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AGRICULTURE—AN UNSOLVED PROBLEM

THE entire issue of a recent number of *Kidma*, publication of the Israel chapter of the Society for International Development, is devoted to agriculture, the guest editor being Michael Evenari, who sets the problem considered by the several contributors to this issue (No. 38, 1988) in the first article. He begins by saying that today humanity faces an "existential crisis," threatening both the so-called "developed" and "developing" countries, even if it differs in dimension and character in the two types of countries. "It is high time," he says, "that the world should face up to this problem, analyze its reasons and try to find solutions fast, otherwise mankind's existence is threatened by this time bomb no less than by nuclear war."

He continues:

> The crises-symptoms are numerous and only too obvious. Let me deal first with "developed" countries. The U.S. Department of Agriculture published in 1987 a diagram showing the amounts of subsidies given in 1986 to farmers in the U.S.A. and in the countries of the European Common Market. The figures, amounting to 27,500 and 21,800 million dollars respectively, are staggering: *if the governments were to eliminate these subsidies completely, or to reduce them by a considerable percentage, farmers would be bankrupt.*
>
> A second symbol of the agricultural crisis is the relationship between energy and output. . . . If we take only the comparatively low figures of 1:10 typical for the U.S.A., and similar values for other developed countries, it means that in order to *produce* one energy unit of agricultural food one needs an *input* of 10 energy units. Considering the worldwide energy crisis, how long can agriculture function in such an inefficient way? This does not take into account some special cases such as, for example, greenhouse-produced vegetables where the ratio reached the incredible proportion of 1:600! . . . .
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> Another problem is posed by the eating habits of people in developed countries accustomed to eat a lot of meat, entailing a large waste of food. Let me cite just one example: in 1980 Germany imported 4 million tons of soy beans from developing countries, mostly for use as cattle-feed. Soybeans are a most important food for hungry people in developing countries but only 5% of the world-wide yields of soybeans is used for human consumption. Apparently feeding cattle is more important than feeding hungry people! . . .
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> Another problem has to do with over-production of certain items in developed countries. This is for example true for butter (which cannot be sold any more and is stored in veritable mountains) and for milk. Two examples suffice to demonstrate the absurdity of the situation:
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> Two years ago friends of mine wanted to buy fresh milk directly from a peasant in the Black Mountains of Germany. The peasant refused their request because if he would sell them milk directly, he would commit a crime. But he told them that he daily throws away 30 and more litres of milk because according to the laws of the E.G. he is only permitted to produce a certain quantity of milk. If he produces more, he is not permitted to sell it but has to destroy it.
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> On August 14, 1985, the famous Swiss newspaper *Neue Zuercher Zeitung* carried the following headline: "American economy has produced record (agricultural) yields. Overwhelming negative consequences for the people involved." On September 3 of the same year the Swiss Television reported: "Bread will be more expensive by three rappen (about two American cents) because the wheat yields were so good."
>
> The most critical question to ask concerning overproduction is whether it has solved the hunger problem of the world. The answer is a clear "No."

In these brief examples given by Mr. Evenari there is plenty to think about. What are the reasons for these laws and subsidies which, when isolated as by this writer, seem so distant from common sense? No doubt economists will find reasons for them, but they still fly in the face of common sense.

Next Mr. Evenari considers the effect of the agricultural disorder on social behavior. He says:

> The agricultural crisis in developed countries also has a deleterious effect on social behavior and on the environment. In the United States, for example, in 1880 some 70 per cent of the population worked in agriculture. Today the figure is less than 3 per cent (2.2%, 1985). This has led to a migration from the country to the large cities. In the long run, this is a most unwarranted phenomenon, leading to the abandonment of farms and villages. Passing through Southern France some years ago I saw many abandoned villages falling into ruins, surrounded by large stretches of bare, formerly productive farmland. I was deeply depressed by this horrendous waste. In Israel quite a number of families are leaving agricultural settlements (moshavim), because they can no longer cope with the problems they face. It really hurts to sec the greenhouses still left rapidly deteriorating.
>
> Another consequence of intensive agriculture is the poisoning of wells by over-fertilization with nitrates, and of soil by over-spraying the fields with poisonous substances which sometimes remain in the soil and are not always destroyed as advertised by the firm producing them.

The writer turns now to the developing countries.

> The agricultural crisis in developing countries manifests itself first of all in the fact that most of them do not produce enough food for their own undernourished population. There are a number of reasons for this state of affairs. One is that the developed countries, in their effort to help, have tried to transfer their own methods of intensive agriculture to these countries. In general these often grandiose schemes failed because the local population was not able to keep them up the moment the foreign advisors left. The expensive machinery brought in was not cared for in the proper way, broke down, could not be repaired, and ultimately turned into scrap metal.
>
> Another important reason for some of the failures was the fact that the projects were often above the level of understanding of the local population: most of the foreign advisors did not speak the language of the local farmers and had to communicate through interpreters. This did not exactly help matters and sometimes even led to opposition because the farmer felt that the high-ups in their local agricultural ministries who, together with the foreign countries, had approved the projects, now wanted to foist upon them something quite foreign to their local habits and culture. I have personally noticed an obstacle in the way of the success of the projects which at first glance seems to be trivial: the foreign advisors staying for one or two years in the various countries concerned, usually live in sharp contrast to the local population, in luxury, causing much too wide a gap between the two "partners," thus engendering antagonism. I have also seen the opposite: wherever the advisors themselves lived under conditions similar to those of the local farmers, the projects were often successful.

In the developed countries farmers strive for maximum yields—"the highest yields of crops, the largest possible production of milk, eggs, meat." Is this, Evenari asks, really the best policy?

> How proudly the countries announce that one of their cows for example produces the world maximum of milk! Or one of their hens the largest number of eggs, unsurpassed anywhere else!
>
> All this is achieved by using enormous amounts of fertilizers and sprays, and by feeding their cattle and hens with an expensive mixture of concentrated feed. . . . Or would it be better for the world, if the farmer would aim at *optimal* production defined as a carefully calculated equilibrium between production-costs (without subsidies), profit, and taking into account the danger to soil, water, and environment in general? . . .
>
> Is it really necessary to use more and more sophisticated, often completely automated machinery to produce more and more? (I shall always remember the reaction of some Kenyan farmers to whom we showed, in one of the kibbutzim in the Negev, its complex, computer-regulated irrigation system, which was the acme of sophistication. One of the Kenyans looked at me and said in an angry voice: "Are you crazy? Why did you show us this so-called 'wonder' of modern civilization? Do you really believe that this could help our poor country with so many hungry people in our area (the Turkama province)?"). . .
>
> Must modern agriculture really be subsidized with horrendous sums in order to be able to exist? Or should we perhaps return to a less computerized and more simplified agriculture which would not need such massive subsidization?

At the end of his discussion Mr. Evenari asks what seem the obvious questions:

Has not the time come to stop the quasi-automatic transfer of agricultural practices from developed to developing countries, and to introduce in the latter, instead of grandiose schemes, smaller, simpler, more "primitive" and cheaper methods acceptable by the local population? This has been done successfully on a relatively small scale, but most often only by private organizations.

Another contributor to this issue of *Kidma*, Dean Freudenberger, begins with a brief history:

In the first decade of this century, agriculture unfolded within a world which was providing sustenance for food for about two thousand million persons. It was a world dominated by Western colonial possessions. The colonies, organized by the "mother countries," were producing, primarily for agricultural commodity, exports of rubber, palm oil, spices, sugar, tea, coffee, timber, groundnuts, maize, cotton, and some cattle hides. By the end of two world wars with their accompanying horror and destruction, the focus shifted to food production. The war-torn nations were hungry and had to be fed. By this time (the mid-decades of this century), with the global advances in health cede, the world's human population began to double about every thirty years.

It grew from a little more than two thousand million to what will probably be a population numbering a little more than six thousand million by the end of this century. This is historically unprecedented. The breeding ground of this kind of run-away growth is poverty. Until it is overcome, it is difficult to predict when human population growth will level off. In the late 1940s, prospects of global famine were on the horizon During this period the Green Revolution was born. Massive efforts were undertaken, with the combined development of nitrogen fertilizers (derivatives of oil and natural gas) and the genetic development of the three major food grains (maize, wheat, and rice), in order that they would be highly responsive to heavy inputs of soluble nitrogen. The goal was to increase yields as efficiently as possible. This was considered an emergency, a short-range strategy. The effort was quite successful; yields have in fact skyrocketed. But, in this process, its glaring success has blinded us to the *original* purpose of the Green Revolution . . . to buy time while simultaneously working on the first agenda, i.e., that of developing reliable domestic food systems to replace the colonial export cropping structures which by now have resulted in massive food deficits across the old colonial world. Also, the idea had been to come up with less exhaustive (soil, water, vegetive and animal species) loss and therefore more promising agricultural technologies. *This fundamental but forgotten goal* forms the agenda of agriculture for the Twenty-first Century.

Since the permanent settlement of human beings in communities, towns, and then in cities, Dean Freudenberger points out, half the soil on earth has been eroded into the sea and the air.

By the beginning of the next century, about five per cent of the earth's surface will be arable for the sustenance of six to seven thousand million people. We must realize that of the entire earth's surface, seven-tenths is covered with water, one-tenth is too cold for agriculture, one-tenth is too hot, with about another one-tenth of this remaining fraction undergoing transformation to desert conditions at *this time*. . . .

We now have a *global food system almost totally dependent on a non-renewable resource which will near exhaustion by the middle* (*at the latest*) *of the Twenty-First Century*. . . .

Generally speaking, irrigation systems (because they are located in semi-arid and arid places) are discharging aquifers at rates far beyond natural recharge from rainfall and snowmelt Along with this process, greater salinization, alkalinization and, as is true of my home state, California, where I received my first university degree in agricultural science, waterlogging is taking place. . . .

Of worldwide concern, too, is the problem of toxicity in our food system along with toxic residue accumulation. . . . Given the continual emphasis on monocropping systems (85% of all food consumed by the human species comes from just fourteen plants: wheat, rice, maize, sorghum, millet, barley, bananas, coconuts, cassava, yams, potatoes, soybeans, peas, and table beans), the health of species' diversity of our biosphere is threatened. . . .

Within the industrial nations, vast areas of prime agricultural land are being converted to urban and industrial use. Grasslands and forests are coming under new pressures. We are all aware of the growing threat to atmospheric stability—carbon dioxide build-up; the new problem of nitrogen oxidation; high altitude particulate concentrations; and the growing probability (if not indeed the fact) of climatic shifts. . . .

Furthermore, the fundamental assumption base of Twentieth-Century agriculture needs to be questioned. For example: Does agriculture (the land

and the rural people) exist to serve the economy of nations? Or ought it to be the other way around? Is humanity really free to manipulate dominate and use the natural system found within the biogeographical provinces of the earth? Or are there basic *responsibilities of stewardship* needing to be respected?

Dean Freudenberger now turns to what must be done:

> The challenge of developing a regenerative agriculture is awesome But there are a few clues.
>
> Regenerative agriculture will be *solar* and *biologically intensive* instead of being petro-chemically and capitalintensive. Farmers will be understood as *managers of micro*biotic communities of which there are millions. We call this kind of agriculture "agro-ecology."... Such an agriculture will integrate perennial grasses, trees and indigenous animal species into the system. . . . We will talk in terms of prairie farming, woodland farming, desert farming, tropical farming, Sahelian farming, and aquaculture. In livestock production. we will work *symbiotically* with creatures which have evolved within their respective eco-systems during tens of thousands of years and have contributed to the health and balance of the planet communities of their natural habitats. New agricultural infrastructures for research, food production and processing will unfold. *Agriculture will be regionalized.* An agro-ecology will engineer itself in ways that maintain and enhance the health of the land and those who farm it. Agribusiness as we define it today will fade just as soon as oil, gasoline and nitrogen fertilizers skyrocket in price by the mid-1990s. . . . More and more, it appears to become evident that the concept (and discipline!) of regenerative agriculture holds out great promise for enabling society to relate to the land as *trustees of a common heritage.* Within such a concept we shall be able to define—once again!—what it means to be human.

Other aspects of food supply are dealt with in an article by H.R. Von Uexkull. He says:

> Modern science and technology have made it easily possible to meet the food needs of a growing world population. But the problem is that such food has to be produced by the use of yield-raising techniques necessitating costly inputs. Food has its price, and an increasing number of people do not have an income high enough to pay that price. Hunger is most prevalent in the predominantly agrarian countries of the developing world.
>
> Up to the present day the world community has tried to solve the problem of hunger in the food-deficit countries by:
>
> — export of surplus food from the developed countries on concessional terms;
>
> — food relief or food aid; and
>
> — provision of yield-raising inputs (fertilizer, improved seed, irrigation equipment) on concessional terms or in the form of grants.
>
> None of these above measures has had a lasting effect, although they have often been very important in providing temporary relief. But in the long run the above measures tend often to aggravate rather than improve the situation because they do not touch the roots of the problem. Export of surplus food from developed countries may help to feed the comparatively prosperous city population in food-deficit countries, but at the same time it deprives local farmers of a market for their produce. Food relief is justified where the local food basis has been eroded by natural calamities; but food relief for other reasons such as rising seasonal prices can become counter-productive. . . . To solve the problem of hunger, economic activity (and thus purchasing power for food) outside agriculture has to be created. . . . All this means that there is no easy or quick solution. Material and monetary aid can only help if it stimulates economic activity on a broad basis beyond agriculture.

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REVIEW
FOURTH WORLD REVIEW

THERE are so many good things in numbers 28 and 29 of the *Fourth World Review,* edited *by* John Papworth,that we decided to make this combination issue the subject of review. We start, then, with the initial editorial announcement, in which it is said:

> Human beings have certain basic needs of food, clothing and shelter to be provided for within a framework of peace and freedom. Despite all the advances in knowledge of modern times these things are as far from realization as they have ever been; the forces which dominate our lives are not ensuring their availability, they are in fact doing much to prevent it. We believe our failure to control these forces springs from the simple but largely unacknowledged fact that our political and social institutions are too large to be susceptible to control by anybody; hence our conviction that if we are ever to attain peace, prosperity or any other desirable social objective then our political and economic institutions must be reduced to a size which enables such control to be exercised.
>
> We are fully aware that this flies flat in the face of nearly all received opinion; we are also fully aware that conditions in small countries and small communities can be atrocious yet in a world of hundreds of small nations, each of which numbers no more than six or seven million, and which in turn is subdivided into numerous small, localized and empowered village or urban communities running their own local affairs without interference from national governments, we believe the common sense and humanity of ordinary people will be far more fully able to reject war, resource waste, ecological despoliation and other evils than monster mega-nations dominated by mass political military and commercial interests. A localized, human scale of government is the only means by which (for example in the city states of renaissance Europe), humankind has ever achieved such social fulfillment and aesthetic splendor as it has ever known.
>
> We believe a global rejection of giantism and all the forms of presumption which it imposes on our lives today can restore to us the transcendent glories of former ages, and with the means which technology has made possible, enable them to be shared by the entire human family.

This is simple common sense, a fine editorial foundation for a magazine. The first article, also an editorial, considers a current economic event:

> In Britain, these words are written as some giant Swiss chocolate firms are engaged in a market struggle to capture control of a giant British firm. The mechanics of this kind of move are simple; one firm with profits to spare begins to buy the shares of a, perhaps weaker, rival. The buying pressure prompts the price of the shares to rise. Having gained a stake in the rival firm the presence of a predator becomes known; this prompts a further speculative rise in the share price, which rise encourages shareholders to sell in order to realize a quick profit. The predator bids in the open market with an even higher price so that it is able to mop up more of its rival's shares until the bright day dawns when it is able to announce it now has a majority shareholding. It can then proceed to call a shareholders' meeting, elect its own directors to the board, thus effectively retiring the former directors, and hey presto! the deed is done. A rival firm has been eliminated, more monopolistic price manipulation can be effected to increase profits even further, the predator firm is bigger and stronger and now in a position to launch more takeover bids so as to become even bigger.
>
> Unless, that is, another even bigger conglomerate begins to start its own stalking game with a view to taking *it* over! For this is how the cookie now doesn't crumble. Marx was virtually alone in foreseeing that competitive capitalism would lead ultimately to the elimination of competition and to a system where the market would be dominated by a handful of giants who would learn to work not on competition but in league with each other.
>
> The man or woman in the street sees all this being played out by reading of giant takeover bids headlined in the newspapers and at the same time by observing the gradual disappearance of local firms and, even more, of local shopkeepers, as "chain" stores increasingly dominate the high street, sucking away the economic surplus of local communities into the hands of remote boardrooms. What is not commonly observed is the rapid and accelerating concentration of power now proceeding apace as a result. This economic warlordism has already created a structure which is totally at variance with the other main drift of the 20th century, of a more open and practical acknowledgement of human rights, rights which include as a matter of course the right of every person to be involved in the decision-making processes which determine the pattern of citizen life. .

> . . We need to harp on this theme insistently because it is showing that the market is not dominated by the moral concerns of the citizenry; the market has its own purposes and its own code, a code based not on morality but on the quest for profit. In a human scale world such a code would be constrained by the moral concerns of the general citizen body of any community; today, owing to the sheer scale of economic operations, buttressed by the power of advertising and the general destruction of community, it is the market which is constraining and subordinating citizen morality on a mass basis to its own purposes. . . .

This writer now gets down to the crucial consideration:

> Morality is an evaluation of human conduct based on human relationships. In the mass society such relationships are only marginally with one's fellows, they are primarily with the state machine. We do not look to our neighbors for education, health, welfare, pensions, policing, food or housing; these have become the charge of the state machine and the giant economic forces which operate in tandem with it.
>
> One cannot have a moral relationship with an institution and most people tend to act on this truism; so that whilst they would ordinarily regard the eighth commandment as binding when relating to their neighbors, the shoplifting statistics suggest that when visiting a chain store they are much more prone to regard what would otherwise be called stealing as a mere reallocation of economic resources. In the same way the statistics suggest few people regard their relationship with the tax inspector or the customs officer as a moral one. One might add indeed they could only do so by debasing the concept of morality itself for they would be assuming that a relationship with an institution had the same moral content as one with a person.
>
> We have here the key to the declining force of morality in the modern world and the reason why any attempt to restore it through state mechanisms are totalitarian and bound to prove futile.

There is force in this argument, although not as much as the writer believes. There are plenty of people who do not believe in cheating the customs officials or shoplifting of any sort, although it seems true enough that people who have public office in institutions tend to justify the argument that—

> The state machine and its economic support systems are just not responsive to moral suasion; a steamroller is not a racehorse and a merchant or a media manipulator is not a moralist. To become one bespeaks a need not to change the personalities at the top, where they will always be trapped in the amoral presuppositions of whatever office they may hold, but to change the structure of society so that the primacy of human relationships and the moral judgments which stem from them are restored.

Another writer in the *Fourth World Review*, Kirkpatrick Sale, takes up this theme. He says:

> If planetary salvation is to be won, we must indeed confront not the symptoms but the causes—not the armaments but the mass societies that produce them, that indeed *depend upon* them. Progress toward some way of limiting war, if not achieving unbroken peace, is possible only when we begin to think of replacing such mass societies with smaller and more coherent and self-regarding ones, a devolution of power and decentralization of statehood to the point where, we may reasonably hope, the root causes of war are indeed capable of human control and limitation.

Sale lists three considerations:

> 1. *The nation-state is the center of power and therefore of violence in the modern world.* Wherever states arise they do so by assembling the means of power, by either voluntary concession of the population or coercion over it, and thereafter establishing that power as the only legitimate one in the territorial boundaries. The modern nation-state, the most efficient, most completely developed, and most powerful form of state ever known, thereby enjoys a monopoly of power unique in history. All violence, whether it be against person or property, within the territory or without, is under its control or direction—and this applies equally to the direction of wars and imperial domination as it does to the collection of taxes and establishment of order.
>
> 2. *The larger the nation-state, the more violent it is and the larger are the wars it wages.* The correlation between size and violence throughout human history is absolutely unvarying, almost as if there were some law of aggregate size. (One interesting example: for 700 years, from the 12th to the 19th centuries, the people of Germanic Europe, living in separate and independent mini-provinces, participated in fewer wars (13) than any other nation on the continent once unified into a single giant state, they became the most bellicose nation around and

precipitated two catastrophic World Wars.) In this present period of superpowers with supercentralization, the world has seen by far the most violent events of human destruction ever known, *greater by magnitude of ten than in all previous history.*

3. *Violence against nature inevitably breeds violence against people.* Those societies that are organized to dominate nature—to build dams, or pyramids, or metrapoles, or empires—are those that develop the techniques to dominate people. Having no regard for ecological balance and little appreciation of the human place in the natural world modern nation-states have acted as if they are immune from the green laws of nature, from the inevitable consequences of violating principles upon which the earth has operated for billions of years. To the extent that modern nations are able to reverse this trend and live with some sort of ecological consciousness, a living-with, not a dominance-over nature, thus will they diminish their interest in and capacity for warfare

Fourth World Review appears every two months. The address is 24 Abercorn Place, London, N.W.8, England. "The journal is run on a shoestring and all work, other than the costs of printing, is voluntary and unpaid." No charge is made to 3rd World students. People without shirts pay $10 a year.

COMMENTARY
A DESIGN SOLUTION

A WRITER in *Fourth World Review,* Kirkpatrick Sale, singles out the modern nation-state as the primary cause of war. It is the organization of people into large nations which makes people feel totally dependent upon the facilities and powers of government, and in this way they submit to the requirements of militarism and to requirements in which they no longer believe. As Sale says, as quoted on pages seven and eight of this issue, peace will become possible for mass societies only to the extent that they stop being mass societies, and are replaced by smaller, more coherent ones.

Smaller social formations are immediately possible through the relationships we have with the earth and its resources. This is known today as the doctrine and practice of bioregionalism, in which the people begin to think and act naturally in cooperation with the processes and forces of the surrounding environment, regarding the sources of water, healthy soil, and unpolluted air as the fundamental elements of their host, the earth, and, as Sale says, developing ecological consciousness—"a living-with, not a dominance-over, nature."

Preparation for war, for such people, becomes irrelevant. They recognize its insanity and will not respond to the belligerent appeals of the national government. This withdraws power from the government, and without power and a responsive population, the national government loses its authority.

At the same time, as the result of changed attitudes, our agricultural problems will begin to straighten out. Food will be raised to feed people, not animals, and food will no longer be used as a weapon, which is a policy which has played havoc with agriculture in both America and Europe. As Dean Freudenberger says, "We now have a global food system almost totally dependent on a nonrenewable resource which will near exhaustion by the middle (at the latest) of the twenty-first century." And as he asks:

> Is humanity really free to manipulate, dominate and use the natural system found within the biogeographical provinces of the earth? Or are these basic responsibilities of stewardship needing to be respected? . . .
>
> Agribusiness as we define it today will fade just as soon as oil, gasoline and nitrogen fertilizers skyrocket in price by the mid-1990s. . . . More and more, it appears to become evident that the concept (and discipline!) of regenerative agriculture holds out great promise for enabling society to relate to the land as *trustees of a common heritage.*

* * *

In the *Los Angeles Times* for Oct. 16, Andy Lipkis, founder and director of TreePeople, reminds people of this area that four years ago, spurred by the program of TreePeople, the people of the Los Angeles basin planted a million trees in time for the 1984 Summer Olympics, his point being that there is now urgent need for more trees to be planted. Where?

> First, at home; houses should be shaded by at least three large trees—two on the south side, one on the west. Then at large heat-absorbing areas like parking lots, streets and school yards. . . . The cost need not be prohibitive. Trees planted around homes can be three-year-old saplings, each costing between $5 and $10. Guided by gardening staffs and community volunteers like TreePeople's trained Citizen Foresters, students could do much of the planting and maintenance at schools. This is the time to expand current curricula to include stewardship of the local environment.

Call the TreePeople for counsel and particular advice about species. In the 213 area, call 273-8733. The address is 12601 Mulholland Drive, Beverly Hills, 90210.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
A BETTER WAY

OUR space this week will be devoted to telling about Betterway, a social organization in Ohio devoted to the welfare of teenagers who have gotten into trouble with the law. It was started by Tom Peters in 1967, in Elyria. According to *Betterway,* a periodically published paper,

> It was the first organization anywhere opening group homes for teen-agers. Over the years Betterway added more group homes and then foster homes. The Search Gift Shop, The Deli Restaurant, all in Elyria, in 1979 a 150-acre retreat farm and ropes course was added in Wellington, Ohio. It is open to visitors and groups and has scheduled programs throughout the year.
>
> Staff and volunteers have come to Betterway from all over the world to work. A newspaper is published and mailed to thousands. It tells the stories of Betterway young people and staff. It is also available at the Search and the Deli. Donations to Betterway are tax-deductible.

The Summer 1988 issue of *Betterway* gives the history of the homes for boys.

> The names of the three boys' homes at Betterway are the Anchor, the Beacon, and the Bridge.
>
> The Beacon was the first group home in Ohio and the beginning of Betterway 21 years ago. The organization was called Lorain Group Foster Homes, Inc., at first, and changed to Betterway after one year when the Search Home for girls opened in Elyria.
>
> The Beacon name meant to signify a light, a beacon showing the way in the dark. The Anchor opened originally as a halfway house for young men on early release from the Mansfield Reformatory, but when this program was dropped the Anchor facility became an alternative school called the Schoolhouse.
>
> After three years the Schoolhouse dosed when CETA funds ended and also because it was not needed since all Betterway youth were enrolled in public schools.
>
> (A new alternative school is being planned again since Betterway has grown and has some boys and girls who do not do well in regular schools.)
>
> This school facility was again named the Anchor but this time it was a home for boys like the Beacon. The name anchor means a place to hold steady in a storm.
>
> The Bridge name also was originally a name for Betterway's other halfway house. When the state opened its own halfway house it closed after ten years of operation. The property was sold.
>
> When the newest boys' home opened two years ago the name Bridge was brought back even though it was a new location. Bridge, meaning a way to get from one kind of life to a new life.

Needless to say, life at the Betterway homes is not entirely smooth. But these places have a wonderful spirit, due to Tom Peters and the people he has assembled to run the homes. The stories of the failures as well as the successes are told in the paper, *Betterway.* The article we have been quoting continues:

> There have been many changes at the boys' homes since the Christmas issue. A few boys ran away, a few had to leave, but most went according to plan. If a person runs away we look at the circumstances and how long they are gone and decide whether we can still help them.
>
> If so, they come back. If not, they go to some other program, and a few stay on the run for weeks or even months. Usually after three months or so they get caught or turn themselves in to the police or their social worker.
>
> During this time, some keep in contact with us every week or so just to see how things stand. Others simply disappear with relatives or friends. . . .
>
> If boys or girls want to work in homes when they finish their stay here, we usually encourage them to find some other kind of job for a while and then return later if they still want to. Most do not as they get interested in the bigger world and new adventures.
>
> Finally, a story about Tony. He just turned 15 and has been here a year. Report cards came out and he did not bring his home. We thought he must be failing. He enjoyed our frustration at him not bringing the card home for days. When he did bring it home his grades were good. He fooled us.

There are three group homes for girls at Betterway.

The girls' homes are the Search, the Ark, and the Cove. The Search is behind the Search Shop and was the first group home for girls at Betterway.

It is 20 years old and was named by the first girls. They said they had been searching for a home all their lives and wanted to name the place after this. The first three girls decided this. A boys' home, the Beacon, had been at Betterway for a year then.

The Ark is about 10 years old and has been a co-ed home at times, but now is home for 11 girls.

The Ark is named after Noah's Ark, a place of refuge in a storm. The Cove is two years old, holds up to 16 girls, and is on a gentle bend in Elyria's Black River. A cove is a protected place in a body of water where life is calm.

All three names have meaningful concepts, but this does not mean every girl is happy to be there. Some girls do not want to be in a group home and if they protest enough they are not usually accepted. Betterway believes that a person should not be forced into a place. Some feel it is too far from their friends, even though they know they need to leave home.

Others are happy to come to Elyria, especially when they find out the city is peaceful compared to their project or neighborhood.

Some come here and decide they will give it a try, even though they are not excited about the idea. After a few days they make friends and like it. Others think they will like it, but when they cannot do everything they want to, they get upset and hate it.

Finally, some want to come and like it most of the time. These are the easy going ones who make the best of wherever they are. . . .

Four girls have had babies since the last issue. They came to Betterway in various stages of pregnancy and began seeing doctors in Elyria and when the time came gave delivery here.

Almost all girls who have babies at Betterway keep them and go back to their own homes, or to foster homes, or if they are older to an apartment in our semi-independence program.

In our 20 years of existence one girl had an abortion because her state social worker insisted on it and made the arrangements, and three or four gave up their babies for adoption. Usually there is too much excitement in the group home over the baby to give them up. Further, there is a certain status in having a baby. It shows the girl had a boy friend and that she is fully a woman.

Plus, it gives them someone to love. They often say they want to give their baby the kind of love they never had. Unfortunately, this is very hard to do if one has not been loved. It is hard to give what we don't have.

One girl, from Jamaica, was going to be sent back but really wanted to stay. After a lawyer took up her case she did stay and went from the Ark to one of our foster homes. She is very happy and still cooks some Jamaican food.

A few girls did run away. Usually these are ones who are very involved with older boy friends and perhaps had been living with them. After a little while here they have contacts with the friend and he arranges to meet them near the group home and goes off with the girl.

They often go out of Ohio and are not seen again by any child care agency. They quietly enter the adult world, even though they may be only 15 or 16.

For the first time in the history of Betterway five girls will graduate this year, three from the Ark Home. One boy will also graduate. . . .

Graduating is rare at Betterway because most who come here are not even in school. Their lives have been disrupted by families falling apart and they may have been away from school for a year. Most also are behind in school for the same reasons, and others have a hard time in dealing with some teachers. When kids have lots of worries and are not living at home, and think about what is next, they often react with hostility to a sharp command or a negative remark from a teacher. This leads to confrontation and suspensions.

All the Betterway girls look forward to summer and time to do new activities.

Betterway's address is 612 Middle Ave., Elyria, Ohio 44035.

FRONTIERS

Land for Survival

NEGROS Island, in the Philippines, has been called Sugarlandia by reason of the massive production there of sugarcane, yet according to a recent release by Appen Features the island is in fact a "hell-hole on earth where the workers are in the savage grip of starvation, malnutrition, unemployment and death, seemingly without any hope of rescue." According to a local priest, from 25 to 30 children died every month in Kabankalan, Negros' second biggest city.

> In 1986 the Health Ministry conceded there were 156,000 children starving. Other estimates put the figure at 300,000. Mechanization elsewhere caught the Negros sugar industry offguard and falling prices made it a double blow. Reeling under the onslaught which put 400,000 sugar workers out of work in an industry that once supplied 68% of the country's sugar production, the exodus to other towns and cities has begun. After reaching rock bottom, a glimmer of hope has emerged. The National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) is attempting to make use of idle sugar land to grow rice, maize, vegetables and fruits, but not sugarcane. Sugarlandia is all but dead as far as the people of Negros are concerned.

The report continues:

> Like many Third World countries, the Philippines is predominantly rural in character. Despite that background Negros, one of its many islands, shot into prominence for its massive sugar production. At one time the island drew thousands of workers from the surrounding islands, producing 68% of the Philippine sugar crop, earning the title of Sugarlandia. By the turn of the century it replaced all other industry. It was also during that period that an American military officer remarked that the plantation system in Negros was akin to the U.S. South before the Civil War (1861-65) when slavery fostered brutality. The "bitter" taste of sugar evolved gradually after ruthless sugar barons like Teodoro Benedicto drove out and killed settlers near Mount Kanlaon and appropriated 10,000 hectares. Developed on the basis of overt coercion and crude exploitation, the sugar industry provided employment at a very high cost. Plantation owners charged 100% interest on loans to workers who borrowed against future earning for marriages, medical care and schooling.
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> Until they paid their debts, they were bonded into slavery and passed the bondage to their children. Each hacienda or landed estate has its own overlords. Ask a worker where he works and he does not give a company's name but says, "I work for so and so!" Sugar accounted for 15% of the Philippine exports in 1913 but by 1932 it increased to 62% of the total exports. It was in that year that the U.S. and the Philippines entered into agreement. Favorable terms were offered but the sugar pact tied the Philippines to a single crop for sale to a single market—clauses which were later to bedevil the Negros sugar workers.
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> While the industry prospered, it worked in reverse for the workers who were ruthlessly exploited. The official minimum wage was 32 pesos a day but most of them earned less than 10 pesos (US 10 cents) a day. Because work is seasonal all the workers can hope for is 180 days a year. In the off-season, women and children did odd jobs like weeding and producing charcoal. For the casual workers or sacadas who drift in from other areas, conditions are even worse.

In 1969 a young Australian priest, Brian Gore, arrived in Negros. Later he said:

> "We were continually burying many children who had died from disease and starvation." He soon took the side of the poor sugar workers and helped to organize educational programs. . . .
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> The extreme poverty of the workers, hunger, exploitation and oppression made the workers think of organizing their ranks and the National Federation of Sugar Workers was established in 1971. After recruiting members the NFSW called for a strike in 1981 demanding basic rights including permanent status for sacadas. Most of the demands were met but the bonus issue was referred to the Court which subsequently ruled the strike technically illegal. Making full use of that decision, the planters organized force to attack the strikers with tear gas and toxic chemicals. One worker died of poison Workers were then forced into the mill at gunpoint. The situation boiled over when 100,000 came out in a demonstration to rally support. Soldiers and police were called and four workers were shot by security guards. That knocked off the demonstration.

A few years later, however, it became evident that production costs in the Philippines were twice those of Australia and Hawaii, two major

international competitors. Sugar production in Negros was 5.5 cents a pound, but the world market price was 3.3 cents a pound. By using mechanized methods Australia was able to reduce costs to 2.5 cents a pound. So after 40 years of an assured market in the U.S., at prices above the world market, the agreement between the Philippines and the U.S. was ended in 1974. With the fall in sugar prices, Negros, which produced 68% of the country's crop, was severely hit. Thousands of workers were laid off in an island where 90% of the 1.8 million population depended on the sugar industry. Despite programs of mechanization, by 1984 around 250,000 sugar workers were unemployed. Today growing and refining sugar have all but ceased on Negros. Unemployment figures have since risen to 400,000 and are expected to reach 600,000.

> About 98.5% of the Negros population of 1.8 million are landless according to researchers. Bishop Fortich of Bacolad City (the island's capital) said two years ago that the people will never go hungry if they are given land to till. That was the key to changing a deplorable situation where thousands were dying of starvation in the green ant fertile regions of the island.
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> Negros Governor Daniel Lacson said not long ago: "Land is the only solution to the problem of Negros. A non-sugar dominated industry must be developed. The National Federation of Sugar Workers, in response, introduced a farmlots program on an ad hoc basis to provide a more secure source of food. Despite meeting a worsened economic condition NFSW continued to press for land to be made available for subsistence cropping. In August, 1984, more sugar planters came forward. So far 4,000 hectares have been promised in small to medium-sized haciendas. The scheme is spreading quickly.
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> The NFSW set up a revolving loan fund. Once the loan is repaid, usually after a successful harvest, the money is re-lent to other villagers in need. The scheme emphasizes self-reliance and international agencies including War on Want have been supporting the fund. . . . Govemor Lacson estimates that some 40% of the haciendas now allow farmlots.

Not all the planters support this plan. Some of the larger ones, it is said, hired thugs to steal the first harvest and destroy the scheme. But the program continues with farmers requesting farm equipment like ploughs, and seeds to grow rice, maize, vegetables and fruits.

> The program provides the family a chance of survival. For the first time, they have a measure of control over their own lives. The farmers are seizing the opportunity to practice a system of agriculture making full use of resources and conservation methods like composting and natural insecticides.