

New Options

April 28, 1989

Issue No. Fifty-eight

Out of Congress' League: Building Human-Scale Community

In our last issue we told you about the 74 "post-liberal/New Age/Greenish" bills in Congress—and the 21 Congresspeople who've been consistently supporting them. I don't think we've ever received a bigger or better response to an issue.

We appreciated all your letters (not to mention phone calls from *Rolling Stone*, CBS and *Le Monde*!). But the issue—and your response—also left us feeling profoundly uncomfortable.

We think it's important to focus on the immediately feasible, and we're glad we did. But we think it's also—and equally—important to focus on where we want to go, 20 to 50 years down the line.

Washington is full of "progressive" publications that have made their peace with short-term thinking and centralized power, and it's not our ambition to become like them.

So for this issue we wanted to bring you the flip side of the immediately feasible. We wanted to bring you a transcendent vision of the future.

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The trouble is, after five years as journalists in Washington we've become impatient with transcendent visions of the future. Our deepest hope was to present you with a transcendent vision that's rooted in the values of "actually existing" Americans (and not in the values we wish they'd have "some day"). We wanted to present you with a vision that's rooted in real-world political and technological realities (and doesn't depend for its realization on some sudden "transformation").

After much searching, we believe we've discovered just such a vision. We pulled it in bits and pieces from an enormous manuscript that Frank Bryan and John McClaughry had been working on for five years in their "spare time." Another version will be published as a 300-page book this July 4 by Chelsea Green Publishing Co. (*The Vermont Papers*, \$21.45 from Chelsea Green c/o A.I.D.C., 64 Depot Rd, Colchester VT 05446).

Both authors are sophisticated realists, not starry-eyed dreamers. McClaughry, you may recall, was a senior policy advisor to Presi-

dent Reagan, and is currently a Republican member of the Vermont State Senate (see his letters to NEW OPTIONS in #56, 51 and 40). Bryan teaches politics at the University of Vermont and is author of a much-admired textbook, *Politics in the Rural States* (1981).

Just as important, both authors *live* their vision. McClaughry has been moderator for the town of Kirby, Vt., since 1967. Bryan has won the *New England Monthly's* Local Hero Award for his efforts on behalf of town meeting.

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Given last issue's feature on bills in Congress and this issue's feature on building human-scale community, some of you may think we're suffering from a kind of schizophrenia. In West Germany, the Greens would certainly attribute our last issue to their "realist" faction, our current issue to their "fundamentalist" faction.

We think those distinctions are silly and self-defeating. We believe that support for the bills in our previous issue can only be *deepened* by dwelling on visions like the one below—and vice versa. We believe that, just as it's important to act realistically (previous issue), so it's important to think fundamentally (this issue).

We've even coined a slogan: "Think fundamentally, act realistically."

By Frank Bryan and John McClaughry

America stands as a beacon to liberty, democracy and community. But that tradition is under challenge from the forces of centralized power. The little green-clad state of Vermont may well become the place to show America how liberty, democracy and community can be restored.

Vermont is physically in the past and technologically in the future. It leapfrogged America's urban-industrial period and landed smack in the Information Age. Unfettered by the problems of urban-industrialism and free of the problems associated with it, Vermont nevertheless is among the leading states on measure after measure of technological maturity.

On every side those that live here are struck by the fusion of past and future. We can touch the ingenuity of our ancestors. We can imagine the merging of old values and new technologies.

Values and virtues

The early Vermonters had the values and virtues of pioneers everywhere. An abiding love of their own hillsides and valleys, a reverence for the land as the anchor for their spiritual existence, a disdain for the haughty and dishonest, a respect for diversity of opinion and eccentricity of behavior, an attachment to their towns and schools and local communities—all these have been among the most cherished Vermont traits.

The question today is not whether we should once again celebrate these ancient values—of course we should. Our celebration, however, must be more than an ancient exercise, like an atheist's singing hymns. The question is whether there is hope for recreating the Jeffersonian republic of Vermont in an age when the forces of centralism and gigantism seem to be so strongly ascendant.

Saving graces

Unlike other states in which bureaucracy and democracy coexist, Vermont's playing field is level. Our bypassing urban-industrialism has meant that depersonalizing forces must confront three components of Vermont's promise for a human-scale society:

- **A legacy of communities.** In our time in Vermont the idea of community has reeled under the hammer blows of centralization, mobility, massification, and social disintegration. But even with all this, Vermont remains the first place in America one would go if one sought to preserve community. The hills are alive with the sound of town and village, neighborhood, corner, and place.

- **An appropriate economics.** The imperative of the coming century is toward decentralism. One part of the movement for economic

decentralism is driven by the potentials of "high tech" and finds expression in works of the John Naisbitt genre (NEW OPTIONS #20). It is given scholarly form in the volume entitled *The Living Economy*, which puts forth the views of TOES, The Other Economic Summit (#35, 50).

Although there are elements of contention between high-tech proponents and human-scalers, their futures are inexorably related, and the influence is two-way—for they need each other.

Vermont's economy of the future promises to go hand-in-glove with this new decentralism. Our state already has more than twice as many self-employed workers as the national average, and our economy is far more dominated by small business than that of the average state.

● **Fusion of democracy and technology.** Vermont has maintained its democratic institutions. The legislature is large and nonprofessional. Less than 10% of its members are lawyers, one of the lowest ratios in America. The judiciary has maintained its tradition of including citizen "side judges" on the bench.

The most important institution of Vermont's democracy, however, is town government. Two hundred and thirty-six of Vermont's 246 units of government are towns in which the "executive" is a three- or five-member board of selectmen and the "legislative branch" is a town meeting. And even the cities are democratically based. Burlington's board of alders has 13 members, each representing about 1,800 registered voters. [This spring, the Burlington Greens' two aldermanic candidates gained 17 and 21 percent of the vote.]

Although democracy in Vermont is being threatened by the forces that trashed human-scale politics throughout America over the last century, it has managed to hold on long enough for the telecommunications revolution to come to its aid. We see this happening both in the enhancement of the democratic process and in the increasing capacity of little governments to do the work of democracy.

Information technology can already help local people do the work of government themselves. What is still needed are new information technologies for democratic structures. We must bring the information technology to town meeting rather than try to approximate the characteristics of a town meeting at the mass level via telecommunications.

"Akin to tribes"

To combat giantism, preserve our liberties, reinvigorate our democracy, and reunite our communities, we propose the creation of a Vermont of *shires*—new units of general-purpose local government to which most of the powers of the state will be devolved and through which our people can express their most heartfelt

political ideals.

To achieve this, Vermont must change more radically than any other American state has ever changed.

The state government will become unrecognizable by present standards. While the authority for laws which must be uniform will continue to reside at the center, the great bulk of state spending programs (education, welfare, mental health, even roads) will devolve to the new shire governments.

These new governments might be given any name, but we prefer "shire." The old English shire provides a rich inspiration for a new, decentralized political structure. Historically that structure was established on a hierarchy of human scale, from warrior to clan to tribe. If we think of Vermont's citizens as warriors and the towns as clans, what is needed is a structure akin to tribes.

More democracy

The shires are not designed as *more government* between the towns and the all-powerful state. They will represent not more government but the same amount of government we have now, redistributed from Montpelier (our capital) to St. Johnsbury, Wilmington, Canaan, Bristol, etc. We want more democracy in the government, not more government in the democracy.

The shires will be independent polities, accountable directly to their own people, governed by a body elected by the people, having their own independent revenue base adequate to their needs.

Creating the shire as the primary unit of government raises an essential question about the future of Vermont's towns. We propose that the division of responsibilities between shire governments and sub-shire governments—whether they be towns, incorporated villages, neighborhood districts, or whatever else the local citizenry may conceive—be worked out variously, by the people of the shire.

In some smaller shires a unitary shire government may emerge, exercising authority over all former functions of the state as well as all functions currently exercised by the towns. In other shires the town governments may be left intact to do what they now do, while the shire takes on the responsibilities that have come down from the state.

Put another way our plan calls for a massive enabling of local government. We expect that after 50 years a wide spectrum of variation in shire structure will emerge. The shires will be laboratories for experimentation, where substance (policy) and process (democracy) will work out a natural balance.

Why shires?

The new shires will integrate many key prin-

ciples of democratic governance:

● Government efficiency must never be defined in terms that sacrifice local citizen judgment. All too often, when democratic control conflicts with plans for administrative efficiency, democracy is *automatically* precluded. For us, in contrast, the bottom line is the democratic process.

● Governmental size must be permitted to float free and seek its own level. At present it is encouraged (and often forced) upward but never allowed downward. The question, is a locality *big* enough to provide a welfare *system*, must read, is the unit *small* enough to provide the human *context* without which attempts to care for the needy shrivel and die on the bureaucratic vine of depersonalization?

● Representative democracy depends on electorates well versed in the principles of citizenship. These can only be learned in the context of human-scale institutions. Since we can't get along without representational systems, small direct democracies are a requirement, not a luxury.

● Subdividing policy-making institutions into a multiplicity of one-purpose bodies (school boards, solid-waste authorities, planning commissions) forces people to seek out influence in a puzzling web. Citizen fatigue and then despair set in. Democracy is lost to the tyranny of complexity and obfuscation. The size of jurisdictions must be reduced to the point where the linkages between, say, highways and schools become understandable and manageable. Policy will be better for it. Democracy cannot survive without it.

Distributing power

Designing a code for the redistribution of power between state and shire in Vermont involves a complete turnabout in the way Americans approach government. To wit: policies that most directly affect *people* are most appro-

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NewOptions

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Alternative communities try to speak

Time magazine just did a cover story on the dark side of "progress" (April 24). The *Utne Reader*, featuring "the best of the alternative press," is the fastest-growing general interest magazine in the U.S. Scott Peck, tireless promoter of "communities," has been on the best-seller lists for 170 weeks now.

More than ever, America seems ready to listen to alternative voices. (In the 60s they were *heard from* but not *listened to*.) So it was with a great deal of anticipation and excitement that we took the Greyhound bus last week to Charlottesville, Va., where we were picked up and driven to Shannon Farm—a model "intentional community" (50 adults, 500 acres)—where the board meeting of the Fellowship for Intentional Community was about to begin.

We knew that the Fellowship had been founded in 1948—by Community Service Inc. and School of Living (both NEW OPTIONS #53)—but hadn't really taken off until 1986, when it started trying to become a continent-wide network for intentional communities. Now its board included people from many of the best known and most "successful" communes and alternative communities, and we came to the board meeting wanting to see if the Fellowship was ready and willing and able to give the intentional communities movement a voice—a voice that would be *listened to* by most Americans.

Refugees

The drive into Shannon was spectacular—the Blue Ridge Mountains were everywhere—and we were directed to one of the larger and more unusual buildings on the place, "Monacan," a three-story obviously hand-crafted all-wood structure whose roof twisted upward like a Dairy Queen sundae. For three days and nights the board met intensely there, in an atrium-type living room filled with broken-down old couches and chairs and the smells of delicious foods from the country-big kitchen.

The board members were worthy of the setting. Here are some typical self-descriptions:

- **Dan Questenberry** "went to work in public health administration across rural Alabama—was fired for wearing long hair, blue jeans and a beard. . . . Came to community realizing it was the only place to exercise his theories about democratic decision-making";

- **Betty Didcoct** "worked three years in a men's medium-security prison. . . . Now lives at Skysong (Wash.) and does west coast community networking/consulting";

- **Geoph Kozeny** "grew up in Kansas. . . . very straight except could not function before

10 a.m. and not into monogamy. Co-founded Stardance community (Calif.)—a group marriage which over the years evolved into more of an extended family. . . .";

- **Caroline Estes** "left Philadelphia 17 years ago, with other AFSC friends, to form a community—eventually Alpha Farm (Ore.). Five of them moved west with \$500 in the bank. . . . Caroline is known as a consensus facilitator of large groups" (see #35);

- **Laird Schaub** "finished college and became a Washington bureaucrat, [only to find he'd] traded 6-7 close friends for only one or two. Personal growth slowed down. So after visiting Twin Oaks (Va.), he helped start Sandhill Farm (Mo.) and has lived there 15 years."

Able and willing

You'd have been impressed with the board's process. Board members were very good at listening to each other—to the emotional content as well as to the words. And they talked and talked and talked about each topic until they reached "consensus." They were more patient and considerate than we'll ever be.

By the end of the three days, several key decisions had been made:

- It was decided to proceed full speed ahead with a "Directory of Intentional Communities"—the first comprehensive directory to be prepared since 1978. At least 150 communities will be included in the first edition, which the Fellowship is co-producing with *Communities* magazine.

- The Fellowship's permanent office will be at the Center for Communal Studies (CCS), on the University of Southern Indiana campus; and not at the School of Living in rural Pennsylvania. Many factors entered into the decision, above all, perhaps, the feeling that the staff at CCS would be more competent. (To keep the academic address from getting in the way of the Fellowship's grassroots image, it was decided to not include the line "University of Southern Indiana" when giving the address.)

- Much time was spent discussing the organization's next steps, especially a speakers bureau and a series of pamphlets.

- The board was expanded to 15 members, and more women, Midwesterners and Westerners were added.

- A national "communities conference" was envisioned. . . . shades of the big "pro-family" conferences of the 1970s.

Not yet ready

For all that we were impressed by the board's

process (and seduced by the great food), we are not convinced the Fellowship is ready to get the intentional communities' message out to the mainstream.

Too often, the discussions suffered from problems that have plagued the communities movement (and not just that movement) from the beginning. Among them:

- **Democracy without expertise.** The board members spent over an hour discussing what their brochure should look like without the foggiest notion of "what works" in direct-mail. And they didn't even seem to care what works. As one of them put it, "The direct-mail people would probably go bananas that we're going to send this flier out—but we're not direct-mail people!" Another added, "Thank god!"

- **Cooperation without trust.** The Fellowship was really taken to the cleaners by *Communities* magazine over the financial arrangements for the *Directory of Intentional Communities*. "Bilked" is not too strong a word. And most board members have begun to see this. But they still adamantly insist on cooperating with *Communities* as if nothing is wrong. It's as if they *have* to be "nice" no matter how badly they're being taken advantage of—otherwise their whole "cooperative" philosophy would be called into question!

- **Commitment without consequences.** The Fellowship *wants* to play a significant role in the life of this country. But it decided to not require its board members to attend more than one of every three board meetings. You can't have it both ways: if you want to change the world, you have to work—hard—to do so.

"Appreciation"

At the end of the three days, the board members did not critique each other's performance. Instead, they spent over an hour going around the circle "appreciating" each other.

Their words were very beautiful: "You're an ally" . . . "I see your warmth and sincerity" . . . "I really appreciate your level of engagement." And outside, as we took our leave, Shannon Farm and that crazy-roofed building glistened in the sun.

My heart swelled with pride—for I knew my life and work had somehow contributed to the reality of that scene. My only regret was that the lessons learned by the 150-plus intentional communities like Shannon would most likely continue to remain hidden from mainstream America, hostage to such constant alternative-culture temptations as anti-professionalism, phony niceness, and failure to demand hard work from each of us.

Fellowship for Intentional Community: c/o Center for Communal Studies, USI, Evansville IN 47712.

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priately *decentralized*; policies that most directly affect the planet are most appropriately *centralized*.

Our reform abandons the way of government currently in favor: education by megastandards, welfare by mailbox, police protection by radio, and health care by stranger.

Thus the power of the state government as the protector of the environment and guarantor of basic civil rights and liberties should be preserved. But the shires should be the repository of authority in matters in which success or failure depend on face-to-face interaction of human beings.

There is a need for state presence in other concerns that transcend local boundaries, such as transportation, disease control, information gathering, and technical assistance. But even in areas such as transportation there should be a substantial shift of power to the shires. The bottom line: If when travelling through Vermont one encounters variations in the quality of the roads, that is the price one pays for democracy.

Distributing responsibility

In all areas where law making is shared between state and shire, the *administration* of policy should be at the shire level. Here is where information technology offers its greatest hope for democracy.

During the 1970s the decentralization of administration to the face-to-face level was called "street-level bureaucracy." There have been problems with building human transactions back into administration.

But the process should not be abandoned, for the course of events is moving in its favor. If advances in information technology continue to develop as they have over the last two decades, we will soon be able to administer *nearly all governmental functions* at the shire and sub-shire level.

In this way citizens will be required to do the *work* of government as well as make the decisions. An officer like the environmental constable—a local citizen with the power to poke around the shire and make sure laws designed to keep the countryside clean are being obeyed—is an example.

In fact Vermont not only has a deep historical tradition of local office holding—hog reeves, fence viewers, scalers—it has also developed more and more roles for citizens in recent years. One such is town energy officer. With the shires in place a whole range of administrative services now run by the state will become the work of local people.

Creating the shires

The ultimate boundaries of each shire will be decided by the people of each shire as it comes

into being. But some kind of starting point must set the process in motion.

The starting point will be the election of representatives to a constitutional convention called to work out the new Vermont government in its entirety. Among its actions the convention will sort the existing towns and cities of the state into "proto-shires," first-order approximations of what are likely to be shires in the new Vermont.

The criteria to be used would include first a population-base appropriate for shire democracy. Other criteria are bioregional identity, with heavy emphasis on what geographers call "population nodes," and particularly watershed boundaries, which have silently controlled human behavior since the dawn of time.

Over the two-year sorting-out period following the constitutional convention, the people of the towns in each proto-shire will participate in a process of boundary adjustment.

Celebrating shire identity

Beyond the emotionally satisfying activity of self-government itself, several steps can be taken to establish community identity in the shires.

Foremost among these steps is the creation of a shire symbolism. In front of the shire's public buildings, its assembly halls, town halls, schools, and community centers, will fly the unique and colorful shire flag. The shire colors will be emblazoned on its road signs and on the shirts of the shire athletic teams.

Symbols of proud local history will abound. Each shire will have its monuments to commemorate shire residents or even sad events in the shire's history. Small corner parks or crossroads commons will bear the names of citizens distinguished for their learning, achievements, or long service to the shire community.

Shire citizenship will be a stepping forward to full membership in a community and a conscious accepting of responsibility for the civic affairs of one's own self-governing republic. Accordingly shire citizenship will differ somewhat from state and national citizenship.

Shire citizens will be initiated in a public ceremony, held once a year on Shire Day. Of course federal and state governments would continue to determine who may vote in their elections, but only those who have accepted shire citizenship shall have the right to vote in shire elections and on shire public questions.

With shire citizenship the new citizens will customarily volunteer themselves to a position of civic responsibility or community self-help. It might be to serve as an apprentice to the pound keeper, or as a perambulator, or as a trumpeter in the shire band, or manager of the shire computer bulletin board. . . . It would not be imperative for a new citizen to choose a mode for making a contribution to the shire,

but it would be expected that he or she do so.

Thus would shire citizenship have far greater importance than the meaningless and empty coming-of-age ceremony of today—a trip to the post office to register for the draft.

Bioregional/global

With domestic affairs returned to the hearths of the people in their shires, Vermont's state government will be free to address the other issues that must have its attention in the coming century. The *range* of state government activities will be drastically curtailed, but not necessarily the *amount* of activities.

The new state government—crisp, efficient and innovative—will maintain the purity of the environment, establish Vermont as a new actor in global affairs, and help coordinate relations among the shires, and between the shires and itself.

A new Agency of Vermont Affairs will take bold steps to increase Vermont's influence beyond its own borders. Within this agency, the *Office of Global Involvement* (OGI) will administer policy set by the state legislature in world trade, international cultural exchanges, technology sharing, and initiatives to promote world understanding and development.

A prime responsibility of OGI will be the management and expansion of programs like Vermont's people-to-people project with Honduras, begun many years ago. It might also generate linkages between Vermont and states or regions of countries on other continents.

The Agency of Vermont Affairs will also have an *Office of Subnational Affairs*, the better to develop bioregional cooperation and interstate compacts and agreements. At a time when vision based on ecological union is needed, Vermont, like other states, is hamstrung by political jurisdictions. It must lead the way in doing something about that.

"There is hope"

For the first time since it became apparent that only radical change would save Vermont's democracy, it is clear that radical change is possible.

Vermont's politics is bubbling like early sap over a new-fired arch. Conventional two-party politics has become obsolete in our state.

The success of Democrats at the polls in modern Vermont has been wrongly identified as a "realignment" of the party system. We are in an advanced state of party *dealignment*. Candidates of either party can win, but the parties themselves are rootless.

For perhaps the first time in Vermont's history, the largest body of voters is self-styled independents. The state is full of nonparty political organizations: the Vermont Greens, the American Freedom Coalition, the Rainbow Co-

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The Ear . . .

Dear, dear Abbie

Here are two letters we received from Abbie Hoffman, who (as you must know by now) was found dead in his bed this month at the age of 52.

The first letter was unsolicited and unexpected and accompanied his subscription last October. The second, which we received this month, was signed "Abbie Hoffman—Delaware Valley." He'd included his bioregion.

You can use my name as advisor you can excerpt any chapters you wish from any of my books—or you can get me to contribute—small pieces (I have 2 contracts for books & lots of speeches plus need operation on foot crushed in serious car accident. but I get loads of short trip items & could be a steady source for a small amount—I own nothing

Particularly knowledgeable: Drug testing (no one knows more). Irangate. Student Protests around America

—Abbie, (215) 297-0721

I found your Dec. issue on TV advertising extremely interesting.

Anyone who doubts the all-pervasiveness of TV ads should consider that America's most sacred rites, namely sports, have been taken over by television advertising. Every big money sport now has installed "TV Timeouts" in the event the coaches don't call enough pauses.

It's quite something to be at a live sporting event and for no apparent reason see athletes just standing around. I swear about 80% of the live fans are unaware of why play has actually been halted "for a brief word." That's real power.

But chipping away at the beast is more practical than a frontal assault. I recently did an "anti-ad" on the USA Today [television] show. It went like this:

"TV ads tick me off, but what really gets under my skin is ads for the U.S. Army.

"I mean who believes all this jazz about beautiful people jumping out of helicopters to have breakfast at dawn? Who believes this is the way to become a brain surgeon, a super electronics engineer or the V.P. of a major corporation—'Being all you can be' in the Army?"

"Look, you join up when you're poor, desperate and uneducated and for the most part that's the way you come out. That's 'cause in the Army you learn how to clean toilets and kill people.. Ain't it the truth?"

There are ways of correctly doing television,

just as there are correct ways of writing and singing.

—Abbie Hoffman

Co-founder, Youth International Party

Author, Woodstock Nation (1969)

New Hope PA, Delaware Valley Bioregion

Can land taxes solve the housing crisis?

We received over 30 letters on our cover story, "Affordable Housing: Laying the Groundwork" (#56). Rather than reprint them verbatim, we transformed them into voices in the imaginary round-table dialogue below. Our "moderator," Judith Leckrone, is a rising star at the Environmental Protection Agency.

First cuts

Leckrone: Good evening, everybody! We're here tonight to discuss NEW OPTIONS's idea that a neo-Georgist tax scheme (raising taxes on land while lowering them on buildings) would help solve the housing crisis. What were your general impressions?

Hanno Beck (Columbia MD, Potomac Valley Bioregion): You've done a really good job of giving a pithy and readable description of the housing crisis, and showing how a modern adaptation of Henry George's ideas is the most promising solution.

Robert Clancy (Henry George Institute, New York NY, Hudson Valley Bioregion): It has been noticed far and wide in our circles.

Richard Clark (Green Policy Forum, Berkeley CA, Shasta Bioregion): Never have I seen so much garbage in such a fine place!

Betsy Dana (Citizens [for] Global Action, Portland OR, Cascade Bioregion): You cannot imagine how delighted I was to read about the effort to secure for local communities a greater share of the publicly-created value of land.

Lorna Salzman (Green Party activist, New York NY, Hudson Valley Bioregion): Groan! This is about the fourth time in as many years that I've had to contest the incredibly regressive, anti-ecological Henry Georgist land value taxation idea.

Jared Scarborough (Treetop Panorama, Payson IL, Heartland Bioregion): My reactions were: Yes, let's cover a heartfelt social issue like housing. . . . Hey, he's really onto something intriguing. . . . Oh no! It's the George crowd. . . . Well, OK, I'll be open-minded. . . . It's just so impractical and there's probably a better way. . . . Real brainstorming going on here! Good work.

Unfair?

Leckrone: We're all over the map tonight.

Unidentified: Aren't we always?

Leckrone: Fortunately, our two prime sources on the land value tax, Steven Cord and Walter Rybeck, were able to join us tonight. So could those of you with doubts and objections please address your comments to them? Let's start with those of you who feel the tax is unfair.

Steve Carlson (Hinesburg VT, Highlands Bioregion): You haven't considered the real effects of the land value tax on real people! In most places, the tax on buildings (including housing) is less regressive than the tax on land.

In my town, every homeowner must pay about \$625 a year in property taxes for a building lot. However, rich people build fancier houses than poor people do. If you build a \$10,000 house on your lot, your taxes will be less than if you build a \$250,000 house.

The land value tax would eliminate even this semblance of fairness! A family living in an aging trailer would pay the same tax as a family living in a mansion.

Paul Olsen (Clearbrook MN, Heartland Bioregion): Surely raising the tax on landowners to reduce the tax on homeowners is not the solution to the housing crisis!

Being a rural landowner, the thought of raising my property taxes to make urban life more affordable sounds just a bit fascist!

Increased housing costs reflect a multitude of causes, and land speculation is only one. Being a society addicted to fossil fuel consumption—and having inefficiencies built into the economy to further increase the GNP—has caused much greater damage than land speculation, in my opinion.

Rybeck (Center for Public Dialogue, Kensington MD, Potomac Valley Bioregion): In fact, the approach is progressive—the poor pay less.

For one thing, land prices vary greatly within cities and bioregions. A few square feet of center city land outprice acres several miles from downtown. Who owns these prized, expensive sites? Not welfare clients!

Another thing: For most homeowners, 65-85% of their property value is in the building. And [under the neo-Georgist tax system], up-taxed land is more than offset by downtaxed houses. So the affluent—with more land per house—would pay proportionately *more* under this system.

Finally, holding idle urban land—a luxury the poor can't indulge in—is [virtually impossible under the two-rate tax, because it would be so expensive].

To sum up: What could be *fairer* than recycling community-created land values to all citizens [by means of the land tax]?

Self-defeating?

Leckrone: Thank you, Walt. Now let's hear from those of you who think a land value tax would be self-defeating.

Michael McDowell (Bellingham WA, Cascade Bioregion): This proposal could easily backfire by making low income housing more scarce!

Much of this country's lower income housing stock exists in the form of older houses and apartment buildings which sit on relatively highly valued land. Such housing is already vulnerable to re-development projects that displace tenants and leave them without affordable alternatives.

Increased land taxes plus lowered taxes on construction will certainly increase the pace of this bogus urban "renewal."

Salzman: Like Marxism, Georgism is an outdated ideology.

It was proposed at a time when there was a lot of open space, and increasing the density of urban development was "desirable." But today, open space—and more important, wildlife habitat—is at a premium. National organizations like the Nature Conservancy as well as local land trusts are desperately seeking ways to reward, rather than penalize, owners of large undeveloped tracts of land.

In a nutshell, Steven Cord is saying that not developing land is inefficient and undesirable—the exact opposite of what rational conservationists are striving for today. Just what is "inefficient" and "undesirable" about preserving land that acts as a wetlands buffer, is a vital habitat for diverse populations of wildlife, provides aesthetic and social values for the community, and so forth?

Admittedly, there is derelict and worthless land in or near urban areas. But are the Georgists at all aware of the desperate need for MORE, not less, open space in the more populated areas of the U.S.? Is their proposal socially and ecologically responsible?

Cord (Center for the Study of Economics, Columbia MD, Potomac Valley Bioregion): Inefficient, low-density land uses in urban areas cause sprawl into open space.

Zoning and planning are okay. But if you really want to protect open space, then tax land values, not buildings. Land would then have to be used efficiently—otherwise there'd be too much tax expense with too little income from [property] improvements.

If land were used more efficiently [in urban areas], there would be less sprawl into the clean-and-green countryside.

Inaccurate?

Leckrone: Thanks, Steve. Now it's time to hear from those of you who thought our facts were inaccurate or misleading.

Roland James (Phoenix AZ, Sonora Bioregion): The article had some interesting ideas but some never-never-land numbers. If they were true, we would all be rich and crowded!

Walter Rybeck stated that from 1956-81 the market value of vacant lots increased 64% a year. So a \$100 vacant lot in 1956 would be worth \$200 million in 1981. A nice return, eh?

Rybeck's other numbers are also suspect. Professional athletes might have had an escalation in wages of eight to 16 times over the past 20 years, but not many others.

John J. Wallace (Wallace & Steichen Inc., Real Estate Consultants; Palo Alto CA, Shasta Bioregion): Rather than the 64% annual increase Mr. Rybeck cited, the true lot price increase was less than 10% a year. Most of the other statistics attributed to him are also wrong, although the errors are not of this magnitude.

What the actual data show is that housing costs have increased at a rate only slightly faster than the general rate of inflation. The overall quality of the housing units, however, has increased substantially. So in comparable terms, housing costs have lagged behind inflation.

By almost any measure, and especially when compared to the past or to other countries, most Americans are very well housed. Some would say over-housed or wastefully housed. Further, Americans are now spending a lower proportion of their personal income on housing than they did in the 1950s, 60s or 70s.

There are groups of people in the U.S. who are not now well housed and have very little prospects of finding decent and affordable housing. These are principally the poor, but now also include the non-affluent young with children, many of whom are living in expensive urban areas. The discussion should center on finding housing solutions for *these people*, and not on make-believe problems.

Rybeck: It's true—the statistics I used were confusing. The percentages I cited were average annual increases from base year, not yearly compound rates.

Here are the facts: From 1967-87, inflation—the Consumer Price Index—went up 240%. Construction wages went up 249%. Building materials went up 260%. Mortgage rates went up 60% (fluctuating to 130% in 1982).

But from 1967-81, residential land prices went up 698%. Projected through 1987, 1000%.

While most Americans are well-housed, that's hardly cause for indifference. Rental housing is being boarded up even as women, children and working people are living on the streets.

Irrelevant?

Leckrone: Thanks Walt. Finally, I'd like to hear from those of you who think the Georgist view is not wrong so much as irrelevant.

Roger B. Wilson Jr. (Winchester MA, Lower New England Bioregion): Land prices are indeed the key to the skyrocketing cost of housing. But why have land prices risen so

sharply? I suggest that large-lot zoning, imposed by government, is a major factor.

Without the zoning, people would be choosing to live closer together in more friendly and ecologically sound—but democratically chaotic!—land use patterns. A truly "new option" would be to ban snob zoning.

Frederick P. Jagels (Cabot VT, Highlands Bioregion): The validity of the Georgist point of view is limited to agricultural lands and to urban lots with potential for commercial development. It has virtually no bearing on today's housing market.

There is no place for the affluent to productively invest their money in a global economy marked by overcapacity. Under these circumstances, non-productive markets become alternative stock markets . . . and, in the case of housing, a *subsidized* alternative stock market (because of the tax writeoff).

Thus the single most important thing to do to dampen house prices is to eliminate the mortgage interest deduction for all second homes—and for all *primary* homes bought by those in the higher income sectors.

Since supply and demand also enter the picture, the second most important thing to do is to increase supply in those areas where the highest percentage of home buyers have been squeezed out. But in today's environment, where every opportunity to "upgrade" scarce real estate into the lucrative top-end market is eagerly seized upon, new supply would have to be protected by placing the underlying land in trust, or by placing restrictions on resale.

Clark: Rising land costs are a *symptom* of the problem, not the *root* of the problem.

To get at the root you have only to observe that over the past 50 years the vast majority of the labor force has gradually been recruited and guided to the production of ever more superfluous kinds of goods and services. If even a fraction of these people were permitted to work on the rehabilitation of substandard housing—and on the construction of ecologically planned (high density, no sprawl) *new* housing—then decent housing would once again be attainable for most people.

Cord: I agree that we need more affordable housing. That's why I support a tax on land, not housing.

By not taxing houses, we make them cheaper to build and buy. And we can reduce the ever-escalating price of land by taxing land values more. A building-to-land switch in the property tax lowers taxes for most homeowners, especially poor people.

In places where it's been tried, this tax switch has actually brought more housing onto the market.

Leckrone: Thank you Steven, and thank you, everybody, for shedding such heat and light on the housing crisis in this country.

It happens every summer

Every year, the nation's "leading" political thinkers decry the absence of new political ideas in this country. And every summer, at least 12 conferences prove them wrong.

This summer, come see for yourself. . . .

Heartland

● Pack your bags and drive out to The Land Institute's festival, **The Global Environment: A Prairie Perspective** (May 26-28, central Kansas). All talks, plays, tours and music will relate to the "proper use of land" as defined by E.F. Schumacher and Wes Jackson, co-director of the Institute and author of *Altars of Unhewn Stone* (NEW OPTIONS #55). Presenters will include Chuck Hassebrook of the Center for Rural Affairs (#23) and Donella Meadows, principal author of *Limits to Growth* (1972). *Land Institute, 2440 E. Water Well Rd., Salina KS 67401, 913-823-5376.*

● Drive west on U.S. 40—the old U.S. 40—to **Action to Save Our Planet** (June 2-5, Aspen, Colo.), a spiritually conscious "weekend of exploration, information and positive solutions to the crucial environmental, economic & social issues that face us all." Speakers will include politicians like Jan Hartke, president of the Global Tomorrow Coalition (#18), as well as people like Patricia Sun, the psychologist and healer (her tapes are among the best). *World Balance, P.O. Box 4897, Aspen CO 81612, 303-920-3202.*

● Heal yourself—spend a day in the Rockies. Then, fly east to Sirius community's workshop, **Alternative Communities Today and Tomorrow** (June 6-15, western Mass.). Explore "the challenges of community living and the innovative ideas being pioneered by these 'R&D centers' for both personal and social change." Workshop leaders Gordon Davidson and Corinne McLaughlin are authors of the best book on intentional communities, *Builders of the Dawn* (#17). *Sirius Univ. Program, Baker Rd., Shutesbury MA 01072, 413-259-1505.*

● Spend a day in the glorious Berkshires. Then, secure your car and fly out to the **Re-thinking the Curriculum** conference (June 19-23, San Diego). "Do we truly comprehend the meanings of our academic disciplines," the organizers write, "in the context of the [current] global transition? Do we have the courage to turn the eyes of our students to the imminent realities they must face?" Presenters will include Johan Galtung (#50), Hazel Henderson (#43), and Frances Moore Lappe (#53). *Dr. Mary Clark clo College of Extended Studies, San Diego State Univ., San Diego CA 92182, 619-*

594-6255.

Will Green grow?

● On June 20, stop whatever it is you're doing and fly out to the **Second National Green Gathering** (June 21-25, Eugene, Ore.)—our last best chance to turn our hopes and dreams into a political movement. "After four years of organizing a grassroots network in over 200 places," the organizers write, "the U.S. Greens are convening to develop a national agenda. [We'll] discuss position papers and action plans [called SPAKAs—see #49], expand our vision and broaden our base. . . . We anticipate about 500 people with special guests from around the world." *Green Assembly, 2826 Baker Blvd, Eugene OR 97403, 503-484-1665.*

Pick & choose

● After the Green gathering, take a walk along the soothing Willamette River and choose among the four virtually simultaneous events below:

— **Building on the Past, Tuning In to the Future** (June 23-July 1, rural Wisconsin), organized by Belden Paulson, co-founder of the New Synthesis Think Tank (#43, 49), will give spiritual and political seekers a chance "to join together to reflect on the experiences and changes we have gone through, and to envision and prepare for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead." *Paulson, CUCD-UWM, 929 N. Sixth St., Milwaukee WI 53203.*

— **Beyond Conflict: Transcending Us vs. Them** (June 24-25, Washington, D.C.), sponsored by Willis Harman's (#45) Institute of Noetic Sciences, will bring 16 speakers in to "examine the root cause of conflict between individuals and groups, and [suggest] how we can cooperate to solve problems more creatively." Among the speakers: Marilyn Ferguson, Sam Keen (#55), and Andrew Schmookler (#51). *IONS, 475 Gate Five Rd, #300, Sausalito CA 94965.*

— **Ecology and Community** (June 24-July 23, northern Vt.), sponsored by Murray Bookchin's (#30) Institute for Social Ecology, is a four-week summer program "intended as an intensive educational experience in the field of social ecology." Instructors like Bookchin, Dan Chodorkoff, Ynestra King and Margot Adler (all #40) will cover such topics as bioregional agriculture, community health and feminism-and-ecology. College credit is available. *ISE, P.O. Box 89, Plainfield VT 05667.*

— **Toward a Postmodern Presidency: Vision for a Planet in Crisis** (June 30-July

4, Santa Barbara, Calif.), co-planned by Richard Falk (#56) and David Griffin (#54), will include lectures, discussions, small groups and "experiential" sessions (led by Joanna Macy, #51). "The conviction behind this conference," the organizers write, "is that our planetary crisis is rooted in assumptions and habits distinctive to the modern world [and that it's] high time to translate this cultural critique into political vision and practice." *Center for a Postmodern World, 2060 Alameda Padre Serra, #101, Santa Barbara CA 93103.*

Visionary feast

● Tired of "marginal" gatherings? Head for the World Future Society's Sixth General Assembly, **Future View: The 1990s & Beyond** (July 16-20, Washington, D.C.). "A dazzling array of over 400 world-class speakers," as the organizers put it, will be strutting their stuff at the plush Sheraton Washington Hotel—among them, Clem Bezold (#45), Bill Halal (#32), Barbara Marx Hubbard (#45), and Michael Marien (#23). More than 3,000 people are expected in all (but, n.b.: 4-5,000 people were attending WFS gatherings 10 years ago. Could the ever-increasing hype and pomposity be driving some people away?). *WFS, 4916 St. Elmo Ave., Bethesda MD 20814.*

● After the Futurist bash, you'll welcome the unpretentious even guileless nature of the **Henry George Sesquicentennial Conference** (July 29-Aug. 6, Philadelphia). "A program designed to highlight George's [land value tax] philosophy as the logical culmination of the struggle between opposing social systems has been planned for you," say the organizers. Steven Cord, Walter Rybeck and representatives of Common Ground (all #56) are among the presenters. *Council of Georgist Organizations, 121 E. 30th St., New York NY 10016.*

● After experiencing the stresses and strains of the gatherings listed above, chances are you'll be eager to attend **Conflict Resolution for Global and Personal Peace** (Aug. 5-6, northern N.Y.). "This weekend brings together three people who are putting words of peace into action," write the organizers. Mubarak Awad (#6) is founder of the Palestinian Center for Nonviolence; Abdul Said (#24) participates in Arab-Israeli peace dialogues; Dudley Weeks does conflict facilitation work in South Africa. *Omega Inst., Lake Drive, R.D. 2-Box 377, Rhinebeck NY 12572.*

Healthy, happy, whole

● If you're a fan of process, you'll love the very process-oriented **Decentralist Congress**, subtitled "Making the World Healthy, Happy and Whole" (Aug. 9-13, Toronto). Presenters will include Ivan Illich, Leopold Kohr, David Haenke of the North American Bioreg-

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Continued from page four:

alition, the Vermont Republican Assembly. . . In this chaos there is hope for fundamental political change.

A new coalition?

There is even, in Vermont, a powerful majoritarian agreement on human-scale governance. But it is split by partisanship, class background, and by one issue area, foreign policy.

The populist "Right" combines belief in agrarian decentralism in the tradition of former Republican Senator George Aiken, small-town working people, and a scattering of professional people.

The progressive "Left" is epitomized by socialist Bernard Sanders, former mayor of Burlington. No one knows for sure how his politics might run should he win statewide office. But to this point, by word and deed, he has been the strongest supporter of local democracy among Vermont's leading politicians over the past decade.

A growing number of Democrats call themselves decentralists. They are professionals, artists and intellectuals. The Greens, who often have serious disagreements with Sanders, are also active.

Between the populists and the progressives are centrist "moderate" Republicans and liberals in the Democratic party. The question is how to educate them while fashioning a strong, majoritarian coalition between the populist agrarians and the progressive communitarians.

A new vehicle?

Using one of the major parties would be difficult. Winning seats is their motive for being, and their perspectives are often controlled by policy differences manufactured outside Vermont.

Republicans, for instance, take positions on foreign policy that the communitarian left will not abide. The Democratic Party presents another problem. It is too relentlessly centralist to accept human-scale democracy.

Using a third party to push a human-scale agenda has the appeal that third parties always have. They are fresh and free of historical baggage. A new party formed on behalf of a Vermont agenda that sustains itself on the application of democratic principles at the local level—and seeks local office first and statewide office second—would be unique.

Another option might be a combination of third-party strategy with the principles of networking. This approach could be modeled after progressive and populist movements in Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota during the 1920s.

Perhaps it is time to try this approach: apply modern state-of-the-art organizational concepts

based on information exchange, and draw together a working coalition for one specific purpose—the radical democratization of the state.

This would eliminate the necessity to agree on everything. The populist right and communitarian left will simply agree to disagree on the rest and work together for democracy.

Wake up, America

A new form of intolerance, "survivalism," is infecting the professional classes.

While popular culture depicts the survivalist as a redneck toting an M-14 and a cluster of stolen grenades around his neck somewhere in the mountains of Tennessee or Idaho, we see a kind of unarmed, upper-middle-class survivalism emerging in states like Vermont. A four-wheel-drive vehicle, a satellite dish, plenty of fencing, and financial, social and cultural linkages to some network far away allow for a planned estrangement from the human community—and not just the immediate community.

Surely during the next century America must move in the *other* direction and emulate the Vermont shire federation.

What the shires will do is provide, in Richard Goodwin's phrase, "a mooring for the human spirit." They will create an opportunity for developing one's personality and abilities in service to the common good. They will nurture that sense of self-restraint which flowers into ordered liberty.

The shires will build the kind of community that integrates the individual into a matrix of land, society, custom, belief and hope, without which he or she is prey to alienation and despair.

Bryan: Dept of Political Science, Univ. of Vermont, Burlington VT 05401. McClaghry: Kirby Mtn Rd, Concord VT 05824. In their book the authors write, "Both of us are deeply indebted to Melissa Bryan, who did all the typing and the editing."

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Continued from page seven:

ional Congress (#35), and Susan Witt of the E.F. Schumacher Society (#12); facilitators will include Caroline Estes of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (p. 3 above) and Mel Leasure of the School of Living (#53). The gathering promises to be a nonacademic and spiritually explicit version of last year's The Other Economic Summit (TOES) conference (#50), and TOES is co-sponsoring. *Fourth World Assembly, 3030 Sleepy Hollow Rd, Falls Church VA 22042.*

One more time

● By now you're probably exhausted and don't want to go back to the West Coast one more time. Trust us, it's worth it. There's the **Sacred Places and Spaces** symposium (Aug. 16-20, San Francisco), which will be "bringing together experts on indigenous cultures from all around the world to meet with scientists, architects, planners and activists. Their common quest will be finding new and better ways for people to live in harmony with nature." Presenters will include Tom Bender, co-founder of *Rain* magazine (R.I.P.); Vine Deloria, author of *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969); and Ann Spirn, author of *Granite Gardens* (1985). *Inst. for the Study of Natural Systems, P.O. Box 637, Mill Valley CA 94942.*

● Alternatively, there's the 27th annual meeting of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, this year entitled **Creativity and Consciousness** (Aug. 17-20, Palo Alto, Calif.). Speakers will include Fritjof Capra (#47), Riane Eisler (#51), Anne Schaefer (#51) and Roger Walsh (#15), plus there'll be workshops, meditations and a "Bodywork Center." You'll need bodywork if you attend all the conferences mentioned above! (But not soulwork.) *AHP, 1772 Vallejo St., #3, San Francisco CA 94123.*

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