

March 4, 1977

Dear Alan,

This letter is in response to your request for some thoughts about how Rootdrinker might serve us in this area. I see Rootdrinker as a potentially useful link in a "networking" process to help bring together and extend communication among people involved in alternatives to conventional social and economic structures that now dominate our culture. In the North Country we have a wide range of alternative living groups, intentional families, alternative publishers, alternative craftspeople, alternative galleries, new small alternative businesses of all sorts (natural foods, restaurants, shops, farms, etc.). Political action groups such as UPSSET provide further foci for the development and growth of alternative, decentralized, person-centered approaches to societal organization. Many are interested in the introduction of appropriate, intermediate kinds of technologies to replace wasteful, energy-consuming, mechanized, automated, dehumanized approaches to the production of goods and services. There is a wide-spread seeking for alternative, conservation-oriented life styles that value the worth of individual human beings and a nourishing environment for every person to live in as opposed to exploitative approaches that emphasize development, economic growth, bureaucracy, accumulation of wealth, and private ownership leading to territoriality, isolation, and interpersonal alienation.

All of these alternative groups need to have as many vehicles for communication and avenues of support as possible. By their very nature, these alternative groups are independent and non-bureaucratic. They resist the tendency toward various forms of coercive control, impersonal bureaucratic management, and limited communication that I now see as destructive and toxic currents in "mainstream" American society. Thus, we need small alternative communicators such as Rootdrinker to help establish new forms of communication that are compatible with diversity, experimentiveness, and openness of our "new-age" groups.

I hope Rootdrinker will be able to help us fill some of these needs for more avenues of communication.

With love and joy,
Bill

Bill Romey (Ash Lad Press, Canton Gallery, St. Lawrence University)

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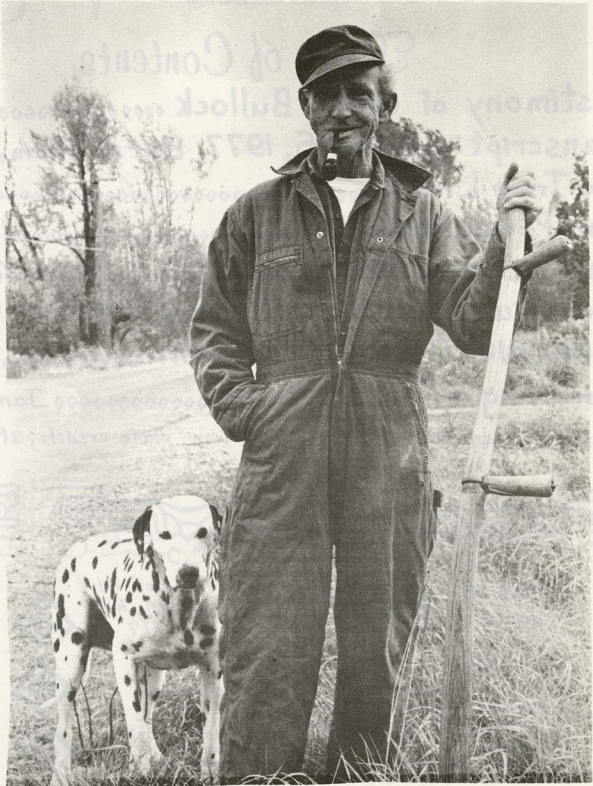
Dear Rootdrinker,

It seems that the people with power have been making decisions lately that will determine the future of our area. Ultra-high voltage lines, nuclear plants, politicians who want to bring industries and jobs but don't seem to care at all what kind of industries and what kind of jobs... "What do you do for a living sir?" "I poison babies. Pays good..." I wish people who want this kind of future would take a ride down to New York City or New Jersey, where there's all the factories anyone could hope for. Oh yes, there are more jobs down there, but it's funny that where there are lots of jobs there are also lots of people so it doesn't seem like there are more jobs. People do make more money down there, but not enough to buy clean air, to breathe, and to buy enough locks on their doors to feel secure either. You'll find many people who are hostile and paranoid, and you can't blame them. It comes from the environment. I feel that there's a spiritual emptiness, too, which comes from being completely out of touch with nature. I spent my first twenty years down there and it's definitely not the kind of future I want.

I think we of the north country have all the advantages over that kind of life, except possibly job security. But we have the security and the freedom that comes from having your own home, land to grow your own food, trees to cut for fuel, and the type of neighbors you can count on for help if things get tough. With some planning, and the right type of development, we can also have more jobs without giving up these precious advantages.

I am not against having industries here; I am just against those that pollute or involve health hazards to the workers. Our main industry is farming, and I think this should be even more emphasized in the future. As the cost of fuel and transportation keeps escalating, the Northeastern U.S. will come to rely more on locally produced food and less from the South and West. High fuel costs may also in the future make the smaller farms of this area more competitive with the high energy--and capital-intensive--farming of the West and Midwest. So, what steps can be taken to help protect the farms we have and encourage more people to take up farming? How about encouraging creation of more local factories which will produce a variety of dairy products such as natural ice cream, yogurt and cheeses. There are so fine cheeses for which a demand exists that are not made anywhere in this country. At present these cheeses are imported, but why couldn't they be made right here as well as anywhere else. A good market already exists.

There are quite a few grains which do well in our area--corn, rye, oats, buckwheat, even soft winter wheat has been grown successfully. Couldn't we have grain mills that turn out dairy ration from locally grown grains as well as cereals and flours for human consumption? There are some cool season vegetables which do as well here as anywhere. Some vegetable growers could get together and cooperatively set up a cannery to market canned organic vegetables, for which there's a market but very little supply. Other crops produced in our county for which demand exceeds supply are maple syrup, honey and strawberries. Perhaps A.T.C., with its experimental farm, could develop other crops which could be grown in the North Country.



Some of these (honey and strawberries, for example) require much less land and capital than dairy farming and could enable more families to become involved. I also think that much of the land which isn't well suited to farming should be planted to trees, including hardwoods, and properly managed to assure a perpetual supply for future industries dependent on wood products for pulp, construction, and even fuel.

Another branch of industrial development for which we are well suited is research and development in the engineering field. Being located near a major engineering college as well as a two-year technical school would certainly be an advantage to such an enterprise. There are bound to be increasing demands for development in such fields as solar energy, wind power, fuel cells, heat pumps, etc. There's no reason why this research couldn't go on in this area as well as anywhere else. An industry based on solar technologies might fit in well with the aluminum and glass industries which are already here. Such a program would provide well paying and meaningful jobs for our young engineers and technicians, and wouldn't need to pollute the environment.

I'm sure that an imaginative person could come up with many more examples of businesses that could be compatible with our environment and way of life. Another point to consider is that jobs should provide more than just a means of livelihood. They should produce something of benefit to society. In other words, enable you to find meaning in what you're doing and give a sense of pride and self-respect. The same values are also fostered by having locally owned small businesses rather than corporations answerable to faraway bosses and stockholders. Even better would be businesses which are cooperatively owned and run by the people who work them. Cooperative sawmills, furniture factories, ceramicware, classical guitar manufacture, cheese factories, organic strawberry jam cannery...?? If our economic institutions and government agencies would encourage this sort of thing, we have talented, skilled people up here who could get all these things going.

There's yet one more very simple way to get jobs up here. Many businesses now demand that their employees work overtime. What if instead, there was no overtime and a conversion of some full-time positions to part-time. This would mean openings for many more people. There are quite a few of us who could get by with a combination of part-time farming and part-time work outside. There are also families where both husband and wife would like to work outside but still have time to spend with their children. This idea is so simple it's ridiculous but I've never heard it discussed or put into effect. Why not?

Our future will be as beautiful or as ugly as we make it. Which way will be decided in the next few years--will we stand up and fight for our independence, our environment and our way of life or will we go along with the big money boys? It's up to us.

Art Pilthch

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