

# New Options

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## Breaking the Hold of Television Advertising

I'm sure you've seen it and cringed—little six-year-olds singing advertising slogans that they picked up from TV.

We cringe because we suspect that children are uniquely vulnerable to the advertisers. But are we adults significantly less vulnerable? According to Jerry Mander (below), the average adult American is exposed to 21,000 television advertisements per year. Can anybody reasonably claim that that barrage doesn't have a powerful effect on how we see ourselves and our world?

Television advertising has never been a political issue in this country. Our politicians take its existence and its nature for granted—just like they take the private automobile for granted (NEW OPTIONS #52), and the giant corporation (#41), and most of the other institutions that really determine our lives.

But some voices are being raised now, here and there, that question whether television advertising should be allowed to proceed with "business as usual."

### **Ubiquitous & domineering**

Todd Gitlin teaches sociology at U. Cal.-Berkeley and has written or edited several books on television—most recently, *Watching Television* (1986). "Television advertising is ubiquitous," he told NEW OPTIONS. "[It sets] the tone and content of the public domain. Wherever you look, you are inundated with reminders of your incompleteness, your inadequacy, your puniness, your inconsequence. . . ."

"Television advertising is the most pernicious [kind of advertising] because it's the most *there*. It's in the house, in the living room. . . . And that, I think, is what's essentially wrong with advertising even when it is most interestingly produced. It is usurping the public space."

### **Create ad-free space**

For Gitlin, advertising corrupts because it's everywhere. So his solution would be to create public space devoid of advertising.

"I think what you'd want to do, at least initially," he told NEW OPTIONS, "is dethrone commercial television, by forcing [it] to subsidize uncommercial television.

"There's [the notion of] the 'spectrum fee': the notion that over-the-air broadcasting is a scarce resource, . . . a public resource by law. Since the proprietors of the channels are deriving enormous profit from their exclusive access to these public channels, namely, the airwaves, they ought to be required to give something back.

"The idea of the spectrum fee is that you simply ought to impose a tax on the revenues derived—1% or whatever—and that that money would subsidize public alternatives [to commercial broadcasting]. . . ."

"Alongside the spectrum fee, one other thing worth thinking about is a scheme [from] Holland. . . . As I understand it, a public group—it could be a church, it could be a political party—gathers signatures on petitions. And people sign these petitions if they want that entity to get television time. The more signatures you get, the more time you qualify for.

"You also have normal television. But somewhere wedged within the normal [programming] are X hours a week allocated to these public groups.

"[Finally,] I don't know if there's another commercial capitalist society that permits advertising to insert itself wherever it pleases [in a broadcast] and as often as it pleases. It is certainly not the case in Europe or Japan. [There, the ads] are bunched at the hour or at the half-hour; there are whole sequences of them. So they're not ubiquitous. You can simply walk away from them and come back in five minutes when they're over."

### **Corrupt & undemocratic**

Jerry Mander is senior fellow at the Public Media Center in San Francisco and author of *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (1978). "The main problem with [television]

advertising," he told NEW OPTIONS, "and one that people never think about, is that it's an inherently undemocratic form of speech.

"You have the 100 largest corporations basically controlling all of television programming. They sponsor 85% of programming at this time. . . . So unless you're a very large corporation, you don't get to speak through television as part of your 'free speech.'

"Point number two is that all advertising is inherently corrupt. By that I mean advertising by its nature tells you only one side of the story. I mean, no advertiser will ever say, 'Here are the good points, now let's tell you the bad points.'

"A third point is that [television] advertising is inherently unfair. I mean, here you have people spending, you know, \$6 million a year to advertise some sugary cereal that will do [your] liver in. And these commercials are being produced by, you know, 15 or 20 of the most intelligent, well-educated, highly-paid psychologists, sociologists, researchers, actors and actresses, cameramen. . . ."

### **Get it off the air**

Given Mander's devastating critique, his alternative shouldn't come as much of a surprise: "There is no reform that makes sense about advertising. The only thing you can do to control it is to have less of it—or none of it.

"In my view, [television] advertising is illegal, that is, unconstitutional. The framers of the constitution, when they spoke of the right to free speech, were dealing in a media context in which 'the media' were one-page news sheets, the spoken voice, handbills and travel. They were saying there should be no abridgment of *that*.

"The corporations did not even exist at that time. And there was no central medium—nothing of a millionth of the power of broadcast television.

"So the current protection of [television] advertising under the Constitution—the Supreme

Court decided to give corporate speech 'equal protection' to your voice and my voice—is totally preposterous, in my view. And if we found the right lawyers to take the case (and I've actually started hunting around for some), there could be a [hard-fought] case."

How would advertisers be able to reach a national audience? "Well, they'd have to use other media!"

Mander is also drawn to the idea of counter-advertising. But without much enthusiasm. "To me the only [television] advertising that makes sense in a democratic society is if the Fairness Doctrine were interpreted to mean that for each advertisement you'd have to provide a counter-advertisement. . . . There'd have to be a mechanism for a group to be able to [address] whatever that advertisement leaves out.

"That's not practical, though. No advertising would be a much more practical solution."

### Functional & complex

William Leiss teaches communications at Simon Fraser University near Vancouver, B.C., and is co-author of *Social Communication in Advertising* (1986). He used to make the same kinds of criticisms as Gitlin and Mander. But not any more.

"I was brought up on the standard left-liberal critique like mother's milk," Leiss told NEW OPTIONS. "I studied 10 years under Herbert Marcuse [one of the most radical theorists of the counter-culture—ed.]. I was one of the very few people who did a doctorate with him.

"I became dissatisfied with the 'manipulation hypothesis' for two reasons. One, it's difficult to know what kind of proof there could be, that people aren't expressing 'genuine' desire when they purchase things. And secondly, there's a terrible elitist bias in it that suggests that the consumer choices made by radical theorists are in response to true needs, but the consumer choices made by other people are in response to false needs. . . .

"I decided that one had to look elsewhere for a basis for assessing advertising and promotion in modern society. . . . I eventually found it when I made my way to a 'communications perspective' and the concept of treating advertising as a form of social communication in the broadest sense.

"Advertising has a very much larger social function than had been contemplated in the [standard radical] critique. . . . [Its] real importance is that it is the discourse, the privileged discourse, for the circulation of messages and social cues about objects.

"In all human cultures material objects are social communicators. In modern industrial societies a specific industry—advertising—has emerged which is charged with the task of [conveying which goods] mark and communicate [which] social distinctions."

To Leiss, advertising not only performs that necessary social function, it is extremely "complex" and "many-sided." It does both good and harm.

"Think of cigarette advertising," he told NEW OPTIONS. "It had a very significant part to play in changing sex-role stereotyping [by] trying to get women to smoke, and breaking down the established practice that smoking was for males only. . . . Through the advertising of a product that turned out to be dangerous to health, the whole notion of the equal treatment of the sexes was promoted."

### Address specific abuses

If you see advertising not as "bad" but as mixed in its effects, then you're not going to want to go after it wholesale. You're going to want to go after specific abuses. That's Leiss's position in a nutshell.

"Instead of the sweeping critique, you have to be specific," he told us. "If you want to point to problems, point to *particular* problems.

"You can look at children's advertising—a lot of people are concerned about that. A lot of people are talking about banning commercials during program hours that are high[ly] watched by children.

"Or take other areas where it is presumed that advertising has some general effect, such as alcohol consumption, particularly drinking and driving. You can propose restrictions there. Or you can propose counter-advertising.

"There are other [legitimate] areas of concern as well: cigarette advertising, sex-role stereotyping, age and racial stereotyping. . . ."

### All consuming

Stuart Ewen teaches communications at Hunter College in Manhattan, and is author of *Captains of Consciousness* (1976) and *All Consuming Images* (1988). "There's a problem with focusing on television advertising," he told NEW OPTIONS. "Advertising is literally, at this point, the spine of the system. It is not just some ancillary phenomenon which can be regulated. . . .

"Television advertising is [simply] the extension of a logic that carries through almost every experience in contemporary culture; that is to say, our experience is *permeated* by commercial messages and commercial images. . . .

"At this point the power of commercial imagery has become literally all-consuming. It's everywhere! And not just in things we watch, but in ourselves.

"If you ask young people what's important when they go to a job interview, you might get a little bit of lip service for technical know-how or analytical skills. But the thing they [really] start talking about is resumes and how to dress. That is to say, one of the messages we've given our young people right now is that one should

view *oneself* as an advertisement, one should view oneself as something to be "sold" and something to be "purchased."

"And it's not just in the job market. One enters into the realm of friendship or the role of courtship with oneself as an advertisement in mind. . . .

"So, you know, you can *say* a good government would do away with advertising. But doing away with advertising [is inseparable from] doing away with an economy predicated on waste; doing away with a society predicated on consumerism; doing away with the media as we know them. . . ."

### Access to tools

Ewen has some ideas about how we can *begin* moving in a more humane direction.

"One of the things that we need to begin doing is educational," he told NEW OPTIONS. "[We] could make 'visual literacy' a basic element of education from the beginning.

"Because images are so powerful and speak often very silently and aren't noticed, some of the skills that people need to *live* in this kind of society are critical skills for looking at, analyzing, making sense of, images.

"Just as people talked about book literacy in the past, [so] critical media skills are a basic necessity in this kind of society—from a very early age. . . .

"Another thing that needs to be done is we really need to envision other modes of communication than the mass media commercial system that we have right now.

"Why not have 'popular media' workshops in every community—where there would be desktop publishing facilities, video equipment—where on some level we could become not consumers but producers of cultural imagery? . . . [Why not couple that with] an institution whereby communities all over the country—all over the world—might communicate with one another?"

## NewOptions

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Editor: Mark Satin

Manager, New Options Inc.: Sylvia Tognetti

Assistants: Judith Leckrone, Mary-Coleman Ragsdale

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# SANE/FREEZE's bold experiment

Most social change groups are either so centralized that they're out of touch with their membership base, or so decentralized that they're powerless and inept. Two years ago, SANE and the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign—probably our biggest centralized and decentralized peace groups, respectively—after much wringing of hands (and necks) and searching of souls—decided to merge.

What had become of SANE/FREEZE's bold experiment? Had the organization managed to combine the best of centralism and decentralism, or the worst of both? Had it begun to express a future-focused, ecological, alternative-defense-oriented vision, or had it simply assumed the old left-wing welfare state take-from-the-military-and-give-to-the-poor vision?

There was only one way to find out. We'd have to go to SANE/FREEZE's second annual congress and see for ourselves. So on the night of Dec. 8 we boarded Amtrak's overnight train to Atlanta, where the congress was about to begin.

## Turning point

On the surface, SANE/FREEZE is tremendously successful. It claims 180,000 members and over 250 chapters. Its activists canvass 1,000 homes a night. Its Washington lobbyists work with lobbying "coordinators" in hundreds of Congressional districts. It produces educational flyers and brochures, three newsletters, radio and video documentaries, even a syndicated radio show ("Consider the Alternatives").

But below the surface, there are tensions and problems. There's an ongoing financial crisis—which Duane Shank, acting executive director, was honest enough to discuss at the congress ("When the scope of our financial problems became clear this summer," he said, "we thought of cancelling the congress"). There's a great deal of personal pain left over from the in-fighting over the merger—which another speaker at the congress had the wisdom to address.

And some of the grassroots chapters won't cooperate fully with the national office. Some have gone so far as to withhold the names of their local members. Others have gone even further and refused to officially affiliate.

"The problems that the merger stirred up didn't allow the national office the freedom to serve the grassroots in the way that had been hoped for," Ira Shorr, former field director of SANE/FREEZE, told NEW OPTIONS. "This will be a tremendously important year for the organization, because it's really time to evi-

dence [our] vision: a national office and grassroots network working together effectively and productively."

## Kaleidoscope

We took a bus right from the Amtrak station to the SANE/FREEZE congress. We didn't realize till we got there that it was being held in Atlanta's posh 70-story hotel—the one with the famous atrium. Nearly all the delegates stayed there, too. They were sending America a message, I guess, a message that they intended to be Real Players in the American political mainstream. (Several delegates told us how uncomfortable they were in those surroundings. But they were definitely in the minority.)

Any SANE/FREEZE member could attend the congress. But only delegates could vote. SANE/FREEZE groups could elect one or two delegates per Congressional district (depending on how many active members there were in the district), and there were special provisions for including women, people of color, labor reps, and people from like-minded organizations.

So the gathering was diverse—and not just in the politically correct ways. Although only 400 people showed up (800 were expected), it seemed like every human *type* showed up—young and old, shy and bold, intellectual and anti-intellectual, casual and intense. We went up to the balcony at one point and the cacophony of colors and energies was overwhelming, and deeply moving.

## A big step?

The delegates had two main tasks at hand: to choose political priorities for the coming year and to suggest a new name for the organization.

SANE's priorities had always been chosen by the SANE board. The Freeze's priorities were supposed to have been chosen in convention; but in practice, the unruly conventions had always come up with long wish-lists instead.

The merged SANE/FREEZE board sought to combine the best of both approaches. It empowered the congress to choose the priorities for the coming year. At the same time, it kept a tight lid on the proceedings. And delegates could choose *only two* priorities.

The SANE/FREEZE board prepared a list of 11 possible priorities—everything from "stop Star Wars funding" to "build link[s] to environmental movement" to "oppose low-intensity conflict in the Third World." That list was given to the participants.

Then, participants met in small groups to "talk with each other and prioritize these objec-

tives." These groups were wonderful—one of the best parts of the weekend. People's commitment, their sincerity, and their respect for each other came through loud and clear in all the groups we sat in on: "One of the things we're finding in California . . ."; "As someone said this morning. . ."; "I don't disagree with that, but let me emphasize it a little differently. . . ." Sometimes there was even a trace of the gentle humor that we thought went out with the peace movement of the mid-60s.

In the end—after many voting tallies and more small group sessions—two priorities were agreed upon: "Cut military spending . . . fund human needs," and "Keep [bomb plants] shut down . . . campaign for Soviets to reciprocate."

The "fund human needs" priority represented a big step for the organization, and everybody at the congress knew it. From now on, peace would no longer mean just saying "no" to weapons and war, but "yes" to an alternative set of spending priorities. "Yes" to an explicit politics.

"I think this has the potential to reinvigorate the SANE/FREEZE [grassroots] network," Shorr told us. "It will enable local activists to go into their communities and build coalitions that can address the impact of federal spending priorities on the quality of life of people."

Astonishingly, however, at no point during the proceedings did anybody stand up and object that the wording of the priority—"fund" human needs (as distinct from, e.g., "meet" human needs or, even better, "empower people to meet" their needs)—implies that our problems have mostly to do with money. Nobody said that our problems also have to do with the way we've *organized* things . . . and the size of things . . . and the values we share.

As a result, SANE/FREEZE's big step forward is less than meets the eye. On the one hand, the organization is saying "yes" to something. On the other hand, what it's saying "yes" to sounds like nothing so much as a British-style welfare state. The grassroots will be thrilled, guys.

## A new name?

The delegates struggled long and hard to come up with a new name. In the process, you got to see some of the tension that exists between the SANE/FREEZE board and (some of) the delegates.

A representative of the board presented four names to the delegates: "Peace Action," "Peace Works," "People for Peace and Justice" and "Campaign for Peace and Justice." The names had been chosen, he said, in consultation with two Dallas advertising executives, who'd donated "\$20,000 worth of their time" to run "focus groups" on how certain names struck people.

Some delegates were outraged by the commercial origin of the names. Others were outraged that the SANE/FREEZE name wasn't even on the ballot. Still others were upset that the congress wasn't being asked to *choose* a name, but merely make its preference known to the board, which would have the final say.

Ultimately, two more names were added to the list: SANE/FREEZE and SANE/FREEZE: The Campaign for Global Security. And after many go-rounds covering all three days, SANE/FREEZE: The Campaign for Global Security was the name recommended by the delegates.

### **Pride and prejudice**

Nearly 100 workshops were held between the plenary sessions. Some were purely nuts and bolts, and those were great—for example, Terry Teitlebaum, bursting with energy, telling a rapt audience how her group had become “the largest social change group in Santa Cruz County,” with “membership as the basis for an integrated fund-raising program.” Other workshops were chock-full of tips for organizers—for example, the brilliant, no-nonsense Liz Paul, of the Snake River Alliance (Idaho), telling an appreciative audience about America’s “nuclear warhead production complex” and what activists could do to shut it down.

Still other workshops were more ideologically inclined. One especially revealing workshop, on anti-communism, featured a genuine Communist and a so-called fellow traveller. To say that the standing-room-only audience was on the side of the presenters would be putting it mildly, and toward the end, after the testimony of innumerable members of the audience, you began to feel the political right was Evil Incarnate. Nobody noted (or, nobody dared to say out loud) that the workshop’s feelings about the political right were a mirror image of the anti-communist’s feelings about the political left.

Another revealing workshop, “Alternative Defense and U.S. Military Doctrine,” featured two speakers from Randall Forsberg’s Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies (#53). The very concept of “alternative defense strategy” was new to most of the participants, and controversial to many. One grassroots organizer from New York summed up many people’s feelings when she asked, “How does it *help our struggle* to engage in a ‘dialogue’ over alternative defense postures for the U.S.? . . . We already have more weapons than we might possibly need!”

One IDDS speaker answered that we need to be able to speak to Congress and the military in their own terms. Another answered that it’s good to offer “something constructive” and not “just protest.” And some members of the audience weighed in with answers of their own. However, all the answers had to do primarily with impression management: the peace move-

ment shouldn’t appear to be negative, out-of-it, etc. Nobody said we need to offer a defense strategy because a world of competing nation states is, objectively and inevitably, a dangerous place.

### **A challenge**

There was only one moment when the comfortable leftist assumptions of the participants were challenged. And it came from a most unexpected source.

Tony Mazzocchi, secretary-treasurer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union, was one of the keynote speakers. Ho, hum, the token old reliable union rep, you might suppose. Many did. They were so wrong.

Mazzocchi began by questioning SANE/FREEZE’s cherished notion of economic conversion. Look, he said, the toxics produced by manufacturing a civilian subway train are exactly the same as those produced by manufacturing military weapons. Moreover, if we re-invest in civilian industries, our new plants are bound to be even more capital-intensive (i.e., they’ll need *less labor*) than our current military industries.

A typical union rep might have called for “responsible trade-offs” between civilian production and the environment. A typical rep might have called for opposing efficient production facilities for the sake of “full employment.” Mazzocchi took an entirely different tack. Like France’s Andre Gorz (#11) and England’s James Robertson (#27), he insisted that we re-examine our relationship to nature and work. The peace movement has got to start taking global warming seriously, he said, and it’s got to start questioning the connection between jobs and work and income. “We need to re-examine all our assumptions. . . . People are doing this all around the world, [particularly in] Western Europe. . . .”

All the other keynote speakers and several other plenary speakers received standing ovations. Mazzocchi received polite applause.

### **Hunkered down**

To find out how open the SANE/FREEZE inner circle is to moving in a Mazzocchi-like, Green-like, post-socialist-like direction, we cornered the organization’s president, the ebullient William Sloane Coffin, former Yale chaplain and New York minister and veteran of innumerable peace and civil rights struggles.

We asked him why the organization is focusing on money for our needs, rather than on reassessing our needs and restructuring our institutions. “There’s always greater consensus about what’s wrong than about what’s needed to right the wrong,” he replied. “I think what’s minimally clear to a great many of us is that the maldistribution of wealth in this country is really little short of obscene. . . .”

*Continued on page six, column three . . .*

## The Eye . . .

The Eye watches people and groups that have appeared in NEW OPTIONS.

**AUTHORS AS ORGANIZERS:** Soul sisters **Susan Meeker-Lowry**, author of *Economics as if the Earth Really Mattered* (#47), and **Linda Marks**, author of *Living with Vision* (p. 8 below), recently co-founded the Institute for Gaean Economics to—you guessed it—bring a visionary sensibility into economics (64 Main St., 2nd fl., Montpelier VT 05602). . . . **Richard Register**, hero of our piece on alternatives to the automobile (#52), is launching a campaign to “promote and help build a new kind of city, the ecologically healthy ‘ecocity’” (P.O. Box 10144, Berkeley CA 94709). . . . **Benjamin Barber**, author of *Strong Democracy* (#11) and probably the most prominent academic champion of direct and participatory democracy, has founded the Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy at Rutgers University. “Whitman insisted that the history of democracy had yet to be written because democracy had yet to be enacted,” Barber told The Eye. “It is exciting to be joining the struggle” (Dept of Political Science, Rutgers Univ., Hickman Hall, New Brunswick NJ 08903). . . .

**BACK TO THE FUTURE: Movement for a New Society** (#8), the first political organization of our generation to bring spirituality, feminism, ecology, global responsibility, non-violent action and therapeutic process together under one roof, announced last month that it had closed its doors for good. The news release did not discuss the disputes over structure and strategy that had racked the organization over the years (P.O. Box 1922, Cambridge MA 02238). . . .

**EYE ON THE PRIZE:** If you liked Andy LePage’s *Transforming Education* (#46) but wished it were more specific and practical, you’ll love **Ron Miller** and **Mary Ellen Sweeney**’s new 64-page quarterly, *Holistic Education Review* (P.O. Box 1476, Greenfield MA 01302, \$4/sample). . . . The “Appreciating Diversity” project of the **Equity Institute** (#45) has released its first videotape, *Sticks, Stones and Stereotypes*. Great for classrooms and public discussions (48 N. Pleasant St., Amherst MA 01002). . . . **Whole Earth Review**’s “20th Anniversary Issue” includes mock “five-minute speeches” by 87 social-political-spiritual visionaries and activists, including 12 NEW OPTIONS advisors and 24 people whose work we’ve covered over the years (27 Gate Five Road, Sausalito CA 94965, \$5/issue). . . .

That’s an Eyeful!

# Letters . . .

## Great expectations

I have reached my early adulthood only to be faced with two numbingly inconclusive debates among my elders.

Those in my parents' generation, frustrated by maturity in the Age of Youth, fret about their weight, their three-decade-old marriages, their investments, their waning sex lives. They've got heroes, but there's also no shortage of Meeses and Deavers. Not inspiring.

Meanwhile, in the pages of NEW OPTIONS and elsewhere, my big brothers and sisters of 1960s vintage continue to spin in a whirlpool of discussion. All the emphasis seems to be on explaining, on feeling, on personal empowerment, on self-contemplation, on nurturing this or that potential. People want to work out all the contradictions and imperfections of human existence and then, in a crystal-clear harmony of wholeness, set out to resolve all the ecological, social and economic issues raised by, for example, the Greens.

Forget it. Broken and wounded as we are, incapable of basic agreement on many things, and surrounded by enormous ambiguity and uncertainty, we need to focus on expediency and effectiveness—because the bottom line is that within a short while we will have completely destroyed the ecological integrity of the Earth.

According to a book review in NEW OPTIONS #51, Andrew Schmookler writes about a world "beyond scarcity," about embracing mystery to transcend arrogance, etc. *What can we do with these beautiful thoughts?* Thoreau and St. Francis raised similar ideas, but look what we've mutilated in the centuries since.

The incredible reality of the global ecological crisis has created a vacuum that neither the Reagan revolution nor any number of spiritual communities, activist gatherings and New Age debates seems capable of filling. Perhaps this has alienated a great many of my generation.

—Ralph Meima

*The Wharton School of Business  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

## Failure of imagination

Your October lead article ("Bigger Roads—or Trolleys, Bikes and Urban Redesign?," #52) shows a failure of imagination for dealing with the problem of automobiles. There's a way of eliminating automobiles from the inner cities and at the same time providing individual private transportation.

You'll find it described in my novel *Love Me*

Tomorrow (1978), which I wrote under the title *Looking Backward II* (the hero Newton Morrow believes he's a reincarnation of Edward Bellamy). Take this passage:

"Electric cars—'Trics'—are the only automobiles permitted in the cities. They are publicly owned, but are private transportation.

"Trics are one- and two-passenger cars with a very small amount of trunk space. They literally line the sidewalks of the inner city. When you find one with its flag up, it's available.

"You insert your commuter travel card to activate both the engine and the computer-controlled time charge. You press your personal identification number on the car's calculator. The time you use a Tric is metered while the computer-activated flag is down. . . ."

I'm still writing at 72. Finished my 14th novel a few months ago and it has been rejected by 10 publishers, so far. As I tell [one of my characters], he, you and I are whistling in the dark.

—Bob Rimmer

*Quincy, Massachusetts*

*Robert Rimmer was well known in the late 1960s for his novel The Harrad Experiment (1966).*

In your good article about trolleys, bikes and urban redesign, there was no mention of the triporteur.

When in Paris in 1927, I often saw a person using a triporteur, a bike with a third wheel that helped hold a rather large basket.

Sometimes one needs a car to carry things. At times, a triporteur would be useful for that purpose.

—Martha C. Hyslop

*Ardmore, Pennsylvania*

## Ain't no way

Trolleys, bikes and urban redesign are all intriguing to me, since I have been using a bicycle as my primary transportation for the last 40 years.

Sadly for your excellent ideas, you are fighting against human nature, and especially the basically lazy-but-in-a-hurry nature of the average American.

Americans want to go exactly where they wish to be, at exactly the time they wish to go, and they will sacrifice many other good qualities to this type of behavior. Most of them will only ride bicycles for recreation or when the automobile situation becomes absolutely hopeless.

—Louis S. Moore, M.D.

*Naples, Florida*

A few thoughts on the "Bigger Roads . . ." article:

• Incentives are needed to encourage a res-

idential settlement movement back to the inner rings of the metro. area; land costs are still higher in the center, and it is viewed as no place for the middle class family lifestyle.

• What about the problem of assuring personal safety if people opt for public transportation?

• In *Urban Economics and Public Policy* (1981), James Heilbrun analyzes the transportation choices of two hypothetical but typical commuters and concludes that for one of them, "Even free transit would not suffice to divert him from the highway."

—Holly Paver

*Urban Planner  
Denver, Colorado*

## Carrot and stick

In your discussion of various transportation alternatives, mention is made of the enormous amount of fossil fuels burned by automobiles. Rightfully so—every year the average American car pollutes the atmosphere with its own weight in carbon.

That today we have to dramatically and immediately reduce the amount of fossil fuels we burn is profoundly apparent to anyone who glimpses the dire consequences of an accelerating greenhouse effect.

Which is why I want to point out the enormous quantity of fossil fuels burned today in the production of a product to which many of us are even more unconsciously addicted than our automobiles.

I'm talking about meat.

It takes 50 times more fossil fuels to produce a meat-centered diet than a pure vegetarian diet. In fact, so gluttonous of energy is today's agribusiness feedlot beef systems that if the calories you burn in walking come from a meat-based diet, you'd actually conserve energy by driving!—providing your car gets better than 25 mpg.

How can this be? It takes 16 pounds of grain and soybeans to produce a pound of feedlot beef. By cycling our grain through livestock instead of eating it directly, we have to grow 16 times as much [as we would otherwise].

The energy costs of today's systems of meat production are obscene. As is the environmental devastation. . . . As I make clear in my Pulitzer Prize nominated book *Diet for a New America* (1988), the most effective single step a concerned citizen of our planet can take today is to shift toward a more vegetarian diet.

—John Robbins

*Ben Lomond, California*

## What's your line

In a letter in NEW OPTIONS #51 responding to Herb Walters's article "Listening to the

Contras" (#49), Ruth Kaswan asks, "Who is Walters's organization, Rural Southern Voice for Peace (RSVP, yet!)? . . . Are they a front for the CIA? Or some fascist fundamentalist religious group—Moonies?"

Walters answers and demonstrates that they have superb credentials: "RSVP is in fact an affiliate of the Fellowship of Reconciliation," etc. But NEW OPTIONS's editor notes, "Suppose RSVP were *not* affiliated with a traditional peace group. Should that cast one iota of suspicion on it?"

The answer is: yes. In our circumstances, where the CIA had commissioned or subsidized 1200 books published as commercial products with no hint of their propaganda origins by the time of Senator Frank Church's committee hearings . . . in the land of COINTELPRO . . . of course we should question the purpose and origins of any (apparently) new outfit that appears to be engaging in distractions or apologies for the bad guys.

That's too bad: it would be nice if people would say what they mean. But since the Authorities have chosen to muddy the waters we all drink, they have inevitably brought suspicion on those innocents who for whatever reasons take positions which prove convenient for the Empire.

—Mark Drake  
Leggett, California

## Oh those Democrats

Say what you want about Dukakis ("The Democrats Won't Save Us," #51), but I hope you voted for him. The Democrats may not save us, but at least they're less likely to sink us!

Meanwhile, you've got to realize and accept that this ocean liner takes a long time to turn. We need patience and the will to make compromises in the long-term interest, a step at a time.

—Larry Daloz  
Glover, Vermont

I agree: the Democrats don't offer much hope. However, rather than be depressed by that, I see it as a further sign that we're just going to have to move even further beyond our old paradigms to effect the kinds of changes needed to sustain the biosphere.

—Hunt Blair  
Providence, Rhode Island

## Is less really more?

We [at Institute for Policy Studies] were pleased to have our book *Winning America: Ideas and Leadership for the 90s* mentioned as part of your "A Few Good Platforms" roundup (#49). And your recommendation that we solicit an "anti-growth" piece from Paul Wachtel

was most helpful.

I do have a serious question to pose, coming from my own chapter on "Housing" for the IPS book, regarding your approving citation of the assertion by Jeff Bercuvitz of the Regeneration Project that "the more innovative solutions require fewer subsidies."

Housing affordability is a major and growing crisis in the U.S. The IPS proposal calls for major restructuring of the U.S. housing system—taking housing out of the profit sector; [providing] capital grants for construction and renovation; permanently retiring the debt on existing housing; providing subsidies for those with incomes too low to afford even the ongoing, non-debt-related costs of housing.

All that is very expensive, although the short- and long-term payoff in permanently lowered housing costs for the society is well worth it.

My question: What proposal do you or the Regeneration Project have for solving the housing affordability crisis that requires less, rather than more, subsidies? And I don't mean gimmicky "solutions" that are workable or applicable for only a tiny, selected portion of our people, but solutions that will work for the one-third of our people that still is ill-housed and can't afford to be well-housed?

—Chester Hartman  
Institute for Policy Studies  
Washington, D.C.

Jeff Bercuvitz responds . . .

*Dear Dr. Hartman: The Regeneration Project doesn't pretend to have simple answers to the housing affordability crisis. What we claim is that we are asking the right questions from a perspective that is as essential as it is promising: relying more on creativity, partnerships and people power and less on federal dollars.*

*The housing solutions put forth by the kinds of groups covered in our newsletter, Regeneration (33 E. Minor St., Emmaus PA 18098), are not mere "gimmicks." Many of us who are concerned about the housing crisis just don't believe that seeking huge federal subsidies is the way to go.*

## There is hope!

NEW OPTIONS #47 contains an article about M. Scott Peck and his most recent book, *The Different Drum*. In the article reference is made to the slim likelihood of it ever reaching the best seller lists.

According to Peck's hand-out from his workshop held in San Francisco this last weekend (which I attended), "His most recent book, *The Different Drum*, . . . became a *New York Times* best seller."

There is hope!  
—Ruta Aldridge  
Calif. Self-Esteem Task Force  
Sacramento, California

Continued from page four:

We re-asked the question. "I understand what you're saying. [But] it's much easier to be a prophet than to have a program. . . ." Then, in a whispered aside to us while another reporter was asking a question: "You're right on target."

We asked if the organization would take its environmental rhetoric seriously by pointing out that everyone can't live like middle-class Americans and that we've got to start changing our lifestyles. "As you know, there's a big argument between those who say we're consuming too much and those who say we're not producing enough. And I'm not about to take sides on that. . . ."

We asked if the organization would address any long-term structural issues. "Right now SANE/FREEZE simply doesn't have the resources to do that. We haven't gotten sufficiently organized to get into relationship[s] with think-tanks. And it's always a problem for a movement, how much pragmatic detail do you want to get into. . . ."

## Finale

The congress closed with Coffin playing the piano and everyone singing "Down By the Riverside." All four hundred of us. It felt silly and awkward, holding hands and singing an anti-war song under fancy chandeliers, with uniformed hotel workers walking to and fro, but there was something right about it, too.

For like the closing ceremony, SANE/FREEZE was a bundle of contradictions. It was trying to merge a centralized national office with a decentralized grassroots network—and to some extent succeeding! It voted to put the phrase "global security" into its name, but it hadn't begun to address or even study such issues as global economic development and Third World democratization—without which there can be no global security. Its activists thought of themselves as change agents, but their "fund human needs" rhetoric made them sound like defenders of the bureaucratic welfare state.

Still, we were impressed. We admired the organization for hanging tough in the face of all kinds of internal and external pressures, and we admired the participants for their manifest competence and passion. On our way back to the Amtrak station, we resolved to check in with them again next year when they met in—omigod—a Hyatt Hotel out west.

*National SANE/FREEZE: 711 "G" St. SE, Washington DC 20003; memberships, \$25/year. See also Pam Solo's history of the Freeze Campaign, From Protest to Policy (NEW OPTIONS #53), and Milton Katz's history of SANE, Ban the Bomb (Praeger, 1986).*

## Mel Gurtov's global humanism

Dear Mel Gurtov,

I was so happy to get your book *Global Politics in the Human Interest*, published by the innovative new globally-focused publishing house, Lynne Rienner Publs (948 North St., #8, Boulder CO 80302, \$16 pbk). I remember you well from our New World Alliance days, when we were all trying to put together the first national "New Age/transformational" political organization (blush, blush).

As I recall, you had recently stopped trying to be a traditional buttoned-down, ambitious college professor, and had self-published a remarkably honest and self-critical account of your journey from RAND Corporation researcher to Oakland commune dweller: *Making Changes* (1979). In that book you tried to give your emerging new personal-political philosophy a name: "radical humanism."

I'd often wondered what had become of you in the years since—and now I know. You've become head of the international studies program at Portland (Ore.) State University. And you've authored a book that *applies* your hard-won humanist philosophy to the international political scene.

### Ways of seeing

In *Global Politics in the Human Interest*, you show that there are three basic ways of seeing global political events. Probably most of us are *realists*—that is, most of us interpret world politics in terms of the short-run national interest. Then there are the *globalists*. *Corporate globalists* reflect the interests of transnational businesses; *global humanists* reflect what you call "the human interest within a global community."

Your book comes alive when you detail these three ways of seeing the world. Realists and corporate globalists share such values as aggressiveness, elitism, materialism and progress. Global humanists share such values as authenticity, enoughness, self-reliance and non-violence. Most capitalists—and most socialists—are realists. Some big capitalists and some state socialists are corporate globalists.

### The three "worlds"

Much of your book is spent looking at the First, Second and Third Worlds from the perspective of Global Humanism. What you show us is dramatically different from what we're used to seeing.

You don't present the Third World from the point of view of the U.S. government—or of socialist revolutionaries—but in terms of the

three-quarters of humanity "whose basic survival needs, cultural and spiritual identities, and quite possibly personal self-esteem have been badly eroded by forces largely beyond their control."

Interestingly, this perspective makes you even more critical than America's U.N.-bashers of many Third World governments and their "demands." For example: "The 'New International Economic Order' is meant only to bring about equity *between* states. Equity *within* states is another matter. . . . [Moreover,] Third World leaders tend to use the same standards of equity, such as average income and GNP, that are employed in the industrialized world. . . ."

You define the First World not as the U.S. and its allies, but as both Superpowers—in part because both countries are suffering from "some fundamental social and economic weaknesses and inequalities [that flow] from military supremacy."

You define the Second World as the countries in the middle—countries like Canada, Hungary, China, Poland, Sweden—and show that that's where the action is, so far as "innovative policymaking" is concerned. "The Second World . . . has demonstrated what can be accomplished when military considerations are not permitted to become dominant."

Toward the end, you suggest a visionary but practical agenda for the global future.

### A missing piece

I find your Global Humanist perspective very convincing. But I'm not sure why. And searching through your book, I'm not sure *how* you convinced me.

Yes, your book is chock-full of facts and figures "persuading" me of the accuracy of your views. But I've read enough books to know that anyone can arrange facts and figures to support their views.

Where do the dozens of Global Humanist values and norms you speak of come from? Toward the middle of your book you suggest that they originate in "heartfelt concern, not political doctrine" — and you insert a remarkable 15 page sub-chapter, "The Oppressed," consisting largely of quotes from Third World people and popular leaders. To read those pages with total concentration would give anyone a burning desire to Make Things Right. But why should a desire to Make Things Right lead one inexorably to *your* prescriptions and values?

In our last issue we said that Thomas Berry's *Dream of the Earth* failed to prove its main

point—that immersion in the Earth community will inexorably lead one to a decentralist, globally responsible politics—and we suggested that a more "humanistic," less spiritual approach might be called for. Your book provides that humanistic approach, but it's missing the same piece Berry is missing. Rational, person-oriented "caring" doesn't seem any more certain than immersion in Nature to bring one around to a Global Humanist (Greenish, post-socialist, etc.) point of view. Some other mechanism is needed.

I suspect that "other mechanism" is the personal journey you wrote about in your earlier book, *Making Changes*. By facing down your demons and getting in touch with yourself, you opened your heart—and the *rightness* of such values as authenticity, enoughness and service was revealed.

I strongly suspect that Thomas Berry's book was the end product of a similar personal journey.

I know it's an unusual request, and might well disrupt your academic image, but . . . would you please consider combining both your books into one?

## Griffin, ed.: spiritual roots of politics

For years, writers as different as Scott Peck (#47), Starhawk (#46) and Brian Swimme (#29) have been telling us it's wrong to separate politics from spirituality. Now comes an anthology that seeks to put to rest forever the notion that we can even *have* a politics without a spirituality: David Griffin, ed., *Spirituality and Society: Postmodern Visions* (State Univ. of New York Press, \$13 pbk).

Griffin is no tripper. He's professor of philosophy of religion at the prestigious School of Theology at Claremont (Calif.) College, and founding president of the intellectually rigorous Center for a Postmodern World. The essays he's chosen investigate such hard-headed questions as what a spiritually-infused agriculture, or economics, or technology, might look like in real life. But the most notable essay in the anthology is the one by Griffin himself.

Spirituality is not an "optional quality," Griffin says. "Everyone embodies a spirituality, even if it be a nihilistic or materialistic spirituality." And every society reflects its members spirituality. Thus, the question is not, Should our society embody a spirituality?, but rather, What *kind* of spirituality should it embody?

Griffin shows that "modern" spirituality has "disenchanted . . . the world." As a result, we've become so narrowly individualistic that we don't even care about our own posterity! Is it any wonder that our society is so competi-

tive and short-term-oriented?

We desperately need a "postmodern" spirituality, Griffin says—and he finds one on the horizon. At its root is "a vision that can be called *naturalistic pantheism*, according to which the world is present in deity and deity is present in the world." A society consistent with that vision would be more egalitarian and communitarian . . . and at the same time, more *genuinely* individualistic.

Griffin deepens and expands upon these points considerably—as do such contributors as Charlene Spretnak, spokesperson for a Green spirituality (#40), and Herman Daly, spokesperson for a steady-state economy (#44). Richard Falk adds an essay-challenging postmodern activists to go beyond the "soft style of advocacy," that is, to go beyond the notion that abrasive political struggle is always self-defeating.

We were made uncomfortable by the attempt—in some of the essays—to come up with a politically correct spirituality. We were dismayed by the occasional insinuation that modern anxieties are merely foolish, never profound (Sartre's *Nausea* will have an unsettling effect in any society, however "postmodern"). You'll enjoy arguing with the authors on these points and more. Still, we think there can be no arguing with them on the main point: No postmodern spirituality, no postmodern society; no postmodern society, no future at all.

## Hellinger et al.: we can help the Third World

If you read radical critiques of America's foreign aid programs—critiques such as the Frances Moore Lappe books—you're liable to end up thinking there's not much we can do to help the Third World, short of getting out of its way. Stephen Hellinger et al.'s new book, *Aid for Just Development* (Lynne Rienner Publr, address above, \$14 pbk), is different. It roasts our aid programs as thoroughly as do Lappe et al. But most of its pages are devoted to telling us how we can do better.

Hellinger et al. are not abstract, academic theorists. They're directors of The Development GAP, which occupies an almost unique place in the social change movement. At one and the same time, the GAP designs and implements development projects in the Third World; networks with grassroots Third World change agents; serves as a consultant to our major aid agencies; and maintains its impeccable credentials as an activist policy organization (see #28).

In *Aid for Just Development*, the GAP tells us everything it's learned about how to promote "equitable, locally defined and self-sustaining" development in the Third World. The first half

introduces us to the "new aid paradigm" the GAP is seeking to develop—an approach "designed to underwrite the involvement and leadership of the poor in their own development, and thereby help foster long-term stability [note the appeal to American self-interest—ed.] rooted in true self-determination."

The "traditional liberal" approach to aid—"channeling large amounts of funds through Third World bureaucracies"—comes in for criticism, as does the "present conservative policy of maximizing the aid spent on the commercial private sector." But what makes these pages sing are the positive alternatives—the dozens of recommended criteria for giving aid. Among them: "Analyze the participatory mechanisms of the organization or project in question"; "Analyze its potential for achieving self-reliance"; "Analyze its potential for promoting self-learning among participants."

The second half of the book not only criticizes the World Bank, private voluntary organizations, and the Agency for International Development, but proposes alternative priorities and procedures for each. In the end, a new aid *structure* is proposed, based largely on the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) and African Development Foundation (ADF)—two small U.S. government-funded agencies that practice much of what the GAP preaches . . . and that owe their good health in part to the GAP's ministrations.

Despite the prodigious amount of knowledge and insight that went into this book, something very conspicuous is missing: Any clue as to how to get from here to there. Sure, the IAF and the ADF already exist, and they demonstrably "work," but they're tiny and controversial and vulnerable. Ah, well, perhaps it's not the GAP's role to provide us with a battle plan; perhaps it's enough that they've spelled out in staggering and enticing detail just what it is we're fighting for.

## Marks: find your passion

In our review of Mel Gurtov's book, above, we suggested that only an honest and scary journey to the depths of our beings could give us the vision necessary to work for a decentralist/globally responsible society. Last month Linda Marks published a book on how to do that journey: *Living with Vision* (Knowledge Systems Inc., 7777 W. Morris St., Indianapolis IN 46231, \$13 pbk).

Marks is a Green-oriented psychotherapist and management consultant, and her book is eminently practical, with exercises and meditations on, e.g., connecting with the child inside us (the part "that has not forgotten what has always been important to us").

She defines vision as "our capacity to craft new possibilities." Everyone has that capacity, she says, and it's not just politically essential, it's humanly essential: "Living with vision is the process of living as full, creative human beings. . . ."

The best visions have heart, says Marks, and you can tell which ones those are because they "create results which are in the best interest of all those affect[ed]." Visions without heart "seduce" rather than "inspire" you.

One of her best chapters tells you how to begin challenging the "fortresses" inside you. Another good section introduces you to a wide variety of organizations and people that are manifesting their unique and heartfelt visions.

The book isn't for everyone—an intensely personal, quasi-therapeutic book can never be—and I found it a little precious for my taste ("vision lives deep inside you," etc.). But I know people whom it can speak to, and I'm buying them copies for Christmas.

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