

# Self-Reliance

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Listings of books, reports, organizations and resources relating to local self-reliance on pages 2, 3 and 16.

## *Beyond Swimming Pool Heaters*

### The Emerging Municipal Solar Utility

The term "municipal solar utility" is a misnomer. But the idea is catching on. As originally conceived, a municipal solar utility (MSU) was a new approach to the financing and marketing of solar energy systems. The first MSU was created in Santa Clara, California in 1976. The city-owned electric utility leased solar pool heaters to customers, making solar more attractive by spreading out the purchase price over the term of the lease.

The Department of Energy, impressed with the results, gave a grant of \$112,000 to the California Energy Commission (CEC) to expand the concept.

At the CEC, Barry Saitman has been directing the program since it was inaugurated in 1979. Under Saitman's guidance the program has been given considerable depth and sophistication. He has broadened the meaning of the words "municipal" and "solar" and "utility." The term "municipal" has been expanded to include community organizations, home owner associations or condominiums, community development corporations, profit-making firms, and special purpose districts such as school, water, irrigation or housing districts. The term "solar" has been expanded to include energy conservation, cogeneration, hydro, biomass, wind and photovoltaics as well as solar hot water systems.

In 1979, small grants were given to six cities—Palo Alto, Ukiah, Santa Monica, San Dimas, Bakersfield and Oceanside—to participate in the first phase of the program. Rarely has so much been accomplished for so little money. Four of the first six cities have already begun implementing their programs. Palo Alto has generated almost \$2 million in loans for solar systems and energy conservation measures. Oceanside has attracted more than \$15 million in private investment capital for a sophisticated solar leasing program. Seven local energy staff positions have been created. Nine more jurisdictions have entered the program's second phase since 1981.

### The Need for Municipal Solar Utilities

Why do we need MSUs? In part to provide a form of consumer protection, to allay the concerns of people buying into new technologies. In part to raise capital on more advantageous terms than could be done by a single homeowner or businessperson. In part to form a public-private partnership that can overcome traditional building codes and permit regulations that might hamper conservation and solar energy. MSUs can help solve the difficult problem of how to deliver solar technologies to low income people or renters.

Over the longer term, the MSU is important as a new organizational form compatible with the demands of new technologies. In the future, energy will be generated in a decentralized manner. Household power plants, neighborhood utilities, cooperative storage systems are part of this future. New collective entities will have to be developed to deliver energy in this future.

Under Barry Saitman's aegis, the MSU program has compiled an extensive data base of information about the legal, economic and political possibilities of collective entities promoting energy self-reliance. California is the only state that has a formal program encouraging these types of entities, but numerous MSUs have been developed elsewhere. New housing developments

(Continued on page 2)

# Notes

Community Energy Ventures, Michael Freedberg or Anne Hatfield, 815 15th Street NW, Suite 610, Washington DC 20005, 202/347-4778. Non-profit technical assistance organization helping community groups develop energy businesses. Fees based on the kind of assistance provided, ranging from referrals to preliminary feasibility studies to complete development packages.

***Building a Sustainable Society***, by Lester R. Brown, 1981, 433 pp., \$14.95, W.W. Norton, New York. A worthy look at "the big picture" of worldwide shortages in natural resources, and how society can adapt to the change.

*We've Got the Power*, slide show or filmstrip on the soft path/hard path energy choice. Available for purchase or rent from: American Friends Service Committee Energy Project, 2160 Lake Street, San Francisco CA 94121, 415/752-7766.

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## Self-Reliance

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## The March of "Progress"...

**A Really Soft Path Strategy:** According to the Texas Highway Department, American cows belch an estimated 50 million tons per year of hydrocarbons; the commission also asserts that 10 cows burp enough gas to satisfy annual space and water heating, as well as cooking requirements, for a house.

**America's Own Third World Colonies:** A study of Appalachian land ownership patterns reveals the area is an impoverished colony controlled by a few wealthy outsiders. Absentee ownership in Appalachia has long been known, but the extent and effect of the ownership has shocked even local control advocates. The study has had unusual impact in the region because it was funded by the otherwise conservative Appalachian Regional Commission. Research was done by citizens and scholars in the region, not outside "experts." According to the study, 75 percent of the mineral-rich land surveyed is absentee owned. Moreover, these outsiders pay a disproportionately lower share of taxes. In Virginia, for example, a typical absentee corporation pays 42 cents an acre, while local individuals pay an average of \$1.02. The corporate tax share is amazingly skimpy when compared to the value of corporate owned land. In Martin County, for example, the top ten mineral owners control land valued at \$9.4 million, but paid a grand total of \$92 in taxes in 1978. Meanwhile, the county has no hospital or sewage facilities and its two fire departments are staffed totally by volunteers. In Walker County, Alabama, 28 landowners controlling 65 percent of the county's mineral wealth paid a whopping \$8,807 in property taxes. For the past 16 years, the county school system has had to borrow money to open schools each fall. Copies of the Land Survey are available from: Appalachian State University, Center for Appalachian Studies, Boone NC 28608. The cost is \$9 for institutions and \$5 for individuals.

**Safeway Muscles In on Recycling:** A new policy at Safeway supermarkets could mean the end of most multi-material curbside recycling programs. Many Safeway stores now pay a penny for every aluminum can turned in to their stores. The strategy is simple. Safeway buys the cans for about 22 cents a pound and sells them for about 43 cents a pound. The bounty also brings in many people who might otherwise not shop Safeway. The problem is that Safeway's policy skims the cream off the recyclables, leaving low-profit or unprofitable items for other recyclers. In Marin County, California for example, a county curbside recycling program, capitalized with a half million dollar grant from the state, was breaking even after a few months. But since Safeway stepped in, the program has been losing \$15,000 to \$20,000 a month. That's because aluminum, representing only one percent of the county's garbage by weight, would bring in \$267,000 a year. In contrast, newsprint makes up 12 percent of the garbage but represents only \$22,300 in potential income. If only aluminum recycling is profitable, should anyone bother recycling other material? Yes, if the public values the landfill space saved and the conserver ethic generated by a comprehensive, multi-material recycling program. In Marin, for example, 30 percent of the waste stream could be economically recycled, instead of the one percent aluminum represents. In an effort to survive, the Marin recyclers pressed for a county ordinance prohibiting anyone from hauling more than 100 pounds of aluminum on county roads, unless it was destined for the county recycling center. County supervisors backed away on that one, however, and passed a much weaker anti-theft ordinance, targeted at those who steal recyclables left at curbsides for the county trucks. That won't help much, because recyclers say that even if they get all the material left at curbsides by every household in the county, they still won't break even if the items contain no aluminum.

**National Power Institute**, Box 2774, Wenatchee WA 98801, 509/662-5008. Promoting locally-based public power campaigns. The Institute wants to hear from energy activists who have already considered public power campaigns or those who would like to learn more about them.

**Knowing Home: Studies for a Possible Portland**, edited by the staff of **Rain**, 1981, 88 pp., \$5, 2270 NW Irving, Portland OR 97210. A love letter to one of the country's more liveable cities. Includes essays on the Portland ecosystem and tradition of local self-reliance, as well as thoughts for the future. Resource listings are not as complete as *The Portland Book: A Guide to Community Resources*. But they are more up to date, descriptive and focused on local self-reliance.

**Analyzing Neighborhood Retail Opportunities: A Guide for Carrying Out a Preliminary Market Study**, 1981, 22 pp., \$10, American Planning Association, 1313 E. 60th Street, Chicago IL 60637. Solid advice for neighborhood groups and neighborhood-based business associations, with attention to the particular problems of low-income neighborhood shopping areas. Proof that introductory information doesn't have to be general or superficial.

In *Self-Reliance* #27 we mentioned a study done by Amory and Hunter Lovins linking the soft energy path to increased national security. Their argument has now been published as *Energy/War, Breaking the Nuclear Link* (\$10) by **Friends of the Earth**, 124 Spear Street, San Francisco CA 94105.

**Solar Barnraising Manual**, 61 pp., 1981, \$5, Urban Solar Energy Association, 277 Broadway, Somerville MA 02145, 617/623-3552. Advice from people who have organized many of these events, where neighbors get together to build greenhouses, solar panels and sun rooms. The booklet includes checklists of tasks to be done, sample forms and handouts, and tips on finding funds and participants.

**Waste and Toxic Substances Resource Guide**, 1981, \$2, Environmental Action Foundation, 1346 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington DC 20036, 202/296-7570. Informational materials on hazardous waste, recycling and resource recovery, occupational/environmental health, toxic substances and citizen organizing. Includes 12-page periodicals list.

## The Emerging Municipal Solar Utility

(Continued from page 1)

are using central solar generation arrays commonly owned by the homeowners' association. Cities are issuing bonds to finance energy conservation or the use of solar technologies. In January, 1982, the city of Carbondale, Illinois, population 27,000, established a MSU project. Carbondale's City Council has budgeted more than \$670,000 over a 28-month period to operate the program. The program, under the direction of Robert Pauls, city energy coordinator, will offer energy audits, provide energy education, make loans and grants and explore energy generation projects.

In 1981, the Center for Energy Studies of the University of Texas at Austin examined the feasibility of creating a solar utility for a several square block area of downtown Austin that contains 266 structures, most of which are commercial. **New Times, New Terms.**

As stated in the beginning of this article, the term municipal solar utility is a misnomer. But new times create the need for new terms. Already the roles and functions of traditional agencies are changing under the onslaught of rising energy prices and new generation technology. Water departments harness the power of flowing water to generate electricity. Sewage authorities generate methane gas. Sanitation departments burn garbage to generate electricity and steam. Office buildings install their own power plants.

The MSU concept began with solar pool heaters in one California city. Today MSUs embrace dozens of variations as neighborhoods, homeowner associations, condominiums and cities experiment with new forms to achieve energy self-reliance.

—David Morris

### Publications on municipal solar utilities

For those who want to learn more about municipal solar utilities, a number of publications are available. Barry Saitman of the Solar Office of the California Energy Commission will send on request a free information packet describing California's current work on municipal solar utilities. A more comprehensive document, *Municipal Solar Utilities in California: Marketing, Financial and Legal Issues*, by John M. Sanger Associates, is also available from the California Energy Commission publications unit for \$6 (order #500-80-062). Contact the Commission at 1111 Howe Avenue, Sacramento CA 95825, 916/920-6811.

A report on the Austin Municipal solar utility project, designed by the Center for Energy Studies at the University of Texas, is available from the city of Austin. Copies of *Feasibility of the Creation of a Solar Utility for the Model Energy Development Demonstration District* are \$5 from: **Office of Energy Conservation and Renewable Resources, City of Austin, Box 1088, Austin TX 78767, 512/477-6511.**

Copies of the *Municipal Solar Utility: A Model for Carbondale, Illinois*, by Chris Robertson and Michael Besal are \$25 from: **Shawnee Solar Project, 211½ West Main, Carbondale IL 62901, 618/457-8172.**

# Progress Reports

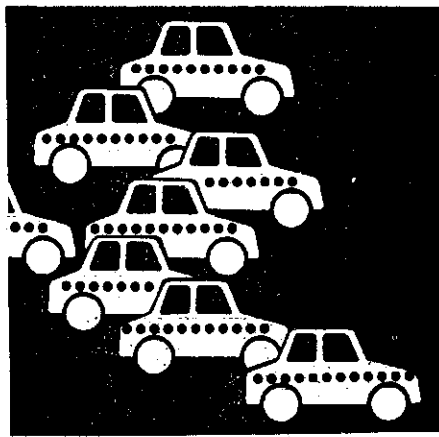
## Taxi Coop Thrives in Denver

In a business where antagonism between labor and management is the rule, taxicab drivers in Denver rarely complain about their boss. That's because most drivers in Denver belong to the Yellow Cab Cooperative Association, where they are, in effect, their own boss. The Denver cab coop has been so successful that it is now the fourth largest taxicab company in the nation, handling 85 percent of the cab trips in the Denver metropolitan area.

Before forming their cooperative two years ago, drivers in Denver shared many of the problems their counterparts in other cities still experience. Privately-owned companies attempt to keep wages and operating costs down by hiring indiscriminately and relying on employee turnover rates that can run 350 to 400 percent every year. Vehicles are poorly maintained and, with licenses restricted by the government, there is little incentive to offer competitive services. Drivers, on the other hand, resent the low-prestige work and see little reason to make the company more efficient. As a result, accident rates and insurance premiums are high, and management expects that drivers will steal up to 20 percent of the company's gross.

The Denver cab cooperative addresses all these problems. Because drivers have a stake in the whole company instead of just their own cab, costs are lower and there is a greater cooperation between the drivers and the cooperative's management.

Denver's cab cooperative was formed when the city's largest cab company, Metropolitan Transportation, planned to sell its operation to another private company with a strong anti-union reputation. The drivers, fearing that their union would be broken, decided to buy Metropolitan themselves, using \$200,000 from a strike fund as a downpayment. Since then, wages have doubled and service has improved, while the cooperative is regarded as one



of the best managed cab operations in the country.

So far, the Denver cab cooperative is virtually unique. Cab drivers in a dozen or so other cities buy items such as gasoline and insurance cooperatively. But only a much smaller taxi service in Madison, Wisconsin, resembles the Denver cooperative, where the entire operation is owned by the drivers, who also determine cooperative management policies.

Denver may soon have some company, however, in Minneapolis, a city with a rich cooperative tradition. There, the Guild of Taxi Drivers is trying to form a cooperative to replace the privately owned Yellow Taxi Company, which announced its intention to sell last spring. Guild members are now arranging financing to get the cooperative off the ground.

Financing is not always the major roadblock to forming a cooperative. In New Haven, Connecticut, a proposed taxi coop never got started, despite a \$200,000 capital advance from a donor who supported the idea. The plan was rejected by the state Public Utilities Control Authority (PUC), which regulates cab licenses. When New Haven's only privately owned cab company decided to sell to another private company after years of mismanaging its operations, the PUC refused to grant additional licenses to the cooperative.

Taxicab regulation varies from state to state. In some states, a single authority regulates all cab operations in the state. In others, cab regulation is done at the county or municipal level.

Members of the Denver Cab Cooperative have gained valuable experience, both in an unsuccessful attempt to form a cooperative in the early 1970s and their current success over the past two years. The Denver coop is helping drivers in Minneapolis form their cooperative, and members are willing to help others. The coop publishes a regular newsletter describing their activities. For more information, contact: Tom Hanlon, general manager, 3455 Ringsby Court, Denver CO 80216, 303/893-6464.

## Nation's #1 Recycling State: New Jersey

New Jersey has just begun the most ambitious statewide recycling program in the United States. The state plans to recycle 1.8 million tons of municipal waste each year by 1986. This represents about 25 percent of the solid waste now dumped into New Jersey landfills each year. Materials to be recycled include paper, metals, glass, plastics, yard and food wastes, motor oil, rubber and textiles.

Recyclers estimate that the plan will conserve more than 300 acres of landfill space, as well as the equivalent of 1.9 million barrels of oil each year. Reduced processing requirements will save at least \$200 million in capital costs. The recycling will generate \$24 million per year in jobs, local taxes and revenues to local communities.

The plan is being financed through a 12 cent per cubic yard surcharge on all waste materials landfilled, expected to raise \$6 million per year. The surcharge will end in 1986, when the state hopes that recycling programs will be established well enough to be one their own.

The plan was designed by a coalition of government officials, business leaders and recyclers. For more information, contact: New Jersey Office of Recycling, Room 204, 101 Commerce Street, Newark NJ 201/648-6295.

## Nation's #1 Recycling City: Islip N.Y.

For the past year, the town of Islip, Long Island, (pop. 300,000) has been running the largest multi-material municipal recycling program on the East Coast, if not the entire country.

According to local estimates, 30 percent of Islip's 74,000 households participate, diverting 10 percent of the waste stream for local landfills and recycling about 100 tons of material each day.

The sorting operation uses two shifts a day of seven workers each, five days a week, and an expansion to seven days a week is planned, as participation rates increase. The program revenues already nearly cover all of the program's costs.

Islip recovers aluminum, plastic, ferrous scrap metal, newsprint, glass, scrap paper and corrugated. Only the corrugated is marketed locally.

There are several reasons why the system is working well. First, Islip was ordered by the state of New York to reduce the waste flow to its rapidly filling dump. Second, the ordinance enacted only requires that all recyclables be put out together. Sorting is done afterwards. Third, the town's franchise agreement with private waste haulers allows them to require a separate day for the collection of recyclables. Finally, town officials are committed to making the program work. The Commissioner of Environmental Control actively promotes the system, delights in finding new markets for recyclables and has many improvements in the town's sorting operation. For further information, contact: **Islip Department of Environmental Control, 401 Main Street, Islip NY 11751, 516/224-5640.**

*Information on the Islip, N.Y., and New Jersey recycling plans is from Recycling News, the newsletter of the National Recycling Coalition, 29-28 41st Avenue, Fifth Floor, Long Island City, New York 11101. Individual subscriptions are \$20/yr.*



## The Self-supporting Community Garden

A community garden program in Austin, Texas, is turning to traditional business administration practices to help keep its operation afloat. The Austin Community Gardens, like many others, has always relied on financial subsidies. In Austin, gardeners till state-owned land, and the program is run by a part-time office manager paid with city funds and a part-time coordinator paid with county funds.

With future subsidies in doubt, gardeners have asked a business student at the University of Texas in Austin to develop an annual plan for self-sufficiency. The student will determine the fees and number of plots needed to cover various administrative and operating costs. Austin Community Gardens now numbers 275 plots, and a considerable amount of office work is required to keep track of six month and year-long rentals, clean-up deposits, tool cooperative deposits, attrition and

When writing to any of the contacts mentioned in SELF-RELIANCE, please send a self-addressed stamped envelope. It will speed the reply and will save these folks some money.

waiting lists. In April, the program plans to start a computerized billing system which will help organizers know the current status of each plot. Organizers are also planning to drop a seed store, which has not produced enough revenue to justify a paid staff person's time.

"Right now our fees don't reflect the costs involved," said garden coordinator Rick Manning. Currently, 275 Austin garden plots cost \$25 for six months and \$50 annually for a 650 sq. ft. plot (Austin enjoys two growing seasons). Higher fees, admits Manning, will definitely make community gardening in Austin a middle class activity. But Manning also notes that a skilled gardener can produce about \$420 worth of food each year. For those who simply cannot afford fees, Manning expects to have a limited number of scholarships.

For more information on the Austin garden business plan, contact: **Rick Manning, Austin Community Gardens, 2508 Durwood, Austin TX 78704, 512/444-4011.**

## Canadian Government Backs Recycling

The Ministry of the Environment in Ontario, Canada, has launched a major effort to source separate solid waste for recycling at the municipal level. The Ministry will pay up to half the cost of developing a source separation program. For the first two or three years of operation, the Ministry will also pay "a significant portion" of promotion costs as well as make up the difference between operating costs and revenues. In addition to funds, the Ministry will provide technical assistance, promotion materials, a how-to manual and marketing assistance. For more information, contact: **Adam Ciulini, Waste Management Branch, Ministry of Environment, 2nd Floor, 135 St. Clair Avenue, W., Toronto, Ontario, M4V 1P5, Canada, 416/965-9668.**

# Progress Reports

## Mall Is a 4-letter Word

City officials in Lawrence, Kansas, have rejected plans for a regional shopping mall on the city's outskirts in favor of downtown commercial renovation. The mall, proposed by a Cleveland, Ohio, developer, would have almost equaled the retail space in the central business district in this university city of 52,700. Officials rejected a rezoning request for the proposed site—now a cornfield—for three reasons:

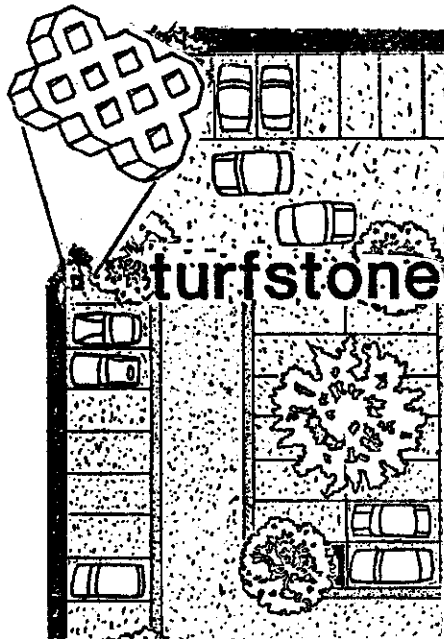
- a county development plan strongly recommended that downtown Lawrence remain the primary regional retail center.
- a study on the mall's potential economic impact showed that both the scale and location of the mall were inappropriate, given the city's growth rate, existing public services and demands for retail space.
- a public opinion survey conducted by the city and the local university showed overwhelming community opposition to the mall and strong support for a new department store downtown.

"Mall has become a four letter word here," said Dean Palos of the Lawrence-Douglas County Planning Commission. Palos said the downtown commercial district is basically healthy, and that a new downtown plan will stress adaptive reuse and infill.

The opinion survey, Palos said, was the "icing on the cake" and provided the objective measure of public sentiment that the city council needed to reject the original mall. Copies of a report on commercial development in Lawrence, including an explanation of the opinion survey, are available for \$4 from: **Planning Commission, Box 708, Lawrence KS 66044, 913/841-7722.**

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## Greening of Dayton

The Dayton Climate Project in Dayton, Ohio, has published an unusually detailed report on its "grass parking lot" experiment. The 30,000 sq. ft. lot, big enough for 80 cars, is paved with lattice concrete, allowing grass to grow in the spaces. The grass helps keep the surrounding area cool, lowers costly water run-off and gives the lot a park-like appearance.

The Climate Project report describes zoning regulation and permits, site description and design, specifications, bids and construction of the concrete, choice of plant material, costs and plans for evaluation of benefits, and a special section on "lessons learned."

Single copies are free, but those interested in using the environment's natural cooling, cleaning and flushing actions to reduce air and noise pollution, reduce energy waste and improve urban appearance should subscribe to the Climate Project's excellent quarterly newsletter, the *International Dayton Line*. It reports on urban climate projects from around the world. Subscriptions are \$4 from: **Fred Bartenstein, City Manager's Office, Box 22, Dayton OH 45401, 513/225-5145**

## Community Self-Insurance Cuts Losses

One of the least publicized drains on a local economy is the cost of insurance. Private insurance companies, if they are to stay in business, must generate more dollars in premiums and interest/investment income than are paid out in losses and expenses. The incentive to reduce losses is secondary.

The effect is particularly severe in poorer neighborhoods, judged higher risks by insurance companies. Residents in these neighborhoods pay more for the same coverage offered to wealthier neighborhoods, or they are denied insurance coverage altogether. When this happens, neighborhoods quickly deteriorate.

Community self-insurance is a way to plug this major leak in a local economy. Through self-insurance, a community gains a strong incentive to reduce loss rather than simply charge higher premiums. A community can also use a substantial portion of the funds generated for investment in the local economy.

The concept of self-insurance is not new. Several large companies, including Ford, Honeywell and 3M have established non-profit self-insurance mechanisms to protect some of their assets. Several states, including Wisconsin and Alabama, self-insure state property and return millions of dollars to their general funds that were formally paid for private insurance premiums.

In California, a limited form of self-insurance has been started on a community-scale. This fall, Mill Valley, California became the first of several towns taking part in a self-insurance mechanism offered by the ABSCO Financial Insurance Group. Mill Valley will offer its residents a homeowner's policy at eight to 15 percent below average private insurance rates. Before buying the policy, however, homeowners must complete a home safety analysis. This analysis will be much more thorough



than those offered on a voluntary basis by many private companies, and homeowner's will be required to correct unsafe conditions.

By actively encouraging loss prevention, Mill Valley hopes to cut losses to 50 percent or below what is paid by residents in premiums. The average in California is 70 percent.

ABCO will manage the program and get 30 percent of revenues. Mill Valley will get 70 percent, out of which it must pay losses and a 10 percent commission to agents. Surplus revenues can be handled in several ways. They may be returned as cash rebates to homeowners, they may pay for education and services to further reduce losses, or they may be returned in the form of lower rates.

Under this system, rates can be established on a city by city basis. Those communities that do a good job, both in terms of management and in reducing losses, will benefit by lower insurance costs. No longer will costs be determined by arbitrary assessments of a property's age or location.

Mill Valley expects to begin writing policies in February. By then, at least four other California towns are expected to join the plan.

A Chicago insurance specialist feels that what works in wealthier, homeowner California towns can also work in poorer inner-city neighborhoods. Gregory Squires, who has studied insurance redlining for the Midwest Regional Office of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, has proposed a non-profit insurance corporation run by a neighborhood association. He is looking for a large, stable and experienced association in an inner-city neighborhood that has suffered from insurance redlining but is still economically healthy.

For information on the California plan, contact: **Richard Zizian, ABCO Financial Insurance Group, 620 Newport Center Drive, Newport Beach CA 92660, 714/644-8260.** For information on Gregory Squires' proposal, contact him at: **Midwest Regional Office of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 230 South Dearborn St, 32nd Floor, Chicago IL 60604, 312/353-7479.**

## NY Hydro Replaces Need For 3 Nukes

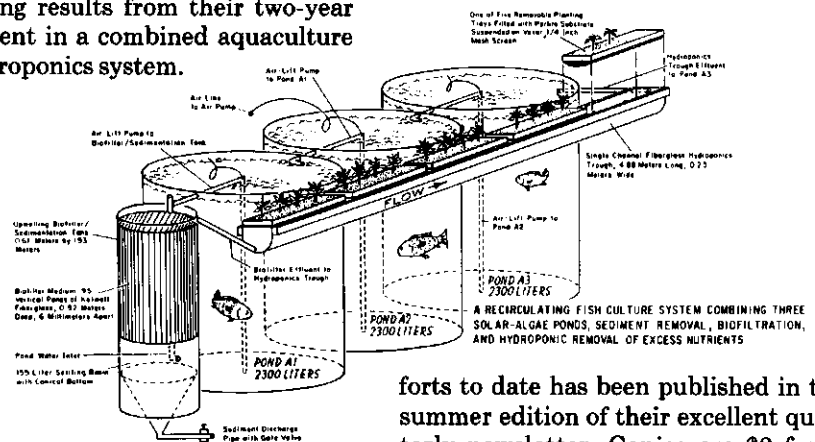
New York State's plan to put 1,050 megawatts of new hydropower into service by 1994 is ahead of schedule. New York already generates 13 percent of its electric needs from hydropower. An inventory by the state has found that another 3,026 megawatts, or enough power to supply another 10 percent of the State's electric

needs, could be harnessed from more than 700 sites around the state. This untapped potential, one-third of which could be on-line in 15 years, is equivalent to three large nuclear or coal-fired generating plants.

New York's hydropower effort includes technical assistance to individuals and small organizations that want to operate a small hydropower facility. The state's Energy Research and Development Authority has published the "Site Owner's Manual for Small Scale Hydropower Development." For more information, contact the Authority at: **Department of Communications, Two Rockefeller Plaza, Albany NY 12223.**

## Aquaculture At New Alchemy

The New Alchemy Institute has begun publishing results from their two-year experiment in a combined aquaculture and hydroponics system.



cient use of space and nutrients in the group's large greenhouse, known as the Ark. Initial experiments have produce plant yields significantly above average U.S. farm soil production.

New Alchemy is experimenting with simpler systems to reduce costs and maintenance. A description of their ef-

Aquaculture, the growing of fish in tanks for food production, has been conducted at New Alchemy for several years. With hydroponics, food is grown without soil through the direct application of nutrients to plant roots, anchored in an inert substrate such as sand or gravel. In the New Alchemy system, excess nutrients from the fish tanks are funneled through a trough which holds the plants.

This system of food production is not intended to replace the extensive organic soil gardening also underway at New Alchemy. But it does make effi-

forts to date has been published in the summer edition of their excellent quarterly newsletter. Copies are \$2 from: **New Alchemy Institute, 237 Hatchville Road, East Falmouth MA 02536.**

Another combined project in aquaculture and hydroponics is underway at Southern Illinois University. Researchers will provide copies of *Use of Hydroponics to Maintain Quality of Recirculated Water in a Fish Culture System* for \$1 postage. They also have a resource list on aquaculture. Contact John Yopp and Dr. Bill Lewis at: **Fisheries Research Laboratory, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale IL 62901.**

# Off the Shelf

Burt W. Griffin

## **Cities Within a City**

1981 \$8.45 ppd.

Gildenmeister Booksellers

13214 Shaker Square

Cleveland OH 44120

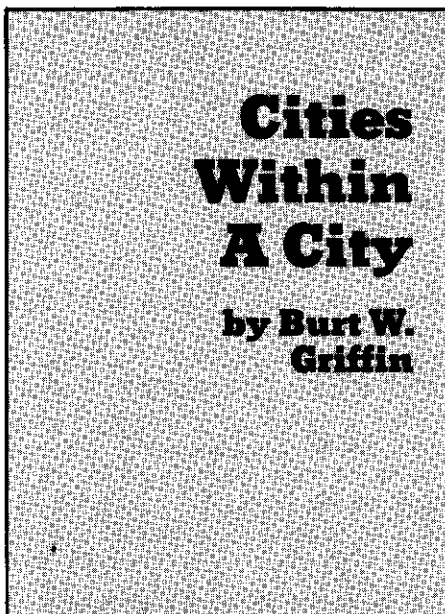
Twelve years after the publication of Milton Kotler's seminal work, *Neighborhood Government*, there is still no city in America with what can be called a real neighborhood government. No neighborhood has been given the power, either in full or in part, to tax or legislate. No neighborhood has gained control of decision-making or administrative power that was once held by municipal authorities.

Nevertheless, neighborhoods are involved in local government more than ever before. Some cities, like Kansas City, Missouri, have officially recognized neighborhood associations since the 1940s. But it wasn't until the 1960s, when federal officials saw how some local governments mismanaged anti-poverty programs, that many neighborhoods gained a hand in local government decision-making. Federal mandates for citizen participation were retained and strengthened through the 1970s, although Reagan's plan to give state and local government more control of federal spending is a decisive setback for neighborhoods.

Not all cities have needed the federal stick to include neighborhoods in their decision-making. In a recent survey of Eastern American cities by Howard Hallman of the Civic Action Institute, about one-third of the cities include neighborhood plans in their overall development plans. These plans are written with the help of citizen advisory committees and public hearings in the neighborhoods.

Hallman also found that about 16 percent of the cities surveyed officially recognize neighborhood councils. About half provide legal recognition through a city charter or an ordinance or resolution of the city council. In the rest, recognition is less formal—administrative policy or action by a chief executive or city department. Again, the powers are mostly advisory. Any programs or funds spent by these councils must be approved by local government officials.

In a new trend, about seven percent



of the cities Hallman surveyed include neighborhood groups in their budget process before public hearings are held. Involvement varies, and no neighborhood has budget control. But the process does put neighborhoods in a better position to bargain with city officials.

In *Cities Within a City*, Burt Griffin, a Cleveland judge, takes the movement for neighborhood involvement in local government a giant step further. Griffin proposes:

"... a two-tiered system of municipal government in which matters of common city-wide impact would be controlled by a central government or top tier, and matters of local concern which admit to legitimate local differences would be decided and administered by sub-cities constituting a lower tier. To the sub-cities would be given administrative control over primary municipal services—police, fire, refuse collection, snow removal, street repair, local parks, recreation, and real property protection and improvement. However, control of taxation, accounting, central purchasing, and revenue distribution would be a function of the central government."

Griffin's plan, on the surface, is extraordinarily appealing, and it is not unrealistic. As Griffin tells us, many foreign cities, including London, Cairo,

Moscow and the well-managed Toronto have variations of the two-tier system. Some American cities, such as New York and St. Paul, have seriously studied such plans, and a national study of the concept has been done by the National Academy of Public Administration.

The main attraction of a two-tier government, as well as Griffin's overall political philosophy, is that it apparently addresses equity as well as democracy. Griffin does not propose that neighborhoods secede from Cleveland, although some citizens of the city's wealthier and more stable sections would jump at the chance of escaping their poorer neighbors. Under Griffin's plan, taxes would still be paid by all to one Cleveland treasury. But Griffin wants funds allocated to independent sub-cities, where locally elected officials would have complete control over how they are spent on what he calls "primary municipal services." These services, including police, fire and refuse collection, are major components of any city budget, although Griffin inexplicably omits education from the list.

In presenting his case, however, Griffin makes several questionable points. A major part of his book is spent arguing that income differences between various Cleveland neighborhoods are not important. Some highly selective statistics are used to show that Clevelanders spend more per capita on city services, but receive less than citizens in surrounding smaller suburbs.

Griffin notes, for example, that "although in 1976 Cleveland's basic municipal services cost \$107 more per capita than similar per capita expenses in East Cleveland, the percentage of residents at a poverty level in East Cleveland was comparable to that in Cleveland." The implication is that independent East Clevelanders are getting a better deal, even though they are just as poor as Clevelanders. But later, Griffin notes that overall per capita income in East Cleveland is almost \$1,000 higher than per capita income in Cleveland, and incomes in every other Cleveland suburb are even higher. Griffin tells us this because he now wants to make the point that "Cleveland seems to be able to raise municipal revenue



despite the poverty of its residents."

But that rounds out the hole in Griffin's argument. Cleveland, as well as most major cities, is poorer than its suburban neighbors. Cleveland raises more per capita than its suburbs because its tax rates are higher. And it gets fewer services for the dollar because costs are higher in older cities with higher percentages of poor people. Streets and water pipes need repair more often, crime rates are higher, houses fall apart or burn down more often, just to name a few of the added expenses.

Far from being unimportant, economic differences between neighborhoods would be a major roadblock in any plan to give them autonomy. It is true, as Griffin notes, that different communities have different spending priorities. And choice in how to spend tax dollars is an excellent reason for giving neighborhoods control over local budgets. But it is also true that different communities have different levels of need. How then, would city funds be allocated? Would stable, tidy neighborhoods like Little Warsaw, which Griffin describes as virtually self-sufficient, receive almost nothing? Would Little Warsaw residents turn over their tax dollars to Hough for the massive rehabilitation and social services this destitute ghetto needs? Any way they are sliced, poor neighborhoods lack economic power (and as a result, they also lack political power). No plan for local government will make poor neighborhoods rich.

Economic arguments aside, Griffin's two-tier plan claims an administrative advantage over Cleveland's current system. After all, local government cannot do much to make its citizens wealthier, but it does have a lot to do with whether or not public services are delivered efficiently. Griffin says that his sub-city system will be more efficient for two reasons: smaller systems are easier to manage, and officials elected in the sub-cities will be more accountable.

There is some evidence that smaller municipal systems are more efficient, such as studies on police protection by Elinor Ostrom and others at Indiana University, which Griffin notes. But more research is needed. Can neighborhoods really collect their own trash effi-

## **In Cities Within a City, Burt Griffin, a Cleveland judge, takes the movement for neighborhood involvement in local government a giant step further.**

ciently? Or does it make more sense, particularly with source separation recycling, to manage trash on a city-wide or even regional basis? Does locally controlled street repair make sense? No one can say for sure. Also, how much local power is Griffin really talking about? With his plan, accounting, central purchasing and revenue distribution would remain centralized, and these are no small weapons of control. Suppose, for example, a neighborhood wants to start an innovative recycling plan, but City Hall decides it is too risky and simply refuses to purchase the equipment. Who has control?

The assumption that sub-city officials will be more accountable rests on the premise that government in the sub-city has been brought "closer to the people." Officials, elected by smaller number of citizens, are presumably more inclined to produce results. Those who don't are presumably easier to remove from office. But this has not always been the case. The ward heelers of big-city political machines, in fact, used small political districts to their advantage, because the bonds of favors, ethnicity and friendship can outweigh competence or incompetence. It was the gross abuse of the ward political system

that caused many cities to change their charters to at-large representation.

Of course, there is considerable attraction in neighborhood government, particularly now when local budgets are cut and neighborhood residents lose services. In Boston, the closing of neighborhood fire and police stations has citizens in some neighborhoods talking of secession. Though that may not be realistic, Boston voters did recently approve a referendum to switch from at-large representation on the city council to a ward system. Perhaps, as other cities cut back on spending, there will be similar moves for tighter neighborhood control of local government.

\* \* \*

Neighborhood government is not as popular research subject as it was in the 1970s, but books, articles and monographs are still published from time to time. Probably the best way to keep current is through the Neighborhood Organization Research Group (**Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, Indiana University, 814 East Third Street, Bloomington IN 47405, 812/337-0441**). NORG publishes a quarterly newsletter which lists the recent literature on neighborhoods (#P 788, \$3.75) is available from **Vance Bibliographies, Post Office Box 229, Monticello IL 61856**. A plan for a multi-tiered government along the lines of Judge Griffin's is discussed in *The Federal City*, by Joseph F. Zimmerman (St. Martin's Press, 1972). Milton Kotler's *Neighborhood Government* is now out of print, but available in most college libraries. Two books by Howard Hallman, *Neighborhood Government in a Metropolitan Setting* (1974) and *Small and Large Together* (1977) are both available from Sage Publications. Hallman's *Organization and Operation of Neighborhood Councils* (1977) is available for \$3.95 from: **the Civil Action Institute, 1010 16th Street NW, Washington DC 20036**. A good reader on decentralization of local government is Volume III of *Citizen Participation in Urban Development*. All three volumes are available for \$11 postpaid from: **URPACC, Box 99, Mt. Kisco NY 10549**.  
—David Macgregor

# Off the Shelf

Si Kahn

## **Organizing: A Guide for Grass Roots Leaders**

1981 396 pp. \$5.95

McGraw-Hill

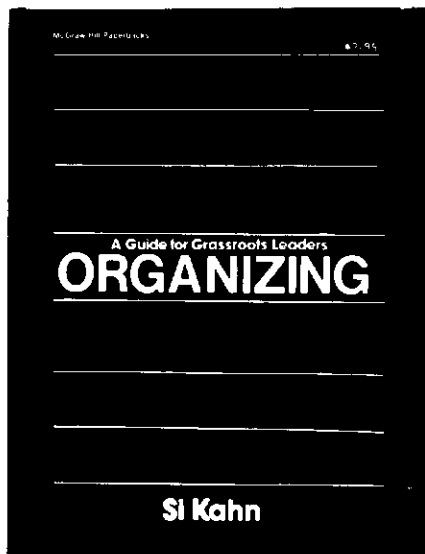
Writing a comprehensive guide to organizing is no small undertaking and Si Kahn's new effort is probably the best around. The liability in such an ambitious project is that the subject of each chapter could have been a book in itself. In the case of *Organizing*, some treatments are too simplistic and there is a tendency to preach too much. But the fundamentals are clearly there and the "nuts and bolts" sections are by and large excellent.

Though the book is subtitled "A Guide for Grassroots Leaders," it's sometimes hard to decipher who the intended audience is. There's definitely something for everyone. For the average person who's mad as hell and ready to do something about it, Kahn offers good advice on how to get started, how to identify issues, how to run a meeting, and the like, along with a well-placed emphasis on the value of permanent organization. For more experienced leaders and organizers, the discussion of thornier problems like staff-leadership conflict and the pros and cons of coalitions might be more valuable.

Chapters on research, training, communication, and media are full of practical information, and the one on culture introduces some interesting ideas. The discussions of money and politics reflect paramount concerns among many community organizations. In the first, Kahn stresses self-sufficiency and a surprisingly often overlooked mechanism—membership dues. On politics, he succeeds in debunking many of the myths that have kept community groups away from electoral politics in the past.

My greatest disappointment in the book is its lack of anecdotes and analytical case studies of actual organizing campaigns and tactics. The frequent use of examples from union organizing is distracting. Relying more on experience to convey information would have made a more colorful, inspiring, and believable book.

I would argue with Kahn's conclu-



**Kahn stresses self-sufficiency and a surprisingly often overlooked mechanism—membership dues. On politics, he succeeds in debunking many of the myths that have kept community groups away from electoral politics in the past.**

sions about coalitions as the route to a "movement for real democracy in America," but the book doesn't purport to be the forum for debate over long-term strategy. He's right to project a broader vision and context for organizing and his poetic afterword does it best, coupled with the adage, "There's no substitute for the hard work of organizing." Si Kahn's book will make it a little easier for those new to the task.

—Madeleine Adamson

(Madeleine Adamson is co-editor of *The Organizer* and national representative for ACORN)

Annie Proulx

## **Back to Barter**

Garden Way Publishing

Charlotte VT 05445

1981 138 pp. \$6.95 ppd.

Hard times and barter seem to go together, so it's no surprise that barter is getting more popular. There are all kinds of barter, ranging from the one-on-one deals common in the country to the sophisticated, high-priced and profitable barter clubs that businesses and wealthy people use to avoid taxes. In between are the community-based, non-profit groups that help people share skills, goods and services that would otherwise go to waste.

All of these systems are described in the newest barter book, *Back to Barter*. Half the book is devoted to rural trading and makes the point that barter is not for everyone. You really need a flair, as shown by the nine rules of the Horse Trader's Handbook, reprinted in a chapter on creative bartering: Rule #7: Get him to name a value first. This puts him on the defensive and sticks him with a stated value while you are free to register incredulity, to laugh, story tell, and counter-offer at will.

*Back to Barter* has an extensive resource section, with listings for many other books and organizations concerned with all kinds of barter. Unfortunately, some of the listings are incomplete or out-of-date. The most important is the Barter Project, which recently moved (**Box 4179, Boulder CO 80306, 303/447-0492**). Director David Tobin publishes an excellent newsletter, *Exchange Networks*, and will send a starter kit on barter for \$2.50. The Barter Project is the single best source for information on community-based, non-profit barter organizations.

A number of how-to booklets are available. Most are published by barter groups and based on their own experiences. Some are better than others. One good one is the information packet from the **Community Skills Exchange, 921 N. Rogers Street, Olympia WA 98502, 206/943-7545**. The cost is \$3 postpaid. Another good source is *The Skills Exchange*, by Kay Fletcher and

## What'll You Take For It?

### Back to Barter by Annie Proulx

**Hard times and barter seem to go together, so it's no surprise that barter is getting more popular.**

Stephen Fawcett, available for \$7 postpaid from the **Center for Public Affairs, University of Kansas, Lawrence KS 66045, 913/864-3701**. Other booklets include *How to Organize and Skills Exchange*, available for \$3 from **Skillsbank, 340 S. Pioneer Street, Ashland OR 97520, 503/482-2265**; an information packet from **The Barter Network, 1717 5th Avenue, San Rafael CA 94901, 415/457-8630** for \$5; an information packet from **SWAP (Sharing Work and Products), 29 South Mills, Madison WI 53715, 608/256-7927** for \$10.

## Workshop of the Role of Earthworms in the Stabilization of Organic Residues

Mary Appelhof  
Volume I - Proceedings  
1981 340 pp. \$25  
Diane Warden  
Volume II - Bibliography  
1981 492 pp. \$50

Two volume set \$75 postpaid  
Flowerfield Enterprises  
10332 Shaver Road  
Kalamazoo MI 49002

Vermicomposting is the breakdown of organic wastes by earthworm consumption. This process is gaining attention as an economical and environmentally safe alternative to landfill, incineration and expensive, risky resource recovery.

In pilot projects in Ogden, Utah and Lufkin, Texas (to be featured in a Public Broadcasting System television show on innovative approaches to solid waste management) vermicomposting appears to be cost competitive in some situations with traditional sludge and municipal waste treatment. Proponents note that credits for the sale of end products (castings and worms) and for the diversion of waste from landfills would make these systems not only less costly than other waste management options, but a profitable enterprise as well. Combined, these credits could amount to \$100 to \$200/ton in developed markets.

Vermicomposting at the household level has been increasing as well. Thanks to the efforts of such vermicomposting pioneers as Mary Appelhof of Flowerfield Enterprises in Kalamazoo, Michigan, worms in home-built plywood bins filled with shredded corrugated paper as bedding are being used to break down kitchen wastes. About one pound of redworms (*Eisenia foetida*) can consume three pounds of waste per week. Appelhof's experiences with neighborhood-scale projects show that people from all walks of life are willing to learn and participate in vermicomposting as a means of waste disposal and as a way to produce worms and potting soil for their own use. Research by psychologist Scott Geller of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia,

confirms that as people gain more information and experience with the procedures, they are more likely to accept a vermicomposting system in their home. Of 744 individuals surveyed by Geller, 35 percent said they would be willing to try using earthworms. Of those who had seen an active worm bin, 75 percent expresses positive attitudes.

There is much to be learned about vermicomposting. What species of worms are best suited for the home and for large-scale disposal? What is the actual process of consumption—do worms eat food wastes or bacteria which act on organic matter? What are the best bedding materials? What is the optimal size and shape for household bins? What are the best ratios for worms, bedding and garbage mass? What is the best climate? What are the best maintenance and worm harvesting procedures?

Deplorably, vermicomposting has received negligible amounts of the half billion public research and development funds spent on resource recovery since 1968. Thankfully, the learning process has been made somewhat easier by the vermicomposting research agenda conference held in April 1980 which has resulted in the *Proceedings* and *Bibliography*.

The conference of 44 international experts was coordinated by Mary Appelhof and supported by the National Science Foundation, which has sponsored such gatherings for resource recovery and recycling technologies.

The *Proceedings* review research data in laboratory, small-scale and industrial applications, policy implications and research needs. The 28 papers presented reflect academic, commercial and government viewpoints. The *Bibliography* is comprised of over 3,000 citations, primarily post-1969 publications relating to earthworms. The bibliography is fully indexed.

Both are essential additions to solid waste management libraries. They will provide answers as well as a direction for further work on the potential for worms as a disposal alternative and environmentally safe business.

—Neil Seldman

# Notes

**Housing Innovation Handbook, 1981, \$26.95 ppd., Atex Inc., Box 8264, Columbus OH 43201, 614/294-8403.** Also available: *Housing Innovation News and Annual Update Service*, \$20. Written for small home construction companies and owner-builders (which together build 70 percent of the nation's housing). Lists 100 innovative devices, materials and techniques in ten areas of housing construction: renewable energy, conservation, materials, construction techniques, water/sewage treatment, site development, total house design, alternative ownership and financing, rehabilitation materials and techniques, and expansions of the housing concept. Each section includes a technical description, a list of advantages and disadvantages, and a reference section for sources, plans, technical assistance, organizations and literature. The breadth of topics covered is extensive: woodlots as low-cost source of fuel, community land trusts, water conserving toilets and superinsulated houses, among others. The bibliographies and list of companies selling products, as well as individuals providing technical assistance adds to the value of this contribution. This book is an attempt to spread knowledge of low-cost, environmentally sound home construction techniques in an industry where it sometimes takes 20 years before an innovation gains widespread acceptance. This collection is by no means complete, but the update service can be easily integrated into the three-ringed handbook, and most home builders should find much of value over the course of a year.

**Two promising films on water:** *Affluent Effluent: New Choices in Wastewater Treatment* covers 17 innovative wastewater treatment projects with an eye for low-cost, environmentally sound technology. *The Alternative in Conservation* promotes water conservation and highlights eight community conservation projects. We haven't seen these films ourselves, but the promotional literature looks good. For rental information, contact: **Water Films, 30 Bates Road, Watertown MA 02172, 617/926-0326.**



**Progress as if Survival Mattered, 1981, 456 pp., \$14.95, Sierra Club Books, 124 Spear, San Francisco CA 94105, 415/495-4770.** Revised and expanded edition of the original "Handbook for a Conserver Society." Essays by Lovins, Henderson, Gussow, the Erlichs, Mander, Speth and others.

**Local Energy Future: A Compendium of Community Programs, July/August 1981, 29 pp., free (single copies) Solar Law Reporter, 1617 Cole Blvd., Golden CO 80401, 303/231-7616.** An excellent survey of local programs in conservation and renewable energy, with an emphasis on government grants and loans, laws and regulations, tax incentives and financing.

**Helping Networks: How People Cope with Problems in the Urban Community, by Donald I. Warren, 1981, 272 pp., \$10.95, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 46556, 219/283-6346.** An extremely academic treatment of an otherwise interesting subject.

**Energy Consumption in New York City, 1981, 93 pp., free (single copies), New York City Office of Economic Development, 17 John Street, New York NY 10038, 212/566-4152.** Energy consumption broken down by fuel type, sector and end-use, with recommendations for saving up to 25 percent of the City's annual energy bill through increased efficiency.

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