Spring Equinox 1977 **ROOTDRINKER** Issue No. 5

Quarterly Weather Report: Sunny skies mixed with some rainy days. Warming as days get longer.

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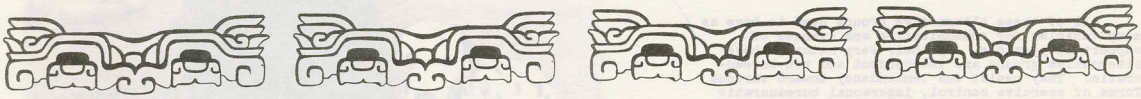

Please write! Letters

P.O. Box 161
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Dear Editor:

I would like to say a few words on the subject of community involvement. As I look around at all the energy being put into preserving the North Country as a pleasant, viable rural community, I am both impressed and depressed. So many important, truly important, causes are before us. So many groups have been started to organize and direct the energy people have for these causes. We have farmers groups, business groups, women's groups, groups promoting safer energy sources and technology, groups concerned with citizen's rights, ...the list goes on and on.

The existence of these groups is impressive to me. People care. They are working together for us all. The depressing part is that while some folks are working so hard for us all, others are simply sitting back and reaping the benefits. Surely each of us has something to contribute toward our common good besides tax money! Community involvement isn't something we can afford to leave to someone else. Anyone who feels that they can should not complain when the North Country fails to meet their needs.

Whether it is a letter, a song, an hour of work, a talk with neighbors, a check or whatever, let's all try to contribute something to make our collective situation a little more like our ideal.

Rebecca Wilson

* * *

Dear Alan,

The North Country needs an alternative newspaper or magazine because the ones we have are neither independent nor objective. For example, the Courier-Freeman in Potsdam. Over a year ago the editor came to the North Country Defense Committee (then the Martin Sostre Defense Committee) and told us that in each issue he would print any material that we gave him. He did this for a few months and then his position changed so abruptly (under orders?) that he never even showed up for an interview that he himself had requested. The paper never covered or mentioned a public speech that Martin Sostre gave to an audience of over 500 people.

When it comes to the fight to stop the 765kv line the bias of the newspapers is even clearer. The Potsdam newspaper was totally unrepresented at the Ft. Covington news conference last October (even the N.Y. Times had a man at that one!) The Ogdensburg paper published an "expose" falsely accusing UPSET and NCDC of wrong doing in the use of printing facilities at Potsdam State University. The Malone paper published a series of editorials criticizing the Ft. Covington farmers, UPSET, and the NCDC pamphlet, "What the North Country needs to know about nuclear plants. They claimed we were outside agitators and our facts were incorrect. When several residents met with the publisher and showed him documentation for every fact in our written material, he promised to publish an explanation. Three months later we are still waiting. On the other hand, hard factual data such as the statements of the Ohio farmers under the 765kv line are ignored or played down in local journals.

There are many other examples. We have been set upon by reporters who ask us to comment on situations without fully explaining them. They even try to laugh at us on their editorial pages. It goes on and on. If you doubt that our newspapers tend to present a one-sided picture, just look at the endorsements of political candidates last November. The papers were nearly unanimous in every office.

Of course our activities do get some coverage, but the above examples indicate how the full explanation of our ideas can be hidden or distorted if those who control the written word disagree with them. And I am convinced that the ownership of the newspapers and magazines in the North Country finds many of our ideas totally unacceptable. For this reason our point of view is unrepresented. We need our own vehicle to explain our ideas and actions.

Incidentally, what is this point of view? I take it as very general, including the fight against the 765 kv line and nuclear plants; the struggle of native americans to excercize their treaty rights; the attempt to expose and improve prison conditions; the fight for equal rights for women; and the protection of the North Country from greedy exploiters, machine-oriented and wasteful, who could be so contemptuous of the life-giving land that they, like the Florida orange growers in January could welcome a death-freeze because the destruction will keep the prices up! So the "they" and the "we" that I am referring to are all those people involved in any or all of these or similar struggles.

What could an alternative magazine or newspaper be? There are many, many ways that it could provide support or even make a direct contribution to these struggles and at the same time be a model for honesty and accuracy that showed how the myth of objectivity is well replaced by principled partisanship.

Here are some of these ways. A people's magazine could report to the people of the North Country what is currently happening in all struggles which are life-giving rather than life-destroying. It could provide a forum for people who are trying to understand our destructive society and trying to stop it--at the same time looking for new approaches and trying to institute them.

In addition to support, our magazine could make a direct contribution to these struggles through investigative reporting. Who pays for speakers such as Kahn and Sawhill, invited by the St. Lawrence Energy Council? Which big supporters of nuclear plants own big plots of land on proposed sites? Have local colleges been raising the costs of housing for faculty and students, squeezing them out of college facilities to rent at exorbitant rates apartments privately owned by the colleges? Are there examples of job discrimination against women that we don't hear about because the victims are afraid to "go public"? It is a lot of hard work, but finding out the answers to questions like these and publishing them, yes or no, along with all the facts would be a real service to our community.

Finally, there is a contribution that all our organizations must try to make. We are all trying to learn how to build a social system which is life-supporting. Of course this must include abstract principles. But just as important, we need to know in detail (read: by specific examples) how various subsystems can work. Within our principles we must know: how do we produce, how do we share resources, how do we interact in organizations, how do we teach what we know? And now, perhaps it is time to try to find out, how do we make a magazine? You must never forget the importance of having your internal organization and editorial policies be just as much an example of our principles as any situation which is described in the journal. In this way, as long as you are searching, you are sure to be making a contribution if all else fails. And if you do have successes, which you surely will, this committment to process, to form as being intimately related to content, will ensure that your contributions will be life-giving.

With the hope that your successes be many and your failures instructive / With the dream of having the time to be involved with you / With love,

Ed Dubinsky