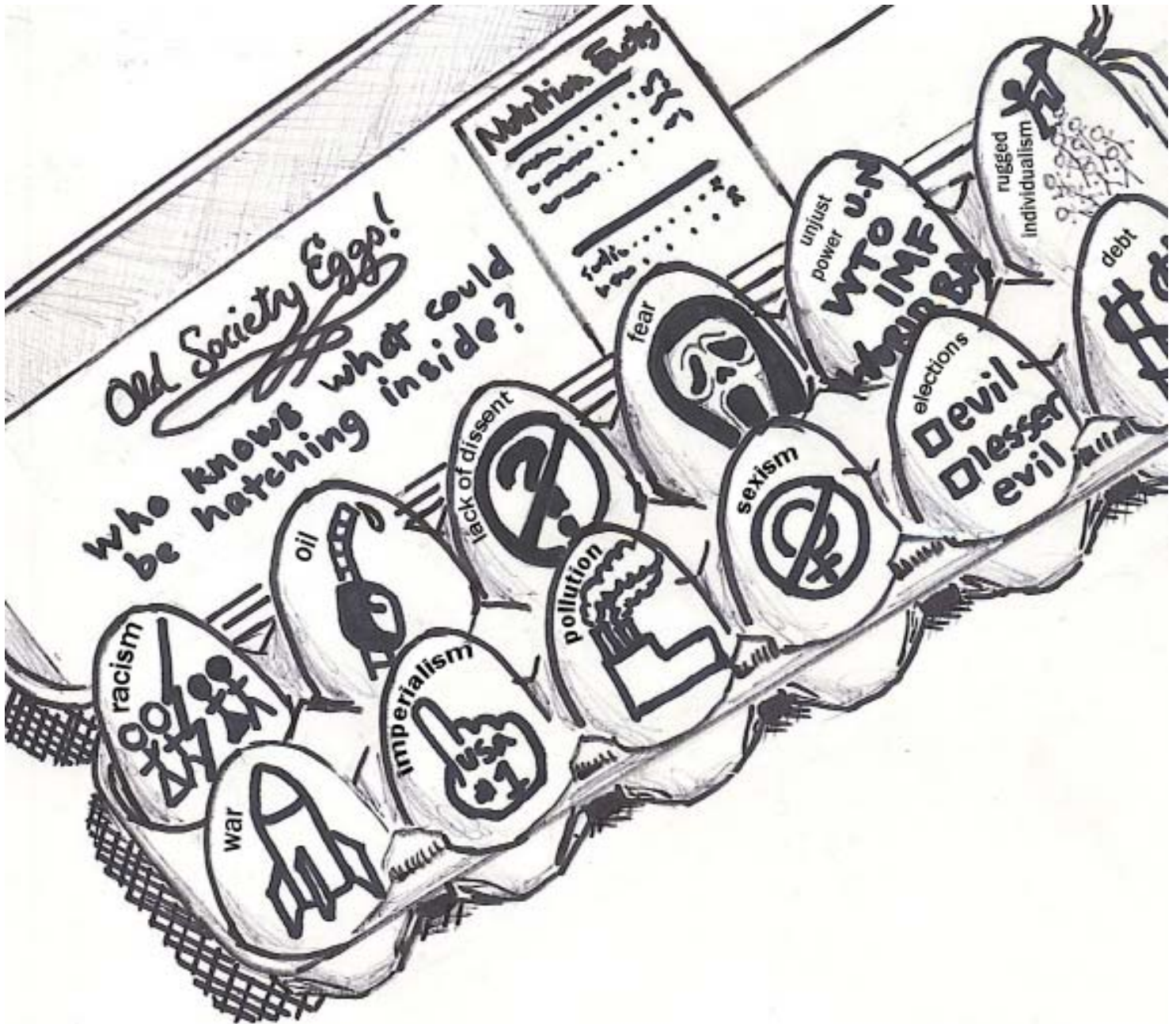


THE Round Table

Spring
2008

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin



Electing a Just Society?

... On Elections, Responsibility, and Resistance

Why This Issue?

As it comes time for voting Americans to choose the next “Leader of the Free World,” there seems to be a lot weighing heavy on the minds of the U.S. Media, like whether or not a woman or a black man could (or should) be elected, or which candidate is most in (or out of) touch with the average U.S. citizen. As November nears, though, it seems that coverage of issues will begin to simplify and idealism will begin to fade. A certain cynicism seems to reign over my thoughts, as it seems that presidential candidates will declare Open Season on each other, on credibility, on Terror (with a capital “T” which rhymes with “D” which stands for “depleted uranium”), on Iran, on fair and accountable voting procedures, or on anything that ends up in front of their political spin doctors.

I am lucky, though, and glad to know so many inspiring people who are able to provide hope and offer clarity during these whirlwind months leading up to the election that determines Bush’s successor. Our authors have put forth great effort to discern what is the right path for them, while taking stock of the complexity and breadth of the election issues. How should we vote? Why should we vote? What more can be done? Is casting a ballot a step towards Utopia or sidestepping the major problems?

It is amazing to me the amount of consensus that our authors reach in this issue of the Roundtable, given that not one saw another’s article before turning in his or her work. Howard Zinn, the primacy of love and personalist relationships, utopia, certain criticisms of current American politics, a great deal of story-telling, some practical advice, and of course poetic reminders of what our world could be like.

Mark Chmiel takes us outside the boundaries of “thinkable thought” and the “preferential option for the rich” as it manifests the exceptional destiny of America vs. the unexceptional destiny of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. Eric Anglada and Carolyn Griffith explore the complexities of trying to stay true to ideals while considering the issue of participation in the dirty mechanics of our voting system. Annjie Schiefelbein gives us a whimsical description of what a Catholic Worker Utopia could look like (in Nebraska). Annjie’s description of Utopia is then followed by Jenny Truax who lays out a map of how we can get to where we would like to be. Jenny not only gives us a quick refresher on the “Aims and Means,” but a series of tangible, often St. Louis-specific suggestions on living our ideals into reality. Bill Ramsey investigates our relationship to and our responsibility within systems of power. Finally, we hear from a new community member (there are many recently) in “From Karen House”, and we hear from Mozambique in “From Abroad.” I’ll leave you with a whim and a rhyme:

Whose voices could we amplify,
what values could we exemplify,
what future could we ratify,
by our actions in elections

As soundbites keep on shrinking,
and in glorious rhetoric we’re sinking,
what major modes of thinking
could aid our autumnal calculations

Whose voices are we hearing
as November comes a’neering,
who’s guiding our projections
as we’re making our selections

Dear Reader, keep on reading,
as electoral politics take a beating,
and our authors know what you are needing,
to make your careful evaluations



-- John Carroll

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Two Minutes and Twenty Years

by Mark Chmiel

“All our problems stem from our acceptance of this filthy, rotten system.”

—Dorothy Day

The summer conventions of the Republicans and Democrats will be marked by inspiring rhetoric about their party’s commitment to democracy, the American people, and the noblest principles of statecraft. Each convention will have scenes of enthused self-congratulation, while allowing ample time for finding fault with the opponent, for his/her insufficient patriotism and moral fiber. Each party will pledge to win “the war on terror,” and claim that it has the best plan to ensure our security. Each candidate will proclaim a steadfast and proud commitment to be an unrivaled leader for democracy and freedom in the world. From summer ‘til November, candidates for the Presidency will be disputing with each other, vying for dominance in the polls. Commentators will observe how this is what democracy looks like: two candidates and their parties, battling it out, debating issues that matter, all in the effort to represent and serve the American people.

Tune into the radio, read the front pages of the newspaper, watch television news reports, and the official story in the preceding paragraph will be apparent. I contend, however, that there is an operative story also going on, and this is what demands our attention and understanding. The elections are a spectacle drenched in imagery, superficiality, and propaganda. Little substantive debate on serious domestic and international issues will emerge, for a very good reason: Many subjects are simply off the table of discussion and debate.

Media critics have described the genius of the U.S. propaganda system as guarding the bounds of “thinkable thought.” That is, to gain admission to respectable, mainstream debate and commentary, you have to accept the fundamental presuppositions of discussion of “the official story,” which is American exceptionalism—that we are unique in the history of the world with our devotion to freedom, democracy, and human rights. If you challenge the allegedly obvious American moral, political, and cultural supe-

riority, if you don’t accept its premises, you are not at all likely to be even admitted to the debate.

The driving force of U.S. foreign policy can be accurately called “the preferential option for the rich.” Noam Chomsky once proposed that such policy “is designed to create and maintain an international order in which US-based business can prosper, a world of open societies, meaning societies that are open to profitable investment, to expansion of export markets and transfer of capital, and to exploitation of material and human resources on the part of US corporations and their local affiliates.” The working assumption among U.S. elites must be that the American people would not stand for a “preferential option for the rich,” because it is immoral and it isn’t in the interests of the vast majority of the population. Hence, American exceptionalism is the mask, or ideological cover, essential to this pursuit of power, hegemony, and domination.

There will be seemingly endless discourse, debate, and commentary in the months ahead—what the candidates say, what they stand for, how they differ. Not being bound by the respectable mainstream doctrinal requirements, I mention a few issues dealing with international policy that will be unthinkable by either Democrats or Republicans.

Iraq: The “surge” is reputed to be a success, and so we are supposed to breathe more easily. But what won’t be talked about are the 4 million Iraqis displaced since the U.S. invasion, an unimaginable human tragedy in a population of 25 million. What candidates can’t talk about is the logic of occupation, with permanent U.S. military bases and the determination to control Iraq’s oil. The staggering wealth gained by corporate war-profiteers is unmentionable, as both parties see nothing wrong with that, which is merely “business as usual.” What cannot be up for discussion is the Bush Administration’s commission of war crimes, including the supreme crime of aggression with its invasion in 2003 and all the horrors that have since followed in its wake. It is out of the question that the U.S. should be paying the Iraqi people vast reparations for the crimes we have committed against them. Candidates may point to a few anointed Iraqi lackeys, but the voices of the masses of Iraqis are utterly irrelevant to operative U.S. policy (as opposed

Mark Chmiel —takes house on Sunday morning and teaches at Saint Louis University on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

to the official/superficial, “we love democracy” policy.) To get a sense of what Iraqis think and feel, one could turn to American journalist Dahr Jamail’s un-embedded reports from Iraq, like the following scene:

The stream of patients slowed to a sporadic influx as night fell. Maki sat with me as she shared cigarettes in a small office in the rear of the clinic. ‘For all my life, I believed in American democracy,’ he told me with an exhausted voice. ‘For forty-seven years, I had accepted the illusion of Europe and the United States being good for the world, the carriers of democracy and freedom. Now I see that it took me forty-seven years to wake up to the horrible truth. They are not here to bring anything like democracy and freedom. Now I see it has been all lies. The Americans don’t give a damn about democracy or human rights. They are worse even than Saddam.’ I asked him if he minded if I quoted him with his name. ‘What are they going to do to me that they haven’t already done here,’ he said.

Israel/Palestine: Candidates and commentators will gush



this May about the 60th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel, but there won’t be an empathetic mention of the Palestinian “nakba,” the catastrophic result of Israel’s founding for the Palestinians who were dispossessed and turned into refugees. It is impossible that either candidate for the Oval Office will criticize Israel’s long-standing occupation of Palestinian land, nor will they protest Israel’s tormenting of Palestinians in Gaza (recently, one Israeli minister threatened the Gazans with a “Shoah,” Hebrew for “holocaust.”) What is seen with clarity outside the United States is impossible for a presidential candidate to express: that the U.S. has not been a neutral party in the “peace process,” but has aided and abetted Israel in its crimes of occupation and violation of Palestinian human rights—for decades. What can be predicted is the ongoing demonization of Hamas by both U.S. parties.

Iran: No one of “respectable” status will question the as-

sumed U.S. right to threaten Iran with a military attack. No one will renounce the possibility of preventive war. It is taken for granted that the U.S. (and Israel, by its association with us) can alone issue such threats. Democrats and Republicans alike see no hypocrisy in the world’s superior nuclear power dictating what Iran should do. The aggressive menacing of Iran will continue beyond January 2009, regardless of who is in the White House.

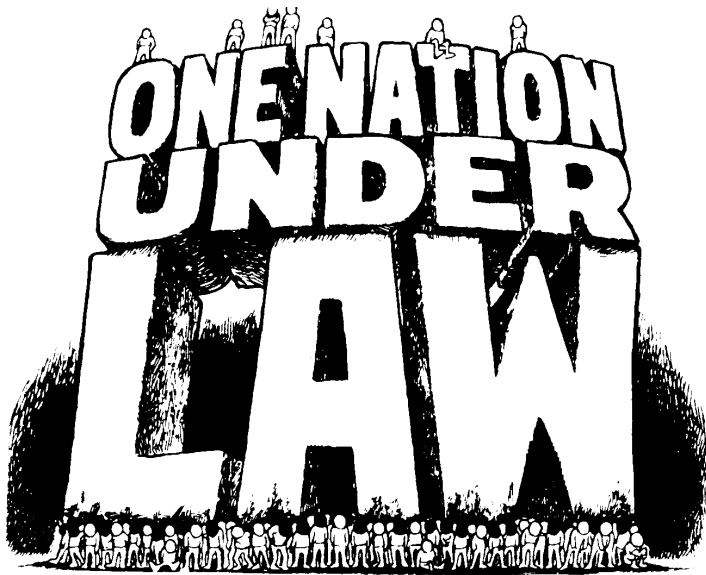
Afghanistan: Other than making assertions as to how much better off Afghanistan is, candidates and commentators won’t focus on the control of the war lords, the rise of the Taliban, or the suffering of the masses. As with Iraq, neither Clinton, nor Obama, nor McCain could dare question the obvious right of the U.S. to be in Afghanistan. Our intervention there has, obviously, been “the good war,” in contrast to Iraq, about which some people now admit that some mistakes, unfortunately, were made.

Recently, I have been reading *No Salvation Outside the Poor*, the latest book of essays by Salvadoran theologian Jon Sobrino, who raises issues and questions that would be inadmissible in our polite political discourse this election year (or any year, for that matter). Drawing on the work of his friend, the murdered university president and philosopher/theologian Ignacio Ellacuría, Sobrino contends that so many of the world’s peoples today face a death, “...which takes the form of crucifixion, assassination, the active historical deprivation of life, whether slowly or quickly. That death, caused by injustice, is accompanied by cruelty, contempt and concealment. I usually add that the crucified people are also denied a chance to speak, and even to be called by name, which means they are denied their own existence.”

There are many among us who can corroborate Sobrino’s claim, as we have been able to bear witness to the reality of Colombia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Iraq, Palestine, and too many other lands.

The U.S. is supposedly a very religious (that is, Christian) country, with religious leaders asserting the need to have faith play a public role in national life and even to have dialogue with candidates about their faith commitments. Call me cynical, but the truth is, I believe, that elected American leaders do believe in a god, and it’s called “the national interest,” in other words, the transcendent U.S. option for the rich, which also goes by the old biblical word of idolatry. Again, here is Sobrino, “... Juan Luis Segundo used to say that, existentially speaking, the most pressing problem was not that of faith and atheism, but that of faith and idolatry. And with the help of exegetes (von Rad, José Luis Sicre), a new definition of idols emerged: historical realities that promise salvation. To that end they require a cult and an orthodoxy, and above all, like Moloch, they require victims in order to subsist. The conclusion is of the greatest importance: there exists a transcendental correlation between idols and victims. Where there are victims, there are also idols.”

The idolatry of American exceptionalism and superiority blinds us: we care for the fate of our soldiers but the fate of Afghanis and Iraqis and Palestinians are, at best, collateral damage, if noticed at all. We are to consider our security of supreme importance but can’t imagine a comparable yearning for security by others living in the war zones that we have made of their



countries.

Another theme of Sobrino's that is worthy of note is the necessity of "prophetic denunciation." As of this writing, the presidential candidates are insisting that they won't sink to the sophomoric level of name-calling and mud-slinging. What Sobrino means by prophetic denunciation is something altogether different:

Prophetic denunciation is mostly unknown in today's Church, having been replaced in the best of cases by ethical judgments on Neo-liberalism, the war, and so forth. Ethical judgment is good, but ethics is not the same as prophecy, social doctrine is not the same as prophetic denunciation, and it is not sufficient in any case, because the word that only expresses principles is easily co-opted. . . . Denunciation means bringing to light the evils of reality, its victims and its perpetrators. Prophetic denunciation has ultimacy, because it is done 'in God's name'; and as denunciation, it is compassionate, because it is done against the perpetrators, but in defense of the poor.

Naturally, such prophetic denunciation will have to come from some place and grouping other than the mainstream culture, which cannot allow the illumination of the evils of the American empire. The culture can only name and denounce the evils of our enemies.

Obviously, the driving goal of those running for office is victory in November. Sobrino reminds us of a much more fundamental aspiration than victory for political power. He gives a new twist to a little used word these days, utopia. He refers to "eu-topia," meaning not "no place" but a "good place, that is, "a dignified and just life for the majorities" [of the world's people]. Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff once spoke of the "little utopia" of at least one meal for everyone every day and the "great utopia" of a society free from exploitation and organized around the participation of all.

Even though the themes and realities of crucified peoples, idols, prophetic denunciation, and utopia are barred in the pub-

lic discourse of the New York Times and NPR, we would do well to make them the subject of our daily meditation and action.

In a recent essay, dissident historian Howard Zinn commented on the "...sense of proportion that gets lost in the election madness. Would I support one candidate against another? Yes, for two minutes—the amount of time it takes to pull the lever down in the voting booth. . . . But before and after those two minutes, our time, our energy, should be spent in educating, agitating, organizing our fellow citizens in the workplace, in the neighborhood, in the schools. Our objective should be to build, painstakingly, patiently but energetically, a movement that, when it reaches a certain critical mass, would shake whoever is in the White House, in Congress, into changing national policy on matters of war and social justice."

PHOTOGRAPH BY
RCOBB
LOS ANGELES FREE PRESS
 SEPT. 22, 1967

Americans are well known for seeking and expecting "quick fixes." I agree with Zinn that we need to think well beyond those "two minutes." Indeed, I contend that we at least need to think of the next twenty years during which to devote ourselves to, in Zinn's political terms, this "movement," and, in the terms of Boff and Sobrino, utopia, first the little and then the great utopia.

- ◆Twenty years will take me into my late sixties and will take my current students into their early forties;
- ◆twenty years of encountering the faces of America's victims, befriending and supporting them;
- ◆twenty years of taking the initiative right where we work and live, blooming where we are planted;
- ◆twenty years of "experiments in truth";
- ◆twenty years of joyfully "building the new society in the shell of the old";
- ◆twenty years of resisting the myriad structures, policies, and practices of dehumanization;
- ◆twenty years of an endless conversation with the choir and those not in the choir as to what makes a human life worth living;
- ◆twenty years of raising the un-ask-able questions in respectable society;
- ◆twenty years of learning how not to freak out when we face a bout of the long loneliness;
- ◆twenty years of countering culturally-approved atomization and isolation by building communities that study, struggle, and celebrate together;
- ◆twenty years of seeking out the truth that can be manifest on the margins of church, state, and culture;
- ◆twenty years of daringly undermining support for the U.S. military occupation of Iraq;
- ◆twenty years of pushing democratic grass-roots reforms to the limit;
- ◆twenty years of critically interrogating the media and creatively disseminating alternative perspectives, reports, and analyses;
- ◆twenty years of reading, writing, and reciting poetry; and
- ◆twenty years of refusing in thought, speech, and action the dictates of this filthy, rotten system. ✦

To Vote or Not to Vote

To Vote: by Carolyn Griffeth

To vote or not to vote, this is a question that compels a worthwhile debate within Catholic Worker circles. As a self-described Christian anarchist and communitarian, I reject the legitimacy of state authority which all too often employs violence and coercion to seek and maintain power, and recognize that our electoral system is disempowering by design. But despite this awareness, I choose to participate in the political process by voting. How do I justify this seeming contradiction?

I realize that from a purely anarchist perspective, one could argue that we should seek to destroy this fiery dragon (the State) lest it set the whole world aflame, rather than just seek to tame it a little. But such an argument is at best philosophical, and at worst ideological (that is, placing abstract principals above the highest principal: LOVE) All around us, fires are blazing, and little people are crying for help. Their needs are not abstract but profoundly concrete and practical: education, health care, immigration reform, habitat preservation, housing, food, PEACE.

If the Gospel has taught me one thing, it is that we must do all that we can for these little ones, the “least of these.” We must care for the orphan and the widow in their distress, offer drink to the thirsty, food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, shelter to the homeless—in other words, to struggle that all people (indeed, all life!) might thrive. If the Catholic Worker has taught me one thing more, it is that we can best provide for human needs through mutual aid and personal relationships. That is, through sharing each other’s burdens and, more specifically, through forging relationships with those forgotten ones who bear the greatest burden of our national culture of exclusion, war making, and acquisitive individualism.

The problem with voting from this perspective is that it has become a vehicle of mass illusion. People show up and check a few boxes and imagine that they have done their part to “change the world.” Clearly, this is not the kind of burden-sharing that

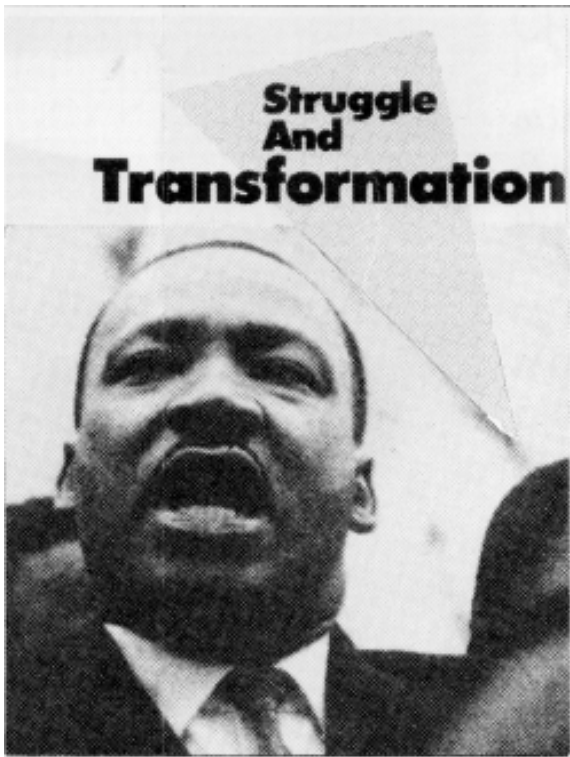
conforms to the dictates, “love your neighbor as yourself,” or which compels personal, much less, world, transformation. Yet it can’t be denied that elections do change the world. The results of US elections send ripples near and far, bringing a surge of hope to some shores, and a tidal wave of destruction to others. And, as ever, it is the powerless who are most vulnerable to such political fluctuations. It is they who are sent to fight in wars, are bombed with depleted uranium, named “illegal alien,” denied adequate medical and dental care, need HIV medications, and who are often dependent on public education, Medicaid, food stamps, Social Security benefits, or the World Food Program. It seems to me that we all bear some responsibility for such consequences, whether we declare “anarchy” or not.

Jesus’ words come to mind, “Whatever you do unto the least of these,” and by extension, whatever you fail to do, “you do unto me.” While I don’t take Jesus’ words literally (that is, that the homeless I share my home with are all Jesus), I do believe that the spirit of God, Christ, lives in every person and indeed all of creation. I do feel compelled by my conscience, by the dictates of love, to do whatever I can to protect the little ones (including myself), to elevate suffering, to prevent war.



Voting is one of the things I can do. And while I don’t delude myself into thinking this or that candidate will solve the healthcare problem or the education problem or the immigration problem or convert our federal tax dollars from war-making into peace making, I also don’t deny that who is elected will impact all these things. One only needs to listen to how the various candidates speak of the possibility of a war on Iran to be con-

Carolyn Griffeth is attempting Spanish immersion by welcoming homeless Spanish speaking folks into her home and Kabat House, which welcomes those interested in language inter-cambios(exchanges)..



vinced that there is a difference. Don't you think the Iranians are hoping we peace-lovers get out and vote? Likewise, my friend seeking special education services for her autistic son hopes we get out to vote. Immigrants who have risked their lives crossing a militarized border hope we vote. The countless poor Americans without health insurance hope we vote. The victims of free trade world-wide hope we vote. Of course I could go on and on, but really I need not.

The reason I vote is actually quite simple. It does make a difference, albeit often a rather sad and meager one. But a difference nonetheless in the life of someone who gets better health care, housing, or education, or doesn't get his or her SSI or food stamps cut, or in some nation that isn't bombed by the good old US. I vote because I feel accountable to doing whatever I can do for the "least of these," and place this dictate above that of achieving personal purity or not appearing contradictory. I vote because the choice is not either/or: either voting or feeding the hungry, either voting or home schooling my son, either voting or praying for a revolution, either voting or creating a revolution, either voting or engaging in civil disobedience, either voting or building community, practicing hospitality, feeding the hungry, . . . I choose to do all these things as an act of love and resistance. ✦

Not to Vote: by Eric Anglada

My journey with electoral politics has taken a circuitous and strange route, starting with my support—though at 16 I could not vote—of Pat Buchanan. By the time the year 2000

rolled around, I found myself on the other end of the electoral spectrum, casting my first-ever ballot for Ralph Nader. Four years later (now an anarchist), I opted out of the electoral system altogether.

With the vote just a few months away, it is difficult not to get sucked into the hysteria surrounding election day. I still plan on staying home that day, although it'll be with a little less doggedness than four years ago. What follows is a tentative, provisional take on my non-voting stance, as well as a fleshing out of Dorothy Day's famous quip: "Don't vote, it just encourages them." I should note too, that my perspective is anarcho-Christian, a position that would describe many, though certainly not all, within the Catholic Worker (CW) movement.

There are those who take up the non-voting position who insist that whoever wins the election—Obama, Clinton, McCain—there will be no difference. I do not take this position. There are real differences between these candidates, although it is appropriate to note that they all support, to give just two examples, capitalism and war—two issues that Catholic Worker's ardently oppose. So, yes, there are superficial differences between the candidates, but profound change—i.e., revolution—will not happen. We as Catholic Worker's, in my view, are only interested in a revolutionary transformation of society.

I will be frank: I don't think the voting issue is of central importance, but I do think it lends itself to an important discussion of the identity of the CW movement. Is the Catholic Worker a radical movement on the margins of society, or a progressive one trying to influence the center? The difficulty the editors had in finding a non-voting CW for this article suggests that this may be a bigger issue than I thought. An anarchist friend of mine was lamenting the lack of anarchists in the movement. My response, half in jest, was that the movement is so anarchist that there aren't any anarchists. I was referring to the autonomy of each house—an anarchist move by D. Day—that allows people of whatever political stripe to call themselves a CW.

The question of effectiveness vs. faithfulness is key to understanding the voting issue. I do think voting is a mildly effective way of influencing the government. But as an anarcho-Christian, and more precisely a Catholic Worker, effectiveness is neither the primary nor among the top criteria for understanding action. Rather, it is faithfulness to God that is our primary criteria for understanding action.

The CW has its political antecedents, earliest on, within the ancient Hebrew movement. 1 Samuel 8 establishes a paradigm for the understanding of political power. Until now in this story, the Hebrew people have lived without an earthly king. They have lived in marked contrast to the idol worshipping "nations" that all have kings. They sink into faithlessness when in their desire to be like everyone else (and to therefore cease to be the model community God desires) when they begin clamoring for a king. To Samuel, God says, "It is not you they reject; they are rejecting me as their king" (v. 6). Nevertheless, their desire is fulfilled and a king is granted, though not without a

Eric Anglada, once the mainstay of the Champaign Catholic Worker is now pioneering a Catholic Worker School in Dubuque. He is also involved in the Jesus radical movement.

warning. In short, the king will bring exploitation, slavery and war. Thus, the sad story of the Hebrews unfolds. The question becomes for us today: is voting tantamount to rejecting God as “king”?

One millennia later, Jesus, before his public ministry, enters the desert. There the devil tempts him, showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, and then saying, “I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me” (Lk. 4:5-7). The message is clear: political power is dangerous, even satanic. Jesus, of course, rejects the offer. Instead, he shows another way, a way that subverts our notion of top-down political authority, and points towards a counter-politics that begins from the bottom up and spreads horizontally, undermining hierarchical relationships.

Jesus also challenged violence in its various guises. Ultimately this costs him his life at the hands of the State. Stop to think what the State is. It is, at root, organized, legal violence. This is part and parcel of what D. Day called the “filthy rotten system.” Think of the military, the prisons, the police. All these institutions may kill you or coerce you if they so choose. The same activities done without state sanction are illegal and re-



sult in punishment. It is indeed a sick irony that the greatest purveyors of violence are celebrated politicians. Let us not forget that casting our ballot for president is casting a ballot for a commander-in-chief.

Yet another reason I abstain from voting is because it is so intertwined with illusion. I don’t know the exact numbers—nor do I need to—of the amount of waste involved in elections. The amount of money involved is enough for me to refrain from voting and further encouraging the madness. More than that, however, I see the emphasis on image, pomp, ego, ambition and success, and think to myself that politics has become a sham, a building up of what the mystics call the false self. I cannot encourage that.

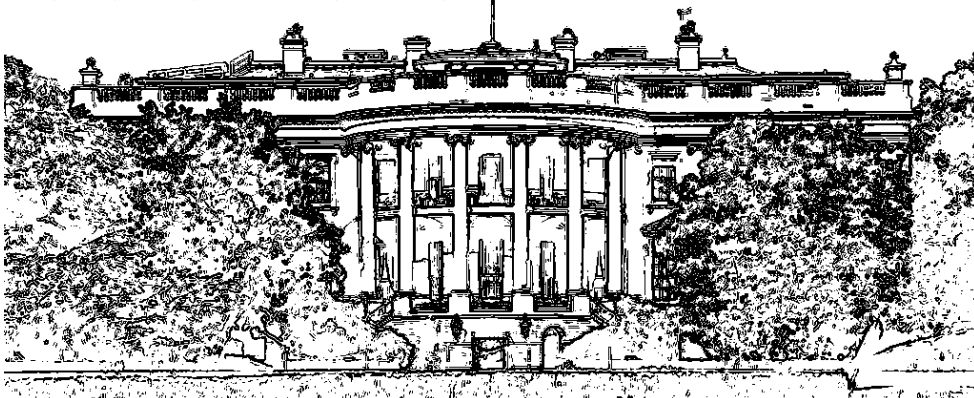
Lest it be assumed that I am taking an apolitical stance, I would like to clarify that I am just as much against apoliticism. Instead, I am interested in pursuing an anti-political politics or, as above, a counter-politics. A “politics” defined exclusively around influencing the nation-state is what I resist, not the “politics” of organizing ourselves to pursue the common good. There are spaces autonomous of the State, and the politics of

the CW should be about expanding those sites until, finally, the State is rendered redundant. The German anarchist Gustav Landauer made an insightful point when he said the State is a form of relationship and we end it when we form different kinds of relationships. We can understand, therefore, voting as a relationship, in which one supports the State’s existence.

As a movement, the goal of the CW is to help create a decentralized and Stateless society. The question of means and ends is important here. If a decentralized society is the goal then we must not use a centralized system to get us there, for the seeds of our means always grow as part of our end.

So, my CW brothers and sisters, I will be staying at home on that November “holy day of obligation.” The question is, will you? ✦

I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU BLAMED IT ON THE TERRORISTS
 I WAS SICK WHILE YOU TOOK MONEY FROM THE INSURANCE LOBBYISTS
 I WAS THIRSTY WHILE OUR WATER WAS POLLUTED AND SOLD
 I WAS HOMELESS AND FORECLOSED AND YOU BAILED OUT THE BANK
 I WAS IN PRISON AND YOU SANCTIONED THE DEATH PENALTY
 I WAS NAKED AND YOU GAVE ME A SOLDIER'S UNIFORM



Meet me in Utopia

by Annjie Schiefelbein

A few weeks ago, I led a roundtable discussion for our community about decentralization. I am not innately drawn to the more intellectual aspects of the Worker, and it has taken me many years to get at them in any depth. Preparing for the talk was good for me, requiring me to go even deeper than the experiential and broad understanding I previously had of Peter Maurin's vision.

I did a lot of research, and still have only scratched the surface. It is intimidating, then, to try and present a Catholic Worker vision of society to you, the world at large including a lot of Catholic Workers who understand this much better than I do! The thing that saves me, that keeps me from drowning in the details, philosophies and intellect is the most basic principle of Peter Maurin's vision. All of his and Dorothy Day's writings, ideas, and beliefs stem from this basic goal: to recognize and celebrate the human dignity of each person, and to see the face of Christ in every person. It is not difficult at all to understand the why of that goal—it makes sense. But how does that look today in the shell of our society? How would that look in a new society?

Maurin did have some answers to these questions. His answers had their base in Russian anarchists, Catholic Social Teachings, and his early life as a French peasant. The root of his answers is the promotion of human dignity. And so, when my community members looked bored during my presentation (of course, I assumed it was the depth and breadth of the material and not my presentation style), I pointed at the large sign I had made of the above goal, and reminded all of us that the goal of our daily lives, in the houses of hospitality, in the soup lines, at work, at the store, with each other, is also the goal of Maurin's utopian society.

Why strive for a utopian society? What is wrong with our society? We live in a democracy, a free nation. Why is it described by Maurin as being a shell of a society? Why did he and Dorothy Day (and thousands before and after them) think we needed a different way? As noted in the Aims and Means of

the Catholic Worker, democracy in the U.S. has been overtaken by capitalism. Our economic system dominates our political system. Capitalism promotes the accumulation of wealth and power over everything, including human dignity and the meeting of basic human needs. Maurin's vision promotes the dignity of people, the gift of their labor, and their inherent worth as vital to both the means and the ends of life. Meanwhile, capitalism promotes profit as the end, attained by any means necessary. It creates a non-productive, consuming minority (most of us white, living in the Global North), provided for by the productive labor majority (the five billion+, living in the Global South). It removes the laborer from the products of his or her labor, and can only exist in the presence of class divide and violence. People become economic factors of production instead of skilled laborers and artisans creating a needed good. Human value is not a goal, and is not accounted for at all. This social analysis calls us to resist the violent capitalist system, and to create alternatives that recognize human dignity.

So let's go, if we may, to a Catholic Worker vision of a better society. Jenny Truax details the path to Utopia in her article. My job is to show you Utopia itself, as it could exist once the shell is decayed and cast aside. The vision of Utopia includes many facets: a Worker-Scholar synthesis; subsidiarity and distributist economics; communal farming; and the Works of Mercy. For the sake of familiarity (my familiarity) and nostalgia (my nostalgia), let's put Utopia in the state of, say, Nebraska. We have traveled to get here, to Nebraska, to see this fabulous place, even though in Utopia, groups of people like the one I'll describe will exist everywhere. Let's call our small community Utopville, just for fun.

The first thing you will notice upon entering the outskirts of Utopville is that it is not very big. And no, not just because we're in Nebraska; Utopian communities everywhere are small. Both Peter and Dorothy spoke often about getting smaller all the time: smaller houses of hospitality, smaller communities, and smaller groups of people making decisions. Decentraliza-

Annjie Schiefelbein — celebrates her 15 year anniversary of coming to Karen House this year and revels in how much she still has to learn.

tion is centered around just that – decentralizing.

The next thing you'll notice is the pace. No one seems to be in a terrible hurry. There are small groups of people talking to each other all over the place, and a notable absence of fast food restaurants. There's a group of people over there- let's see what they are doing. They are having a roundtable (RT) discussion. Those are big here in Utopville. Peter Maurin realized that there are scholars, and there are workers. To make the small community thrive, however, the two types of people would need to come together. He said that workers should become scholars and scholars workers. This view was heavily influenced by Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist. RT discussions take many forms: one on one conversation, clarifications of thought, public gatherings, publications (like the one you're reading), and more formal RT talks.

The community also meets to talk through communal decisions. Decisions on all aspects of community life, such as meeting the basic needs of every community member, problem solving, and logistical issues are made by the members of the community. In fact, when possible, decisions are made by those with a stake in them, and not by any larger group. This principle, called subsidiarity, is an often-overlooked part of Catholic Social Teaching. The first mention of it came in the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII. It was further validated (strongly) by the Catholic Church in 1931 with Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. In this encyclical, the Catholic Church calls it an "injustice" and an "evil" to give higher association to any organization when a smaller group will do. What does that really mean? The lowest, smallest, closest group that can govern should govern. (Incidentally, the 10th amendment of the US constitution was supposed to be a lot like subsidiarity, but was altered before ratification to give the U.S. central government more power.)

Quadragesimo Anno goes on to say that there is a purpose for a higher government; a positive, moral function of protecting human rights, dignity, and the common good. It is only when the lowest group is failing to protect those specific rights that a higher body should answer. In Utopville, Nebraska, the larger body is the village collective, a group of 3 localized



villages. In the case that the collective itself cannot or is not protecting human dignity, the (even-larger) regional body may address it through a grouping of more village collectives that come together. That is as high as the governing limit reaches. It is really the opposite of multi-national corporations, neo-capitalist policies, and rule by the wealthy minority, and the very best of regionalism.

But you have questions— How does that community feed itself? Where do the clothes come from if people in Honduras aren't making them? How do we get oranges in winter (we are in Nebraska after all)? Thanks for asking. Those questions lead us nicely into the next facet of Utopia, that of distributism. Distributism comes also from the Catholic Encyclicals mentioned above. Distributism and subsidiarity are symbiotic. Distributism relating to how we organize wealth, and subsidiarity describes the way we organize ourselves. Walking down the street here in Utopville, we see bread shops and clothiers, a print shop and a candle store. Let's stop in this tea shop and think for a moment about distributism. The tea shop, incidentally, is owned by the Wills family that lives up the street. They get their herbs from the community farm, and the tea is a recipe from Grandma Wills brought to you today by her granddaughter Shalya. Shalya's brother was not into making tea, and so was trained by the Cobair family and works in their blacksmith shop. What all of these stores and shops have in common is that they are family owned. Some bigger shops are cooperatively owned by several families.

Dorothy Day describes distributism as personal or family ownership of all aspects of production, land, workshops, tools, transport, trades, and professions. These involve social arrangements or voluntary associations (as opposed to take-overs, buy outs, and monopolies). The goal of distributism is the widest distribution of wealth, along with an avoidance of isolation. It is in contrast to the other economic systems (in fact it is sometimes referred to as the third-way economic philosophy). Whereas capitalism promotes a very few owning everything, and socialism advocates no one owning anything (and state governance of everything), distributism promotes as many people as possible sharing everything, and including everyone else to the best of the community's ability. It means that the laborer is not dependent on the tools or materials of others to perform work, but is responsible for all aspects of the production. Going back to Maurin and Day's vision of seeing the dignity in every person, it is easy to see how this third-way meets that goal. A factory-worker,

however, has no tie to the tools with which he or she is working, nor to the end product, and is not necessarily compensated or treated fairly for this work. Factory workers have very little recognition of their dignity or celebration of their likeness to Christ (except perhaps in their suffering). In our new society, value is placed on a small, owner-based, shared culture of work.

I still haven't told you where to get the oranges. I can't really help you there. Oranges are a rough go. So in this village, we do without. Utopia does not mean everything we want whenever we want it, it means, again, say it with me, that we recognize and celebrate the human dignity of each person, and that we see the face of Christ in every person. To meet the basic needs of every person (and the earth) means that we don't get to live as the privileged class anymore. Fortunately for us, there is so much joy here in Utopville that we hardly notice the absence of citrus.

Meeting basic needs does not come easy, even in Utopville. With things like mental illness and power struggles (we are still human after all), there are members of our community who have it rougher than others. The great thing about Utopville, however, is that we are seriously committed to taking care of all members of our village. Dorothy and Peter did not get this idea from any Russian anarchist or papal encyclical. They got it from the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus lays out the Works of Mercy. In Utopville, when there is the need, we do feed the hungry and care for the sick. A portion of the community harvest goes to a central food bank and is given out as decided by the whole community. Health care professionals practice their trade at the Utopville Clinic. Many of us have Christ rooms for people in our community who don't or can't have their own living space.

Utopville's food is all regional, coming from the communal farm or the farm cooperatives outside of town. Jane trades poultry for her vegetables, Shayla barter tea and guitar lessons for eggs with the Stead Family Farm Cooperative. Teachers get many of their supplies from parents of students. Peter Maurin would be proud to see how the agriculture works in Utopville. He recognized early on how farm subsidies and corporations (like Monsanto now) decimated the family farm, again removing dignity from the equation. Peter, as you probably know, was a big proponent of going back to the land. Working in communal farms gives us a sense of pride and connection to the earth and to what we put in our bodies. This labor doesn't hurt our morale either. Knowing who has produced our food connects the community to itself.

Take a deep breath and close your eyes. We must return from whence we came. Utopville is fading and we slowly return to our present reality. We are back in the shell of the old. But seeing is believing. Is Utopville a dream? Ask the sheep-farming, candle-making Catholic Workers in California. Ask the volunteer medical professionals at the Philadelphia Catholic Worker Clinic, or the Workers at Peter Maurin Farm in New York State. We are not there, but we can get there, and many of the building blocks are already present. We can respect ourselves and each other on the path, remembering that the means are intimately connected to the end. We can see the face of Christ in each other, and we can recognize and celebrate the dignity of each person before us. We can create a new society in the shell of the old. I'll see you on the way.



Rita Corbin

It is impossible for any culture to be sound and healthy without a proper respect and regard for the soil, no matter how many urban dwellers think that their food comes from grocery stores and delicatessens or their milk from tins. This ignorance does not release them from a final dependence on the farm.

Peter Maurin

CATHOLIC WORKER POLITICS:

FAITH AND RESISTANCE



Dorothy Day joins Cesar Chavez and Coretta Scott King attending services at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York in 1973.
-photo by Chris Sheridan

ANARCHISM IN ACTION



Ammon Hennacy engaging in one of his familiar activities.

MANUAL LABOR AND THE GREEN REVOLUTION



Helen Gott plowing at Maryfarm in Easton, PA.
—from Catholic Worker archives, Marquette University

THE WORKS OF MERCY



A Breadline in New York City.
—photo from Catholic Worker archives, Marquette University

PERSONALIST ACTION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

PACIFISM



Protesting the Civil Defense Drills in New York City.
-photo by Robert Lax

VOLUNTARY POVERTY



Following Gandhi's example, Dorothy Day spins in her room at a Catholic Worker farm near New York. —photo by Vivian Cherry

CLARIFICATION OF THOUGHT



Charles Butterworth, Ed Turner, Dorothy Day, Judith Gregory, Walter Kerrell,
New York Catholic Worker office, ca. June 1962 —Catholic Worker Archives, Marquette University

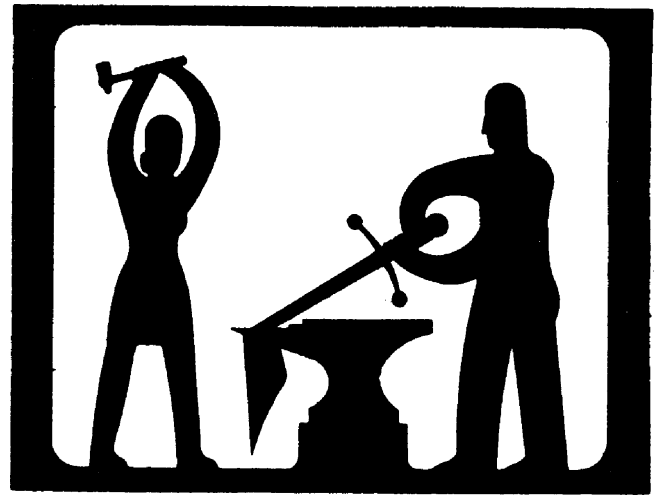
From Where We are to Where We Should Be:

Tools, Actions and Ideals for Forging the Path

by Jenny Truax

In his Easy Essay entitled “What the Catholic Worker Believes,” Peter Maurin, co-founder of the Catholic Worker, calls us to “build a new society within the shell of the old.” This new society the Catholic Worker advocates is one in which the dignity of each person is the primary focus of all structures. It is a society connected to the land, where citizens perform the Works of Mercy, govern themselves in small communities, and ensure that wealth is shared. No one ever accused the Catholic Worker of not thinking big! Faced with the harsh realities of poverty, the wild imbalance of wealth distribution in the world, and the escalating destruction of the planet, we believe that humanity can do better. Catholic Worker houses of hospitality, farms, free clinics, resistance communities, soup lines and prison ministries are various experiments at creating this new society.

In our new society (Annjie Schiefelbein’s article described it as “Utopia”) it is easier for people to be good. As a North American, I say, bring on Utopia! I know that I’m not alone in my frustration. It feels like no matter what my choice, it’s always between two evils. We have allowed the desire for profit to supplant the need for the common good, resulting in a country where real justice seems impossible. In the age of suburban sprawl, genetically-engineered food, and sweatshop labor, it’s hard to make just choices. Take, for example, the issue of transportation. In St. Louis, sprawl is prevalent. Travel by walking, biking and public transportation is difficult, though obviously the most just option. For those who decide they are car-dependent, the decision between hybrid (good for emissions and fuel consumption but requiring far more money, with higher resource consumption because it’s a new product) or a used car (lower resource expenditure because it’s used, but more costly to the environment in every day use) is a tough choice. In a new society, we might organize ourselves into smaller geographical communities, making cars mostly unnecessary. A society where it would be easier to be good outshines our current shell, where it is almost impossible to make choices benefiting the common good.



To build our new society, we must shift the understanding of responsibility we have in the U.S. The prevailing sentiment seems to be that we can’t maintain our wasteful North American lifestyles, but feel we’ve met our civic responsibility by voting, paying our taxes, and occasionally donating to charity. The Catholic Worker was founded upon the idea that we are both profoundly and personally responsible for each other, that every day of the year, we are called to perform the Works of Mercy, question the system that creates such poverty, and work at building new society. Dorothy Day’s famous quotation stated, “The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us? When we begin to take the lowest place, to wash the feet of others, to love our [sisters and] brothers with that burning love, that passion, which led to the Cross, then we can truly say, ‘Now I have begun.’”

The Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker advocate several practices for building this society. These methods rely on our creativity and our willingness to be vulnerable and to

Jenny Truax — is looking forward to a summer with the kids at Teka Childress Catholic Worker House, the first harvest in the house garden, and the premiere of the new Star Wars movie.

work with others rather than alone or over others. These actions call us to be courageous, to build our lives resisting injustice and identifying with 'the least of these.' While these attempts are a path to building the new society, they also are real manifestations of Utopia, here and now.

Adopting a nonviolent lifestyle is one of the four practices the Catholic Worker advocates. This nonviolence is not a tactic of a particular action, nor does it imply the passive, go-with-the-flow, do what's easiest lifestyle. A nonviolent lifestyle means withdrawing from and actively resisting oppressive structures. This could mean resisting the acquisitiveness of constantly upgrading computers, cell phones, and vehicles. Valuing nonviolence means choosing justice over convenience. Nonviolence calls us to resist war and violence in all forms, whether in the personal or state realm. Countless examples exist, from nonviolent acts of civil disobedience, to mass marches, to war tax resistance. At the Catholic Worker, refusing 501c3 (state-sponsored non-profit corporation) status is one example of our resistance to violence-based State classifications, and of our commitment to Christian nonviolence and personal responsibility.

Another practice that you'll find in the Catholic Worker vision of a new society is manual labor. What a counter-cultural value! Many of us spend half our work day sitting in front of a computer screen, travel home to sit in front of a television screen, and for entertainment, pay \$8 to go sit in front of an even bigger movie screen. Manual labor is often considered something we pay others to do for us, and this cuts us off from our humanity. Fortunately, examples abound of people rediscovering their ability to grow, create, build, and make the things they need themselves (as most of our grandmothers did). Honing such skills is an essential part of building self-sufficient communities. Any Karen House volunteer can tell you that manual labor is one Catholic Worker tenet at which we succeed daily!

Voluntary poverty is a most difficult practice for many of us to adopt. So many elements of society- families, schools, peer groups, media, even religion- encourage us to get ahead, to consider profit the ultimate end, and to be upwardly mobile. Ironically, our huge suburban houses, elite educations, and mammoth SUVs do not seem to ensure happiness. It was in 1957, when the average U.S. house was just 900 square feet, that North Americans reported their peak level of happiness. Living voluntary poverty means resisting consumerism. It means deciding who in the family will work for money, what that income truly needs to be, and then budgeting expenses. It requires a realization that we can control our own lives and consumption. It is a challenge to do without and re-discover grace. Voluntary poverty is a hard practice for those born with privilege, and shouldn't be confused with the involuntary poverty

that the majority of the world, including the guests at Karen House, experience. For those of us who grew up with access, security, and privilege, voluntary poverty introduces us to the nitty-gritty of precarity, having to share, and making difficult choices. It can also lead to a great discovery of strength, depth of relationship, intentionality and community.

The Works of Mercy are distinct opportunities for "learning to do the acts of love, so that the poor can receive what is, in justice, theirs, the second coat in our closet, the spare room in our home, a place at our table" (Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker). We must realize that our liberation comes with our relationships with the poor. Connecting to one another, being responsible for one another, and celebrating vulnerability and weakness are essential elements of building a new society that honors the dignity of each person.

In the U.S., several barriers (both preventable and not) thwart us from practicing the Works of Mercy, valuing manual labor, and adopting nonviolence and voluntary poverty. One obstacle is the amount of debt, or perceived debt, we have. Enormous student loans are one example. One undergraduate year at our local Jesuit University runs about \$37,000. Another barrier (one that we have more control over) is the fact that many of us are living above our means. With access to credit in a society that values upward mobility, we buy too-large houses, multiple vehicles and elite educations, accumulating debt that keeps us from a real freedom. Another obstacle includes our addiction to convenience at the expense of justice. True justice takes research, sweat, and time. Americans are preoccupied with security and afraid of each other, which contributes to our obsession with accumulating wealth and our acceptance of violence to maintain the status quo. Another issue that middle/upper class folk face is our tendency to be overly focused inward, on ourselves and immediate family members, rather than on the reality of the world around us. It is a spiritual poverty to pay exorbitant fees for music, sport, and other lessons for our kids while ignoring the lives of millions of kids who worked in sweatshops making those footballs, uniforms, and video games. (Not to mention children one or two zip codes away who are hungry, who experience staggering amounts of violence, and who go to unaccredited schools).

These are real barriers that we with privilege in the U.S. face. These barriers are embedded in our present culture; recognizing and addressing them as part of the shell we're in is imperative if we want to build the new society. Everywhere, people are freeing themselves from the chains of this "filthy rotten system" that Dorothy Day so often decried. Utopia is both far away and here right now, and its realization only requires our desire and creativity. Let's go!

WORLD PEACE PRAYER

LEAD ME FROM DEATH
to LIFE, from FAITHHOOD to TRUTH

LEAD ME FROM HATE
to LOVE, from WAR to PEACE

LEAD ME FROM DESPAIR
to HOPE, from FEAR to TRUST

**Building a New Society:
Some Suggestions, both Effortless and Audacious**

1. Dress (tastefully) from thrift stores.
2. Gather two neighbors and set up a sharing system for power tools and lawnmowers.
3. Spend regular time with a prisoner (In St. Louis, call the Criminal Justice Ministry at 241-8062).
4. Question why we have prisons (Read Are Prisons Obsolete? by Angela Davis).
5. Start a garden. Grow way too much, and bring the produce to someone in need.
6. Honestly examine whether your job contributes to the common good.
7. Explore the spiritual tools of prayer, fasting, and nonviolent civil disobedience.
8. Transform your guest room into a Christ Room.
9. Work to keep military recruiters out of your children's school (Check out resources from "Alternatives to Military Service").

19. Feel personally responsible for homeless, mentally ill, and drug addicted people in your city.
20. Immerse yourself in a loving relationship with someone born without your privilege.
21. Find love a harsh and dreadful thing.
22. Find love.
23. Share your labor with an elderly neighbor.
24. Declare a moratorium on new technology in your household.
25. Discern what your immediate needs are; return the rest of your possessions to the poor.
26. Hold a family discussion on who is considered "the least of these" in today's society.
27. Support worker-owned businesses and local cooperatives (cityfoodcoop.com is a St. Louis option for groceries).
28. Resist the spiritual poverty of seeking the best of everything for your children while other children go without basic necessities.
29. Recognize the freedom that voluntary poverty could provide for your time, spirit, and community.
30. Nurture your skills in nonviolent communication, consensus decision-making, or community organizing.
31. Barter with friends for child-care, hair-cuts, oil changes, fresh vegetables, and skilled jobs.
32. Experiment with regional living: this summer, only consume things produced in your locale.
33. Build a loving community of people to enact these crazy experiments.
34. Give at a personal sacrifice, rather than out of excess.
35. Consider your complicity in the Iraq war, and consider ways to withdraw your support. (unitedforpeace.org, wartaxboycott.org, insteadofwar.org)
36. Seek self-sufficiency: learn one new craft or new skill a year.
37. Share it with the community.
38. Pray, struggle, fail, struggle, and pray some more.
39. Envision a new society within the shell of the old, starting with you, your family, neighbors and friends.
40. Explore co-housing and communal living options in your area (see ic.org, cohousing.org).
41. Get a bike, get a hybrid, or get walking.
42. Ban any purchases of new books, music, and household items in your family.
43. Ban any purchases.
44. Acknowledge your own racism, sexism, class-ism, ableism, heterosexism, and ageism.
45. Be inclusive to a fault in your groups, meetings, and activities.
46. Study Wendell Berry, Ivone Gebara, Peter Kropotkin, or Martin Luther King.
47. Sacrifice convenience for justice on a daily basis.
48. Vote with your actions every day of the year.



Rita Corbin

10. Attend one more social justice event a month. Bring a friend. Make a donation.
11. Help plan the next event, join the committee, or assist the planning board.
12. Fast from your car and give away your TV. Enjoy the seasons in a new way.
13. Refuse to pass the buck to the State.
14. Volunteer as a family at your community garden (gatewaygreening.org has a St. Louis list).
15. Refuse to buy from companies using sweatshops (organicfairtrader.com lists alternatives).
16. Question the morality of making money without doing labor.
17. Sell those stocks and bonds, and make a regular donation to a local justice organization (St. Louis Justice and Peace Shares is one good option).
18. Prioritize service as an extra-curricular activity for your children.

Thanks to Bill Kellerman's "100 Suggestions for Being a Catholic Worker" for inspiration.



An Open Letter to Mark Scheu

by Bill Ramsey

Palm Sunday 2008,
the 40th Anniversary of the My Lai Massacre,
the 5th Anniversary of Rachael Corey's Death in Palestine

Dear Mark,

This morning as I walked on a trail where our paths often crossed, I noticed that park rangers have placed an orange ribbon on a branch of a tree that we dedicated to our memories of you. The color orange has become a symbol throughout the country of resistance to the unlawful detentions, secret prisons, and practice of torture that have become the U.S. government's daily exercises of power in the years since your death. I was heartened to see your tree adorned for the task of resistance. Welcome to the wearing of the orange.

The editors of the Roundtable have asked me to write an article on the nature of power and how it is to be engaged and resisted. With this topic, which you and I discussed endlessly, before me and the request coming from the Roundtable, which over the years carried so many of your own thoughts, it seems appropriate that I write my article in the form of an open letter to you, dear friend.

As a scholar of U.S. history, you probably knew this, but it just occurred to me while listening to an interview with Steven Waldam, author of a new book, Founding Faith: Providence, Politics, and the Birth of Religious Freedom in America, that our freedoms of faith, thought, speech, assembly and association, so endangered now, were not established by people who had arrived at the pinnacle of a triumphant climb toward human freedom. Rather, they were the results of the torturous human struggle to undermine the colonial regime's attempts to assert themselves as the new arbitrators of permissible faith, thought, speech, assembly, and association.

The founders of the colonies had sought a safe haven from tyrannies of an older world, but quickly replicated those same tyrannies as they assumed the mantle of power in the New World. What does this say about the irrespress-

ibly abusive nature of power? Anglicans, Puritans, Congregationalists, Catholics, and yes even Quakers, sought to draw boundaries dividing the new land into areas of governance in which the exercise of human freedom would be placed under their restrictions.

Quakers, anti-Baptists, evangelicals, native peoples ("pagans") and young women experimenting with free thought about their own humanity were jailed, banished, forcibly relocated, tortured and put to death by these colonial regimes. Despite it all, people persisted. Out of their determination arose the demise of the colonial attempts to control the human spirit and the resulting insistence by a few of the founders that a bill of rights be attached to the Constitution. These rights are the tools with which we engage and resist power. Enshrined, they are useless. Relentlessly and repeatedly exercised, they can undermine empires.

Let's turn to the Gospel that shares your name. As you know, Mark tells the story of a Jesus who journeyed from the margins to the center of power and then invites us to join him on the return journey back to the margins. What can we learn about the nature of power, as Jesus enters the heart of the Temple state and the seat from which Rome exacts the price of empire from the people of Palestine? Oh Jerusalem!

Together you and I read Ched Myers' Binding the Strongman and discovered the ironies of the "Triumphant Entry." Jesus approaches Jerusalem not on a gilded chariot, carrying weapons, but on a lowly ass with his hands empty and open. Cuttings from the fields of peasant farmers are thrown in his path. No palm branches are mentioned. The procession itself remains outside Jerusalem. Mark stages the "entry" into the seat of power as a public repudiation of the conventional notion about how power presents itself and asserts its will. He is challenging the first century spin doctors.

This is a satirical piece of street theater, mocking the military parades of newly assigned Roman procurators and the dreams of grandeur of those who seek restoration of the messianic monarch. The "Hosanna...Blessing on the coming King-

Bill Ramsey — is still finding creative ways to make a rake.

dom of our father David” is an acclamation designed to display the contradictions between hollow tributes to power and the authentic task of challenging the premises of power. Palm Sunday turned upside down.

The story ends not with the triumphant taking of power, but with strategic retreat after a brief reconnaissance operation. Arriving at the Temple, Jesus “looked around” (Mark used the Greek verb meaning “assessed”) and then returned to the outskirts of the city to discern what he had “assessed.” What mechanisms sustain the political economy of the Temple? How does the myth of power as a commodity maintain itself? What systems of obedience uphold this charade?

Jesus returns the next morning ready for a direct action, a confrontation with the Temple cult which sustained its economic power through a system of dues which required all who entered to pay in the correct currency. The “money changers,” representing the banking interest of the city, served the cult of compliance, changing Greek and Roman coins for Jewish coins. “Those selling doves” provided the birds required to meet the purity obligations, placed on women and the “unclean.”

Yes, the trade itself was exploitative of the poor. But Jesus’ more fundamental assessment is that the cult of compliance and obligation was upholding the political economy of the Temple cult. It was the tables of compliance and obligation that he toppled. The cult created privilege by authorizing mechanisms to exact compliance and obligations from those who lived under its privilege. The source of the Temple’s and the State’s power was not a divine endowment. It was repeated acts of compliance, and concessions to obligation. These repeated acts included the Temple leaders’ own concessions to and compliance with the Roman rule of Palestine.

As Jesus stands before Pilate, it is with the consent of the crowd that he is sentenced to death. It is with the collaboration of the religious leaders that he is tortured. Pilate condemns him, pretending that he is fulfilling his obligation to the people. Jesus is dragged through the streets while his companions remain silent, huddled in the alleyways. The power to detain, torture and kill did not reside with Pilate. Rather, it emerged from a broader consent, collaboration, obligation, and silence.

Each concession is infectious. Did Peter’s fearful words in the court yard quell the lingering courage of his companions? Did the silence of Jesus’ friends incite the crowd to shout for Barabbas? Did that same absence of voice fortify the Temple leaders in their collaboration with Rome? It’s clear that the crowd



provided Pilate with his noble obligation to kill. We become each others excuses and set loose a relentless epidemic.

Mark, as you reminded us repeatedly, most of us live our lives with the deadly illusion that we have set aside the cultish practices of power and placed all their charades behind us. We are, after all, a nation governed by the consent of the people. How do we exercise that consent? Is it by voting and electing others into “power?”

When we “look around” and “assess” the state of our own cult of ballot-box democracy, it appears that the right most exercised by the U.S. public is the right to remain silent. How many people exercise their right to vote? How many people select silence in the face of injustice and war, refusing to associate with others to raise their voices in a collective shout, “Not in our names.” Within the context of criminal proceedings, the

right to remain silent is an import safeguard. Within the context of the citizen engagement, it is extremely dangerous. Our silence has far more to do with who is “in power” than anything we do in the seclusion of the voting booth.

Likewise, it appears that the least exercised right by the U.S. public is the right to free association. We have become a cubical culture. The associations that we do form are characterized by brevity and a tentativeness that keeps us guessing about our ability to count on each other. To form a dissident or alternative association or community and to maintain it over time is, in and of itself, a subversive action in our culture. It is a walk on hallowed ground.

Now you can probably predict that it’s time to turn to your mentor, Howard Zinn, who concludes in a recent article in the magazine *The Progressive*:

“I’m talking about a sense of proportion that gets lost in the election madness. Would I support one candidate against another? Yes, for two minutes - the amount of time it takes to pull the lever down in the voting booth. But before and after those two minutes, our time, our energy, should be spent in educating, agitating, organizing our fellow citizens in the workplace, in the neighborhood, in the schools. Our objective should be to build, painstakingly, patiently but energetically, a movement that, when it reaches a certain critical mass, would shake whoever is in the White House, in Congress, into changing national policy on matters of war and social justice.... Voting is easy and marginally useful, but it is a poor substitute for democracy...”

Our collective inertia and fears clear the way for injustice and war, and set the stage of our compliance and collaboration. The patience and energy we need to create a movement that asserts our sacred right to reign in those who claim to hold economic and political power, are often diverted by the tyrannies of "what must be done now." Sometimes I think we should change the motto on our currency from "In God we trust" to the more accurate "We go along to get along."

Mark, imagine with me for a few minutes, a citadel atop a mountain of sand. This is not a permanent palace up there balanced on those shifting sands. Gravity, erosion, and repeated attempts to climb its slopes will, in time, bring it down. But a citadel is a place of power and while it is up there, it will do harm. On the other hand, it is able to deliver what we want, so we go along.

We purchase timbers, build terraces and do what is necessary to maintain them. The task is never ending and requires repeated purchases of more timbers. Each completed terrace brings with it the desire for another, and the certainty that the citadel is secure and can be trusted to protect us. The terraces provide places for us to stand part way up and so we get along.

At our sides, people begin to build staircases. We watch from our ever eroding terraces as earth movers and truckloads of timbers arrive. They search in vain for firm footings and decide to erect the stairs without them. They assert that there is only room for two teams of staircase-builders. We are fixed on the question of which of the two sets of staircase-builders will reach the top first and occupy of the citadel. Any other attempt to climb the mountain on foot could cause further erosion and jeopardize the stability of the two staircases. As the stairs reach

us, the builders ask for our permission to erect the next flight of stairs from our terrace. We give our consent and follow their ascent.

But who is this down below? They have rakes and no timbers for terraces. Why don't they climb the stairs. Oh my God, they assembled in small groups and are raking the sand to their sides away from the slopes. Don't they know what's up? Have they forgotten our motto? Without the sand below at our base, our terraces and both staircases will fall. Without the underpinning of our terraces, the citadel will topple. We will all have to live in a level place.

When we cleaned out your place and sorted through your things, we found a framed copy of Dorothy Day's proclamation, "Our problems stem from our acceptance of this filthy, rotten system."

Mark, you can check this with her, but I don't think Dorothy would mind if we added a corollary: "This filthy rotten system..." and all the power that it pretends to hold over us, begin to erode each day we come together, break our silence, refuse to pay it tribute, withhold consent, withdraw our compliance, put aside our purchases, set down our collaboration and learn to live with each other in a more level place.

Has anyone got a rake?

Miss you,
Bill ✦

“THOSE
WHO PROFESS TO
LOVE FREEDOM
AND YET DEPREGATE
AGITATION

are those who want crops without plowing. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and never will.”

— Frederick Douglass (1857)



From Abroad



by Mary Becker

Last week, I played “Jeopardy” with my 8th graders to review for their 1st trimester Chemistry exam. None of the students had ever heard of the game, but they loved it, getting extremely competitive over questions like “What is a substance?” and “What is a method used to separate a mixture of sand and water?” After a series of serious questions one group inevitably would choose “C for 200,” for which the question was “Sing the refrain of a song by Lizha James [a well-known Mozambican singer].” In most of my classes, the room broke out into laughter and a few girls would stand up and sing some lines of “Nu Wa Nima” or “Já Não Me Tens Valor.” But in Section 8 the game was close: The group that got this question looked at each other very seriously and Guedes, a tall, lanky boy, rose up slowly, body already swiveling in James’ trademark Macarena-like dance and broke out into song “Ni tamuku makwi niluwe walisi mahosa hosa...” Then, the whole class broke out laughing.

I thoroughly enjoy teaching in Mozambique. My methods of doing things tend to be different than my students are used to, but rather than detracting from their learning, I think new approaches stretch their minds. Perhaps my students found the idea of playing Jeopardy in the classroom silly, but they had a good time and it was a great review lesson to help them remember all of the complicated chemistry information I taught them over the first eight weeks of school.

The difference in the education system and pedagogical methods between Mozambican and American schools often staggers me. Even at Secondary School Laura Vicuña, a school run by Catholic Sisters where I have been volunteering for the past 8 months, there is a huge lack of resources and educational tools. Of my 300+ students in 8th grade chemistry, only 3 own textbooks, and those three all have the oldest version, printed at least ten years ago. All of the information that the kids learn about chemistry is what comes out of my mouth during class.

A common method for transmitting information in the classroom, as I’ve seen by observing some Mozambican teachers, is to dictate information. Seeing this was sort of incredible to me: The teacher reads a lesson (about, for instance, basic properties of chemical substances or the commutative property in mathematics) from her notebook and the students copy every word the teacher says. They write furiously, heads down, switching from blue to red ink to highlight key words. The students’ notebooks, then, with precisely taken notes, serve as their textbooks.

I have adopted some Mozambican school traditions – such as wearing a white lab coat in the classroom – but I have not dictated anything more than homework assignments at the end of class. I write out all my lessons in chalk on the blackboard, and the students have gotten used to my different style.

A school without books also has no science equipment or other tools for hands-on learning. I performed a science experiment a few weeks back by doing a demonstration of “separation of mixtures” with water, chalk, some cups and a coffee filter I brought from my house. The kids were super excited to see something practical in the classroom – so much of their learning is purely and completely theoretical. The teachers also thought it was cool: The other chemistry teacher asked to borrow my cups to do the same in her classes, and a Portuguese teacher stopped me as I left the classroom to test his memory on types of mixtures from his own high school days.

Portuguese, the national language of Mozambique and the language used to teach in schools, is not the first language for the vast majority of Mozambicans. Many students arrive in primary school only speaking Chopi or Shangaana or Chisena – maternal African languages – and only begin Portuguese in first grade. Many of the young girls who live at the Laura Vicuña Orphanage, part of the compound where I live and work, have a certificate stating they have passed 4th, 5th, or even 8th grade – but often they can’t read and don’t recognize their letters or numbers. In extreme cases, some of my students fail their 8th

Mary Becker- Long-time Saturday-morning house-taker, writes from the Centro Laura Vicuña in Inharrime, Mozambique, where she is the house expert on curing skinned knees, fixing electronic equipment, and reading English-only instruction manuals.

grade chemistry tests not because they do not understand the material, but because they cannot read the questions written in Portuguese!

On a national level, Mozambique lacks teachers. At most schools, teachers tend to be young and overworked (some carrying as many as 40 or 50 hours of in-classroom time per week). In order to improve the current situation, the Mozambican government has lowered the required level of education necessary to teach secondary school. Many teachers enter the workforce having 10th or 12th grade education plus a year of teacher formation.

Teachers and administrators understand the deficiencies in their students' education and want to improve their schools. There's much talk of 'development,' and a strong emphasis on teaching with the latest methods available. When the country came out of a long civil war 15 years ago, the government wanted to improve education – and top administrators have often looked outside their own country for help. The foreign non-governmental organizations that help direct school-development often require a high 'passing rate' in the Mozambican schools to prove the 'effectiveness' of their programs. "Foreigners came in and wrote our new curriculums for us," our physics teacher said to me one day, "and they say that 80% of our students have to pass. But what if they don't deserve to pass?" The government re-writes the national curriculum every few years taking out things that don't seem to work and trying out new ideas. But, developing an entire country's education system is slow work.

Working here as a foreigner, the vast differences in our

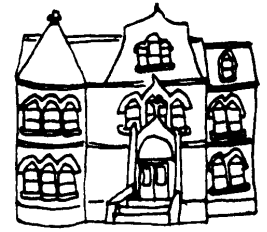
education systems sometimes make me forget where I come from and the types of schools I went to. When I took high school chemistry, we all received packets of worksheets, a glossy periodic table, and a chemistry textbook, and we did experiments in a laboratory. I must continually remind myself not to become complacent in my acceptance of how things are here. I try to give simple experiments as I can and work with the knowledge that I was so lucky to have had the opportunity to obtain.

After the class in which I gave my students the demonstration on mixtures, I gave an unusual homework assignment: I told them to do their own experiment at home. Mix water and salt, then put some of the mixture on a piece of paper, set the paper in the sun, and see what happens. Not many of the students did the assignment – it fell pretty far from doing normal review questions in their notebook – but the few that did were so proud: "Look teacher, I got salt!" A few students, nervous that no salt appeared on their paper, sprinkled on some extra table salt and tried to pass it off – a perfect opportunity for me to discuss honesty in science experiments.

My main goal in my short time here is to offer some fresh ideas. I lead music and theatre extra-curricular groups at the school for the same reason: I want to present some new opportunities to the students. Not all my ideas are well-accepted, but I'm not here to create big changes – enough foreigners have meddled with life here and have done enough harm. I just work to provide a different perspective on life for my students and colleagues and a chance to try some activities they might not otherwise experience. Students turning in their first-ever chemistry experiment and dancing in the classroom are my invaluable reward.



From Karen House



by **Timmy Cosentino**

There has been quite a bit of newness at Karen House recently: a newly tiled bathroom floor, a new mouse population, and two new community members. The two new people in community are Beth Buchek and Tim Cosentino (me). The newness and change also bring growth. John Carroll went from not knowing how to tile a floor to being a pro at it, and there seems to be a thriving family of mice in the house that know how to avoid traps very well. Beth and I are also growing into our roles in community and as Catholic Workers. It seems that the next step after change is to learn how that change is affecting life and go from there. From my point of view, that looks like John working on tiling a second bathroom, less food and things being left on the floor and in mouse-reach, and Beth and I taking on more responsibility in the community. Both of us are truly learning what it means to live at Karen House and to be in community; and this new community is learning what it means to welcome in newer community members and to be in community with us. Yet it seems, for all the change and all the newness, that nothing has actually changed at all. Despite the challenges of growing together as a community and all the newness we are experiencing, this is not anything new or different, rather, this is all just part of the greater ebb and flow of the life of Karen House.

Small changes have always been going on at Karen House. Lets face it, mice have been in the house longer than most people, and the community changes in some ways every couple of years. With this newness, though, has come a lot of great energy and excitement for the work of the house and our community; however, a lot of questions and confusion have also come up. As a result of these questions and confusion, a very wise community member suggested that we take a step back as a community to take a look, in an intentional way, at the tenets of the Catholic Worker as written by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. In this way, our new community is looking back to its foundation to understand what it is becoming and to help us continue to grow in the tradition of the Catholic Worker and Karen House.

So far we have only covered two tenets: decentralization, the green revolution, and non-violence, but over the coming months we are going to take a look at each of the tenets. However, for myself, I have already discovered two things to be true for my understanding of the Catholic Worker and Karen House in particular. First, the tenets of the Catholic Worker are no simple undertaking. Just to actually try and live in community is a big commitment, not to mention voluntary poverty or the works of mercy as a part of community living. Secondly, I am coming to realize just how profoundly radical the Catholic Worker was and still very much is. Peter Maurin was talking about a green revolution well before melting ice caps, global warming, or Al Gore were even thought about. The early Catholic Worker was against war since its beginning and has always believed in a living wage.

As a new community member it can seem a little intimidating to try and step into the great tradition of the Catholic Worker and Karen House. I certainly thought so when I first started volunteering at Karen House over five years ago. However, five years ago I just saw the work, and the challenge, and the radical-ness. Today I still see those things, but I also see the true base of Karen House: community, support, and a great love for people. In my short time living in Karen House I have come to an understanding that I really hope I do not lose. I came to understand that what makes Karen House truly radical is not any political stance. Rather, it is the core belief that a person must truly love their neighbor, and from that love move into relationship with them. It is in that relationship that we might find our common humanity, and come to know our God. It is through this core belief that I have come to understand myself as a Catholic Worker, and it is because of this belief that Karen House will always be inviting you to come in and enter into relationship with us. ✦

Timmy Cosentino is still introducing himself as Tim (see above) or Timothy. Timmy is enjoying the successful new clothesline he strung up in his room in the polar bear days of winter.

by Megan Heeney

A few weekends ago I traveled with some of my fellow Catholic Workers to the Julia Davis Branch Library. We went to watch *Winter Soldier* with other members of the St. Louis community. *Winter Soldier* took place over several days in which people who had been a part of the military occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq gave our country an eyewitness account of what is happening (you can watch these accounts by going to www.ivaw.org). The accounts we watched all dealt with dehumanization. One person after the other told gruesome stories about how we educate and train people to dehumanize others. We create a system which makes it all too easy for us to perpetuate war, violence and discrimination.

This March 19th marked the 5th Anniversary of the War in Iraq, 5 years of perpetual war, violence and discrimination. For me, March 19th reminded me of being 18 at my first peace vigil with my best friends in Omaha, Nebraska. I wanted to think of something else that day; I wanted to force myself to think again about the 4.5 million Iraqis who were now displaced from their homes; I wanted to think about the hundreds of thousands of individuals and families who feel the effects of this war through the death of a loved one. But as I stood with hundreds of other St. Louisans on a street in Clayton, all I could do was think about that day 5 years ago.

Five years ago I went to a Peace Vigil on a bridge over Dodge Street in Omaha. I held a candle while watching people sing for peace and cry. They'd lived through this war thing before; so many of the people I gathered with were my age at the beginning of the Vietnam War. I recall thinking that this time it won't be like that; they know better. I stayed up the majority of the evening thinking about 18 year olds in Iraq, wondering about young girls in Baghdad, thinking about fear and what it does to us, what it must feel like there. Five years ago I thought that there was no way this war would still be going on when I finished college. Five years ago I felt that there was no way this many people couldn't change the way our country

was acting. Five years ago I felt like if we all tried a little harder and screamed a little louder we would be able to stop our country's out of control desires. Five years later I think, how naïve!

In the past three weeks, I have gathered with people to discuss the situation in Iran. I hear myself at meetings and sometimes I think the 18 year old in me is waiting to jump out, waiting to say I think maybe we can do something this time. We are meeting knowing that our country, if it so desires, has the ability to attack Iran right now. There is very little beyond logic and ethics stopping our government from doing so. I question, as many of us may, what value ethics and logic have in our country today.

We have been brainstorming how to pre-emptively make peace. How do we convince our country that it won't be worth it to perpetuate more violence? I have to say, "Doesn't this 5th Anniversary of the War in Iraq, with so much destruction and unrest, say enough?" I hope it does. I hope I am not as naïve as I was at 18.

I don't want any of us to have to gather with candles this year because a new war has begun. I don't want any 23 year olds in Iran to feel the fear that I imagined the 18 year olds in Iraq felt. I don't know what our options are, but I do know we perpetuate this dehumanization which allows war by not doing anything to stop the next one.

We know how difficult it is to get out of a war once bombs have been released and bullets have been fired. We know that our country rarely admits to or rectifies mistakes. With this knowledge, we must make sure that another war doesn't start by pre-emptively waging peace. ✦



Megan Heeney has been sporting a new Italian haircut while she looks forward to finishing her first complete year at Karen House.

**It's the 75th Anniversary of the
Catholic Worker!**

Karen House Needs

Toilet paper, Diapers, Shampoo, Deodorant
Frozen chicken, hamburger, hot dogs, fresh
produce

Anyone interested in cooking dinners over the
summer, as many of our school groups will be
on vacation.

Call Karen House 621-4052

Kabat House Needs

Refrigerator without a freezer
Phone Cards to Mexico and Nicaragua
A large metal bowl, a large pot,
a large pressure cooker

Call Kabat House 621-7099

Teka Childress House Needs

Donations to our "Kid's Fund," which pays for
school tuition, summer camps, and special
outings for the three kids.

Call Annjie or Jenny: 621-4052

Little House Needs

Refrigerator
Call Karen House
621-4052

New Catholic Worker Items Available:

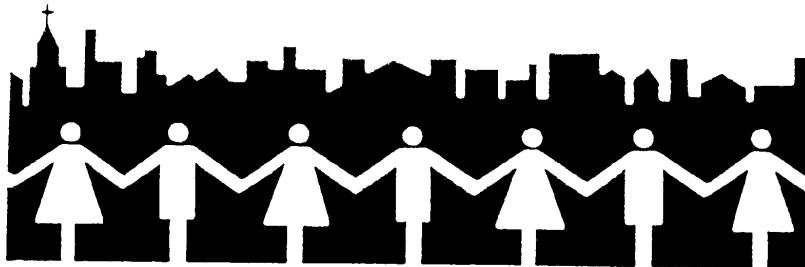
- *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day* ed. Robert Ellsberg (marquette.edu/mupress/)

- *The Catholic Worker after Dorothy: Practicing the Works of Mercy in a New Generation* by Dan McKanan (litpress.com)

- *Fool For Christ* Now on DVD: one-person play about the life of Dorothy Day (foolforchrist.com)

Don't forget to check our website (www.KarenHouseCW.org) for a schedule of our RoundTable Discussions, and updated house needs.

Join us for Mass every 1st, 3rd and 4th Tuesday of the month and for a Taize prayer service on the second Tuesday of every month at 8 pm in the Karen House Chapel.



The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Joe Angert, Teka Childress, Sarah Sunseri, Mary Hargadon, Lauren Koenig, Christen Parker, Ellen Rehg, and Jenny Truax. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

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