

Hard times in upstate NY brings citizen action

Self help in Andes village

Andes, N.Y., looks like a lot of other Catskill villages: big white houses with cupolas and ginger-bread trimmed porches, shady lawns, spired churches, and a hotel with wide verandahs where summer people used to relax.

A few summer people still come to Andes, along with some fall hunters and winter skiers. The money these visitors spend and the incomes of the social security pensioners is all that keeps the town going these days.

There's no way to earn a living here. You can't do it raising a truck garden in what used to be called the "Cauliflower Capitol of the World." You can't do it breeding horses or dairying. The terrain is too bumpy and the growing season too short for grain farming. So the farms around the town are going back to timber. There is only one grocery store, and its proprietor says he's losing money and may have to close down.

There is nothing unique about the plight of Andes. The virtual disappearance of small industry and the rise of agribusiness has emptied many of this nation's villages, leaving behind only the old, the inept, and a few social idealists, who quickly learn that clean air is no substitute for a regular pay check.

What's special about Andes is that the citizens have come together and decided to do something to keep their village from becoming a ghost town. Four hundred turned out to the first meeting, which was chaired by a retired labor organizer and social activist named Hank Mayer.

Mayer, a friend and follower of crusty old socialist and back-to-nature faddist Scott Nearing, retired here with his wife about eight years ago, intending to piece out their social security checks by growing organic vegetables for sale. He was, he says, "through solving the world's problems."

Events and his neighbors have altered that resolve.

A committee formed under Mayer's leadership has drawn up a dozen alternative blue-prints for revitalizing the economic life of the town:

- a community slaughter-house and meat processing plant;

- a cooperative cannery;
- a cooperative grocery store;
- a community freezer plant;
- a workshop where the women of the area, many of whom are adept at needlework, can make things for sale in Albany and Schenectady;
- a center for making potpourri and organic cosmetics;
- a small woodworking plant to make picture frames, costume jewelry, or whatever.

"We can get along without New York City, but New York City sure as hell can't get along without us."

One of these projects—or perhaps two—will be recommended by the committee as a starter. The final decision will be made by those who will do the work. Part of the proceeds of whatever evolves will go to those who contribute their labor; part to the community as a whole.

The people of Andes may fail at this first attempt. They have no government backing and no special education or experience of economic planning. But they do have first-hand experience of other "hard times." Most of them can remember the depression of the '30s. And they have at least one leader able to apply the lessons of that era to this one.

The pensioners (and friends) are organizing themselves to solve their problems by their own efforts. If they succeed, they will have set an example for beleaguered Maine potato farmers, 80-acre Iowans, and Oregon ranchers who can't compete with the big pear growers. They believe they are important for this and other reasons.

As one senior citizen here puts it, "We can get along without New York City, but New York City sure as hell can't get along without us." They may prove to be right about that.

—Velma Tate

Velma Tate is a retired writer and editor who lives in a village in the same region.

New "ministers" avoid taxes

"Hallelujah!" said 148 residents of Hardenburgh, N.Y., one evening in September. With that, they became ordained ministers and their homes became churches, therefore tax-exempt.

It's part of a new kind of tax resistance in upstate New York, where in some communities as much as 40 percent of the land is exempt from property taxes, generally because the owners are churches. The Catholic church, for example, owns seminaries, churches and rental property, and pays taxes on none of it. Other religious organizations have been buying large amounts of land in the last few years.

"Hardenburgh is a root-hog-or-die small town with little industry, not much farming anymore, some summer visitors who help the economy somewhat, and a lot of people on welfare and old-age pensions," says a resident of the area.

Last year's reassessments in the face of more and more property becoming tax exempt were the last straw, she believes.

George McLain, Bishop of the Universal Life Church, ordained over half of Hardenburgh's residents. The church, which ordains by mail for \$10, made the opportunity of a religious vacation available to many men wishing to avoid the draft during the Vietnam War.

"A lot of people in Albany laughed when we started this movement," says McLain, a Hardenburgh resident, "but they're not laughing now."

The goal of the movement is the abolishing of all exemptions, Stephen Oppenheim, attorney for Citizens for Fair Taxation says. This may mean eventual abolition of real property tax "in favor of a tax that distributes the burden more fairly," he says.

The group has also challenged the exemption of some land in the area. May 1 is tax status day in New York state. On May 1 this year, town assessor Robert Kerwick says he will remove the 148 new churches from Hardenburgh's tax rolls. The State Board of Equalization and Assessment is threatening to remove Kerwick from his post if he removes the taxpayers from the rolls.

Oppenheim says the board actually has no jurisdiction in the case. "They've been throwing lightning bolts from Albany," he says, "but the board can't do anything. It's just a paper tiger."

The ruling of the assessor can be challenged in court, but one court case already upheld Hardenburgh's new churches. "There's no way to rewrite those exemptions to keep our people out," says Oppenheim. Other local tax-resistance groups are forming across the state, and George McLain, a plumber before he became a Doctor of Divinity with the Universal Life Church, is busy ordaining new ministers.

About one-third of all real property in the U.S. is tax-exempt because it is owned by the government or by educational, religious or charitable organizations. Soon the figure may go as high as 50 percent. The increasing tax burden on small homeowners, many of them older people on fixed incomes, may lead to increased tax resistance. More people, like those in Hardenburgh, may discover a sudden religious calling.

The *New York Times* reported one resident, after making her home a church, began holding prayer meetings there. The subject of the prayers? "Mostly taxes."

—Judy MacLean

cineaste

WINTER 1976-77 ISSUE

'Red Flags and American Dollars', A Preview of Bernardo Bertolucci's new film, "1900", with two interviews; 'The Politics of Luis Bunuel's Later Films' (from LOS OLVIDADOS to DISCREET CHARM); 'The Left and Porno'; UNDERGROUND, Pro and Con reviews; interviews with Nagisa Oshima on IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES and Alain Tanner on JONAH WHO WILL BE 25 IN THE YEAR 2000; plus reviews of THE FRONT, MEMORY OF JUSTICE, THE LAST WOMAN, THE OMEN, LET'S TALK ABOUT MEN, THE LAST TYCOON, etc.

SPRING ISSUE: HARLAN COUNTY, U.S.A.; Roberto Rossellini talks about his new film on Karl Marx

\$4 for four issues
Pamphlets Subscription, \$10
333 Sixth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10014



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY POSTER

(four colors, 17 x 22 inches)

Cost: \$1.50 each; \$1 each for 10 or more

Order from: New American Movement, 1643 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647

JUMPCUT

A REVIEW OF
CONTEMPORARY

CINEMA *developing a radical
film criticism*

6 issues \$4.00

JUMPCUT

PO Box 865
Berkeley CA 94701

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

BOOKS

Photo by Ken Firestone

His object all sublime, to make the energy fit the task

THE POVERTY OF POWER

By Barry Commoner
Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1976, \$10

This eminently readable book bursts like sunshine on the oily swirl of current talk about the "energy crisis." By its light we can distinguish cause from effect in what are in fact several crises—fuel shortages, a sullied environment, and ominous economic inflation unemployment.

If separate "solutions" to these problems are not to clash with one another ("Pollution control reduces energy supplies; energy conservation costs jobs")—we must understand the relationship of three basic systems that, together with political decisions, govern all human activity: the *ecosystem*, the *production system*, and the *economic system*.

The economic system is dependent on the wealth produced by the network of agricultural and industrial processes, and this in turn upon the resources of the ecosystem. Logically, the requirements of the ecosystem should govern, since if it fails the other two will fall. But "in actual fact, the relations ... are the other way around.... The ecosystem has been disastrously affected by the design of the modern production system. Gas-gulping cars pollute the environment with smog; petrochemical factories convert an unrenovable store of petroleum into undegradable or toxic agents. In turn, the faulty design of the production system has been imposed by the economic system, which invests in factories that promise increased profits at the cost of "environmental incompatibility and inefficient use of resources."

Since energy plays a decisive role in all three systems, Commoner looks to the laws of thermodynamics, "the science of energy," for an appropriate tool of analysis. While the First Law tells us that the energy of the universe cannot be created or destroyed, the Second Law—(that the entropy of the universe is constantly increasing)—tells us that some of the *capacity of energy to do work* is irretrievably lost whenever energy is used to produce work.

Commoner applies the Second Law to define a measure of the efficiency of energy use. The thermodynamic quality of energy is "characterized" by its temperature. Energy delivered at high temperatures has a high capability of doing work, is of high "quality." When we use high-quality energy (say, electricity) for a low-quality task (say, to heat water) or when we burn oil in a furnace at 500 degrees to warm a room to 70 degrees, we are using high-quality energy to accomplish tasks that could be done as well by a low-quality source such as solar collectors or the waste heat rejected by a power plant.

Second Law efficiency enjoins us to look first to the thermodynamic demands of the task to be accomplished, then to match to it the energy whose thermodynamic quality is just sufficient to the task. For example: the basic task of energy in a power plant is to produce steam to drive the generator, requiring, for thermodynamic efficiency, temperatures in the range of 1000-2000 degrees. In a nuclear power plant, the energy of the fission process is in the range of a million degrees. To use nuclear radiation to boil water for steam is a classical case of "thermodynamic overkill." And when the social and economic costs of controlling safety and radioactive waste (including military protection of the plant to prevent theft of bomb-material plutonium, with a mobile "recovery force" and domestic espionage) the folly of such thermodynamic mismatching must be seen to be colossal.

Commoner gives us a masterly exposition of the sources of energy—fossil and nuclear fuels on which we now depend, and the still unused source, the sun. He makes the point that just because solar energy comes to earth at low temperatures, it is particularly suited to space heat, heating water, cooking, refrigeration, and air-conditioning—uses that now represent about 28 percent of our national energy budget. And, being intrinsically of very high quality, it can readily be brought up to the temperature suited to *any* energy-requiring task by concentrating it. The huge parabolic mirror of the French solar furnace in the Pyrenees gathers enough to melt tungsten at nearly 6000 degrees, almost the temperature of the sun's surface.

His conclusion: "Solar energy can not only replace a good deal, and eventually all, of the present consumption of conventional fuels—and eliminate that much environmental pollution—but can also reverse the trend toward escalating energy costs that is so seriously affecting the economic system."

The uses of power are studied in depth in three segments of the American production system—agriculture, transportation, and the petrochemical industry. Typical Second Law efficiencies are calculated, from which it appears that the overall efficiency of the production system is probably no more than about 15 percent. In petrochemicals—the conversion of petroleum and natural gas into such products as synthetic fibers, plastics, pesticides and fertilizers—Commoner's estimate is that efficiency is near zero.

His conclusions: "In the huge gap between the *minimum* amount of energy needed to produce the goods and services we now enjoy, and the large amount we actually use to per-



Professor Commoner in class at Washington University.

form these tasks, lies the possibility for a drastic reduction (more than enough to eliminate imports if we wish) without reducing the standard of living."

The book's last chapter lays responsibility for many of our economic problems at the door of the changed design of production of the last 30 years, a design in which the amount of energy and capital needed to accomplish a task has increased; the amount of labor used has decreased; and the impact on the environment has worsened. The faults of the production system "have not risen, autonomously, from

within the system.... We now know from an analysis of the energy crisis that the operative fault—and therefore the locus of any remedy—lies in the design of the economic system.

"...The energy crisis and the webs of interrelated problems, confront us with the need to explore the possibility of creating a production system that is consciously intended to serve social needs and that judges the value of its products by their use, and an economic system that is committed to these purposes."

Whatever sensitive hackles this radical conclusion may raise,

it is not the result of parlor political theorizing, but the inescapable outcome of a painstaking empirical investigation of the American production system viewed in the light of a scientific understanding of our planet's great self-renewing processes.

—Frances W. Herring

Frances W. Herring is the author of *The Development and Control of Nuclear Industry in California*. She has retired from the Institute of Governmental Studies at the University of California (Berkeley) and is active in the ecology and peace movements.

Roots said something for America.

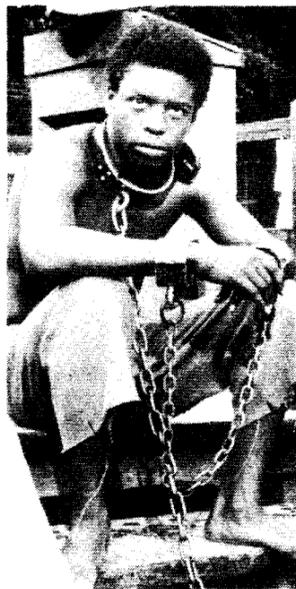
Eighty million Americans watched *Roots*. And eighty million Americans disproved the assumption of most media that the public can't understand or stomach anything that challenges their ability to think or change.

In *These Times* is a weekly newspaper that starts with a different set of assumptions.

We believe in the intelligence and integrity of our readers. We believe you are capable of making your own judgments about issues when they're presented in a full and responsible way.

Because of this, *In These Times* is a different brand of newspaper. We're a socialist newspaper that isn't out to score ideological points. We're a humanistic newspaper, but not a moralistic one. We take on serious issues, but not without a sense of humor.

Take the cabinet appointments. Rather than dwell on the marital fidelity of Carter's dozen, we told you *who* these men are, and how they view America's future. We told you about the corporate connections of the Vances and Blumenthals, the kind of decisions they've made in the past



The young Kunta Kinte.

and the interests we can expect them to represent in the future.

We've covered social movements that oppose corporate control and domination. Like the Sadlowski and Hayden campaigns. We've taken up issues that concern environmentalists, like PBB poisoning in Michigan, and those that concern feminists, like the anti-abortion movement and who's running it.

You'll find reviews of major books and films which avoid

the persnickety condescension you've come to expect from many critics. You'll read interviews and stories on some of your favorite musicians like Loretta Lynn and Esther Philips. And you'll chuckle at our weekly comic strip, "The Factory."

In our opinion section you'll find such notables as Nobel-prize-winning scientist Salvador Luria and Frances Moore Lappe, author of *Diet for a Small Planet*. It is commentary that aims to inform and provoke—not to preach.

And, like Alex Haley, we believe you must know your past in order to hope to control your future. It is a perspective that informs everything you read in *In These Times*.

The present, past, and future. At \$15 for 50 issues, can you afford not to read *In These Times*?

IN THESE TIMES	
1509 North Milwaukee Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60622	
Name	_____
Address	_____
City, State, Zip	_____
INTRODUCTORY OFFER: Send us \$5 and we'll send you a 3-month subscription. REGULAR SUBSCRIPTION: \$15/year.	