consensus, was that he didn't want anyone implying that in order to be a bioregionalist, he needed to agree with any particular definition of spirituality or religion.

It is understandable that someone with a very traditional Christian religious upbringing would have problems with what may even smack of paganism. And we all agreed that, rather than alienate people—people who may have something valuable to contribute to some aspect of the "movement" — we would be content with the way things worked out [i.e., no agreement on a statement on spirituality].

It was an incredible experience, personally, to feel very strongly about something, yet be open to another's point of view, and recognize that, although I didn't "agree" with this person, he did indeed have a piece of the truth that needed to be integrated into what we are doing.

—Susan Meeker-Lowry
Editor, Catalyst
Worcester, Vt.

The need

Stuart Speiser's Universal Stock Ownership Plan really smacks of the "bread and circuses" approach (NEW OPTIONS #29 & 31). The need is for meaningful activity in a community, not more time to sit in front of the tube.

This other side really needs exploring. Guess that's what the bioregionalists are doing in their better moments.

—Ken Morley
Mountain View, Calif.

Re: The debate about whether to redistribute income (Stuart Speiser) or access to information (Robert Theobald letter, NEW OPTIONS #33). If only the question were that simple!

Yes, information access should be shared. However, most information manipulated by advanced societies is exploitative, shortsighted, systemically poisonous. How can we forget this even for a moment?

The remainder—the good information—is more in the nature of art than science (and more in the nature of life than art). If [processed correctly, it would point us in the direction of] a just and sustainable society in the context of planetary ecology.

Theobald's computers are superfluous for processing this information; in fact they'd botch it or any wholistic body of information that suffers by reductionist treatment. The computer

revolution has helped bad information drive out good.

Meanwhile, the plant and non-human animal kingdoms, the weather and oxygen cycles, the physical world *intact*, freely share something we need to avail ourselves of.

—Jonathan von Ranson
Wendell, Mass.

Reality sandwiches

Perhaps it is because you are in Washington where national government(s) is the central occupation of everyone you meet that limits your concern with "Reforming the U.N." (NEW OPTIONS #34) to nation-state solutions.

Nation-states have only been with us for a couple of hundred years. They may last for a couple of hundred more. But, there is no reason to believe that the all-consuming power they have wielded in the past will continue unabated.

In fact, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the influence of nation-states is already on the wane. The non-national power of the multi-national corporations is one case in point; another is the growing power of the fundamentalist Islamic religions; another is the growing influence of the Christian churches in the Third World. Live Aid and other celebrations of "global consciousness" may be a naive but embryonic sign of forces to come.

Many members of your own Board of Advisors have explored the potential of "non-territorial actors." By contrast, the limited reforms you explored suggest another "March to Folly."

—William N. Ellis
Transnatl Netwk for Approp. Tech.
Rangeley, Me.

I wanted to tell you that I enjoy your publication very much. As a matter of fact, I found in your article "Reforming the U.N." seminal points for a speech that I recently presented to the Andrews Air Force Base Toastmasters club.

The speech, and the ideas behind it, were quite well received by the military and Department of Defense civilian audience.

As a former Republican activist (I am a cost analyst for the Air Force and fall under the "Hatch Act"), I especially appreciate how you are not simply a mouthpiece for a particular brand of politics. My experience in the past with "new options"-type thinking was touchy-feely left wingers talking about the evils of capitalism and sporting "FMLN" buttons.

—Scott A. Zingler
Alexandria, Va.

One of the key passages from Scott Zingler's speech: "What we must realize is that the U.S. can no longer afford to run the world for its own benefit. We must join it in a meaningful way."

Anderson: we're in charge here

For years, those of us whose politics are decentralist, ecological, value-focused, etc., have been saying "no" to the Genetic Age. Led by people like Jeremy Rifkin (NEW OPTIONS #4 & 21) and Liebe Cavalieri (*The Double-Edged Helix*), and gathered together in groups like Earth First!, Earth Island Institute and the German Green party, they—we—have become a bothersome thorn in the side of all those technocrats who—we imagine—can hardly wait for the day when surrogate motherhood, genetic screening, embryo transplants, frozen semen, genetically engineered plants and animals (and humans?), and all the other wonders of the new biotechnology, become as matter-of-fact as cherry pie.

It's easy to oppose the new biotechnology when that technology is seen as the highest stage of an outdated and destructive worldview . . . and opposition is seen as proof of one's commitment to the new spiritual-empathic worldview struggling to be born. But suppose you see the situation somewhat differently. Suppose you're no technocrat (in fact, suppose you're co-author of the article "Now That Progress' No Longer Unites Us," in NEW OPTIONS #33), but you're prepared to acknowledge that the whole world is now—and has for some time been—an *artificial* ecosystem. Suppose you're convinced that Darwinists, evangelicals and Greens all share a common reluctance to "recognize and celebrate the full extent of human intervention in the evolutionary process" — and that that common blind spot is making it difficult for us to confront the real issues. Suppose you're convinced that the question can never be, *Should* we govern evolution?—since we're already and inextricably doing it, in a myriad of ways—but rather, Can we get over our damnable *innocence* about what we're doing in time to learn to do it well? Can we learn to shape a decent evolutionary ethic, as distinct from a mere environmental ethic?

That's how Walter Truett Anderson sees things in his just-published book, *To Govern Evolution: Further Adventures of the Political Animal* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$23)—an eminently readable and enormously stimulating introduction to the whole field of what he calls "evolutionary politics." The debate over the Genetic Age may never be the same again.

Master challenge

Anderson's thesis is simple: we face a new "master challenge," comparable in importance to the challenge of mastering the agricultural and industrial revolutions. The new challenge

is, quite simply, coming to terms with our growing ability to intervene in nature. Anderson's point is this: Only if we look dispassionately at all the issues raised by this new challenge, can we possibly fashion an appropriate political response.

So the first part of the book is spent in examining the major issues of "evolutionary politics," in utterly fascinating detail. It is all here: the rising rate of species extinction, the loss of genetic variation within species, the new genetic technology, the increasing transfer of life-forms between ecosystems and continents . . . not to mention surrogate motherhood, eugenics, Baby Doe, population control, the "rights of non-human entities," and much more.

If all Anderson did was ground us in the issues, the book would be well worth reading. But he does more. In the second part of the book, he attempts to show how we might begin to cope, politically, with the thorny issues "evolutionary governance" raises. His recommendations are as far-reaching as any German Green might wish.

He says we desperately need a "global system of governance" to cope with the new technologies. In fact, he says, a global system is arising now, in bits and pieces, partly in response to our growing perception of "the common responsibilities we share in the envelope of life. . . . I expect many more Law of the Sea-type efforts. . . ."

Another key recommendation: the new technologies demand a new global culture, "one in which people everywhere are intensely living in the questions [about] our place in the biosphere. . . . And for some time to come the questions will be our new habits of the heart."

Partly to speed up the evolution of global institutions and culture, Anderson calls for a massive "project of global restoration," one in which many countries might spend the "40 year crisis period ahead" jointly attempting to eliminate the major diseases, bring food production and distribution up to the necessary levels, reduce the number of children born with severe birth defects, etc.

Sub-text

Behind Anderson's rich text is an equally rich sub-text, namely, his thorough and extended critique of Rifkin, the Greens, etc. Sometimes the criticisms are indirect, but often they are quite direct and even brutal, as when Anderson ridicules the deep ecologists' notion that we shouldn't "manage" nature; or when he shows how *Earth Island Journal* has practiced irre-

sponsible, fear-mongering journalism; or when he accuses "the Jeremy Rifkins of the world" of a kind of "biological McCarthyism." One winces in anticipation of what the Jeremy Rifkins of the world will say in response.

And yet, one wonders whether the approaches of the Anderson and Rifkin wings of the movement to confront human power in nature (let us call them the "co-evolution" and "resacralization" wings, respectively) need be forever at odds.

On the level of strategy, ask yourself this: Without Jeremy Rifkin & Co. turning the issue of biotechnology into a moral crusade—without their disruptive, attention-getting tactics, without their courtroom smarts and media savvy, without their passionate and principled rejectionism—would there even be much of an audience for the "ecologically informed, prudent" dialogue Anderson says that we need? Don't forget, Anderson said some of the same things in a 1976 textbook and a 1982 anthology—and found few takers. If his message now finds more, won't it be because Rifkin et al. have succeeded in waking us up to the dangers ahead?

On the level of content, too, the two positions may be less antagonistic than their protagonists would have us believe. Rifkin thinks it would be disastrous to let the genie out of the bottle. Anderson thinks it would be unwise (and anyway impossible) to stuff the genie back in. But don't forget: both Rifkin and Anderson are committed to a decentralist, ecological, globally responsible future. In a sane, humane world, probably both of them would support the genie making *carefully limited* excursions from the bottle.

Of course, Rifkin might say it's going to take a *long time* for the world to develop the necessary wisdom to carefully delimit the genie's excursions. But will it take a shorter time for the world to develop the global institutions and culture that Anderson sees as the precondition for intelligent evolutionary governance? Aren't they talking about the same thing here?

Doyle's way

For an example of a "carefully limited excursion" by the genie, consider the "biotechnical soft path" recently proposed by Jack Doyle of the Environmental Policy Institute of Washington, D.C. (referred to in passing by Anderson). Doyle would genetically engineer crops solely for the purpose of permitting them to resist disease or pests without the use of chemicals. In effect, his "soft path" would use biotechnology to reduce the need for—and scope of—agro-industrial technology, thereby at once fostering both the co-evolution of society and nature that Anderson desires, and the resacralization of people and nature that Rifkin desires.

One drawback is that neither corporations

nor governments appear to be at all interested in pursuing anything like Doyle's soft path. Wouldn't it be nice if, in the future, the Rifkins and Andersons of the world would focus more of their energies on identifying joint political tasks, and less of their energies on attacking each other?

Gottlieb: where did our love go?

Unplug the telephone, make yourself some tea and pull up a soft chair. Someone has finally written an honest book about the 1960s. Not a bittersweet nostalgia book like David Harris's *Dreams Die Hard* (1982), not a thank-god-I'm-over-that-now book like Jane Alpert's *Growing Up Underground* (1981), but a book that vividly and accurately recalls our plans, hopes, dreams.

And it's not just about "the 1960s." After a couple of pages . . . after your first sips of that tea . . . you'll realize it's really about the 1980s. It's about how the (idealistic fragment of the) 60s generation has begun to gear up for a second run at power and influence. But with more savvy this time, and with more depth to our ideas. . . .

The book is Annie Gottlieb's *Do You Believe in Magic?: The Second Coming of the Sixties Generation* (Times Books/Random House, \$20). She calls it a "collective autobiography," and for good reason. She spent four years cornering former Sixties people from coast to coast, and the book is full of our words, not just Gottlieb's (but always to illustrate a point. She doesn't let us drone on and on endlessly, like David Wallechinsky does in *Midterm Report*, 1986). She is convinced that "we are still a generation far more united than divided," and she continually refers to the collective "we" and "our," as in we did this, our parents did that.

The deepening

Gottlieb's thesis is this: "Everywhere I travelled I sensed a wave gathering, a spring stirring. Once again Buffalo Springfield could sing, 'Something's happenin' here.' Beneath the depression and self-interest which are our adaptations to Reagan's America, the generation's real energies have begun to move again. . . . Ideals, chastened and toughened by years of exile in Reality, seem poised to become practical, even profitable. Leadership is preparing itself, like crocuses under snow." If she doesn't entirely convince us of the truth of her thesis, certainly she makes us wish that it were so.

The book begins with a wonderfully evocative section on "Acts I and II" (1945-63 and 1963-68). By Act II, she notes, "Only action could cleanse you. Only by taking the part of society's victim, and as far as possible sharing his fate,

could you share his virtue." And you wonder why so many of us seemed self-destructive.

But these chapters are only a lead-in to the heart of her book, in which she examines seven key themes of the 60s . . . and shows how they've evolved into their (wiser, deeper) 1980s counterparts. Some examples:

War. In the 1960s, the Vietnam war—and by extension, power itself—seemed evil. Now we're asking, How can we use our power as a force for good in the world?

Revolution. Then, we wanted instant change, and were ready to go into the trenches (literally!) to get it. Now we know there can't be lasting social change without *reconciliation*, *leadership*, and a post-materialist *worldview*.

Dope. Then, dope gave us a "greed for ecstasy" and an "impatience with the mundane." Now we're grateful to dope for having enhanced our minds and our senses, and for freeing us from the materialist worldview.

Spirit. Then, we were consumed by a need to break through to other dimensions of existence. Now many of us are adopting what is, in effect, a kind of neo-paganism, a many-levelled celebration of *this* dimension of existence.

Work. Then, we felt "experience" was more important than work. Now we feel we can accomplish anything—and that we must accomplish a great deal quickly, if we're ever going to create a sustainable society.

This brief summary misses all the nuances of Gottlieb's analysis, all the individual observations and insights that make her book a masterpiece of cultural history and not just pop reportage. The book has plenty of passages that bite like these:

"[In the 80s] we could better understand our parents' obsession with security. But an even more unexpected emotion, to the child of the upper middle class who was once ashamed of wealth, is the shame of poverty—the embarrassment of inviting a successful friend to a

small apartment, or being aware of your cut-rate clothes when she takes you out to lunch. With the embarrassment comes envy of the friend's free, grand gestures, of a life as unbounded and full of possibility as our own used to be.

"We're ashamed of the shame and envy, because these emotions seem such a craven betrayal of our own values. We prefer to show indifference or contempt. But the values of the larger culture have shifted in favor of success. And what we're feeling now—we who were right at the center of the culture when we fancied ourselves the radical fringe—is the unheroic, cold and nasty sensation of being truly marginal.

"And marginal not only economically, but morally. . . ."

Great on paper

In Gottlieb's last chapter, "The Evolutionary War," she tries to point us in the direction of a positive future. She sees the traditional peace movement as a distraction—"The enemy is not [the number of weapons] 'out there.' It's that warmaking thing in the human spirit, fathered by fear." She calls on us to "further the reconciling spirit" but at the same time "own our power and our truth." So far as political initiatives are concerned, she talks about what some people *plan* to do, what other people *hope* to do, and what some writers have accomplished in their *books*. Unfortunately, what she does not do is point to political initiatives that embody the kind of sensibility she says is intrinsic to us.

Acknowledge her honesty: she does not pretend that socialist initiatives represent a full flowering of the 60s-sensibility-turned-practical-and-"mature." And she tends to see U.S. Green initiatives as self-crippled versions of that sensibility. But where, in the political arena, are the people who are actually *doing* what it is she says we want to do? We're over 40—plans and hopes and dreams are not enough.

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