

# The Mustard Seed



Volume 4 Number 2 Summer 1995 The Catholic Worker Movement in Toronto ONE CENT

## TRUTH an experiment TRUTH

by  
Jo Roberts

The issue of The Mustard Seed which you hold in your hand has been something of an experiment for us. We have progressed more or less joyfully through each stage of editing, typesetting and layout without resorting to the familiar technologies we usually use. No Word Perfect or PageMaker - in fact, no computer at all. And no photocopying of graphics or articles.

Last year Chuck Trapkus of the Catholic Worker in Rock Island, Illinois, wrote a fine piece in their newspaper The Catholic Radical critiquing the computer and the effects of its prevalent use on all of us. (We are reprinting his article on page 1.) He ends with a rallying cry to all CW newspapers to boldly fling their computers onto the trash heap.

His article sparked a Wednesday Night Discussion here on technology, and from that came the proposal that we put out an issue of our paper using only a manual typewriter, and original graphics from friends of our community.

"Why bother?" you may ask, "What's all the fuss about?" That question we hope to explore through some of the articles in this issue.

Technology, of itself, is not the problem. Coming from the Greek *tekhnē*, meaning a manual skill, technology implies building. It has been practiced, in various forms, since human beginnings. In Questioning Technology, John Zerzan and Alice Carnes write: "With technology, we select materials abstractly from a

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*This copy of THE MUSTARD SEED has been hand-stamped by a member of the CATHOLIC WORKER community*



variety of settings and meld them into an artificial whole - then sit back to see what will happen. Technology is an impulse, a thought form, before it has anything to do with tools. It grows from the desire to rival the awesome, unfathomable creativity of the earth. This is where domination of nature begins." This idea of technology as a thought form is, I believe, key to breaking open and trying to grasp what goes on in our highly technicised world.

Our history is shot through with moments at which some technological breakthrough led to irrevocable change - not only in how people lived, but in how they saw their world. Imagine how the invention of the clock must have changed the experience of time - time now harnessed, contained, made linear. Think of the invention of writing in an oral culture; of the printing press superceding the quill pen; of the engine in a world of manual labor. Think of the tremendous changes unleashed (with little knowledge of or thought for the repercussions) by the mining and burning of fossil fuels; the splitting of the atom; biogenetic experimentation.

So, what is the development of computer technology doing to the way we look at our world, the way we live in it? I can only offer a few examples to shed a glimmer of light on this massive question. Jacques Ellul, whose writings have probed it deeply, warns: "The world that is being created by the accumulation of technical means is an artificial world, and hence radically different from the natural world."

*continued on page six.....*

## ARISE <sup>from</sup> SILICON SLAVERY

by  
Chuck Trapkus

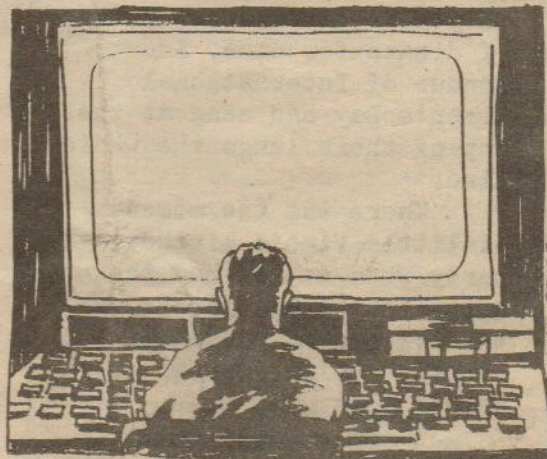
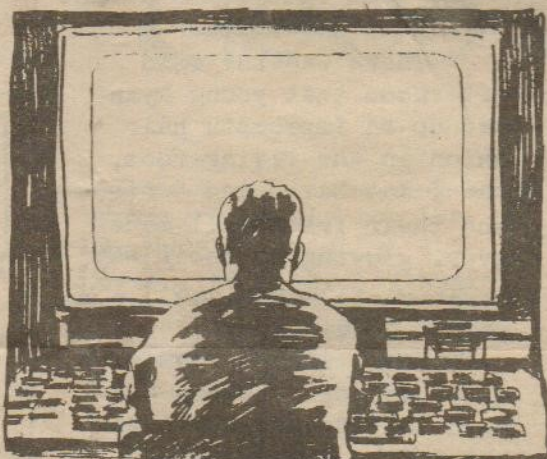
Before I start bashing high technology, I must make a confession: while contemplating this article I got hooked on Steve's computer chess game. And further: one reason I try to avoid computers and high tech gadgetry is that I think they would swallow me. I find much of the microchip world alluring, fascinating and addictive.

Nevertheless, I contend that our technologies rule our society, and this technocracy is only getting worse as years pass.

There is a tendency to politely accept whatever corporate America foists our way, and we soon elevate it from the ranks of absurdity to novelty to necessity. And as with the introduction of the car, phone, TV, electricity, nuclear fission, you name it, there is never any public debate over whether or not we want our society to be completely transformed by the latest technology. The big-money folks know that our materialist appetites will overcome any potential objections. So we stand back and watch the bulldozers level our homes to make way for the coming information superhighway and we can't come up with any good reason why it shouldn't be so.

Of course I'm not unaware of the benefits of computer technology. While some of those benefits are real (certain medical applications, perhaps?), most are of dubious value and many are downright diabolical (military technology). And seeing only the benefits coupled with a best-case-scenario risk assessment, is a trick the disastrous nuclear power industry is known for. When I hear people tell me how much simpler the computer has made their letter-writing, newsletter editing, etc., I wonder if such luxuries can really be justified in light of the bigger picture.

*continued on page four....*



NINA PRICE



## Zack's

by  
Alayna Munce

There was a spirit of mirth at the planning meeting for this, the technology issue of *The Mustard Seed*. I've often reflected on how grateful I am for the sense of humour with which we seem to respond when we find ourselves over our heads. In just talking about all the elements involved in putting out this issue we were already beginning to realize how technology-dependant we are and how difficult this was going to be. (Jim, however, sat cross-legged on the couch, grinning because in just a few days he was going to be off on a three month retreat and would miss our little "experiment" entirely.) When it came to deciding who would write the house article, all eyes turned to me, the fresh-faced one. Never having written a house article before, I enthusiastically agreed, trying to ignore the evil giggles all around the room.

I had no idea how difficult it was going to be.

I ruminated. I made lists. I mulled it over. I locked myself in my room. I crumpled it up and tried again. And again. How does one pull together into one article the details of so many different lives without being trite, without glazing over the difficulties? How does one make an article out of the battles, the disappointments, the people moving in and out, the finding and losing of jobs or apartments, the flu-bugs, the burn-outs, the chores not done, the grief over the struggle of the Innu, the grief over the dying of a mother, the disparate visions, the clashing priorities, the failures? How does one do justice to it all?

And in my efforts to find a way to do justice to these lives we're all living, it struck me that the struggles of writing the house article are similar to the general struggles of living here on the south end of Close Avenue. The questions are the same: how to pull together the details of so many different lives whose trajectories merge and intersect but are in the end separate? How to make it into one story, a whole? How to make a community?

And so I began to look for ways to see it all as a whole. I began to try to keep my eyes open to the ways we hold together instead of focussing only on the urgency of how we fall apart. And I began to think that I just haven't had the right eyes. I haven't had eyes for the moments and details in which you can, if you're looking, glimpse the whole, the holiness, see that we are a community even in our disparity and our falling apart. And when I began to have eyes for those moments I saw that they were everywhere.

There was the moment one windy February evening when we all sat eagerly around the table waiting



for Donelda to pull her bannock from the oven, wrap it in a tea towel and then break it open for us, the traditional bread breathing steam like relief. A moment of silent communion.

There was the mild afternoon that young Ryan set up an impromptu hair salon in the living room, and I met David and Doris and their friend all made over, glowing on their way downtown to Our Place. A moment of delight.

There was the moment after dinner on March 8th when all the swarthy Latin men in the House decided they'd do the kitchen full of dishes for once, in honour of International Women's Day and sang at the top of their lungs the whole time.

There was the moment at little Vino's birthday party when we all had the quiet honour of witnessing the Sri Lankan ritual of feeding one another by hand.

There was the moment of emotion at the coffee house when David (just

before his return to his native country, Bermuda) made a short speech dedicating a song to Jim, thanking him for friendship, making amends for conflicts, and sang in a voice that none of us had anticipated.

There was the mound of composted earth on our front lawn (two dump truck loads donated by the city!) that we moved to the garden in the back wheelbarrow by wheelbarrow, and then suddenly the last wheelbarrow and the sense that this was how faith moves mountains.

There was the quiet Holy Thursday service in our living room and a moment of tenderness when men from very different backgrounds, brought together by common work at the sawmill co-op, washed each other's feet.

And there was the moment on Easter morning out at the waterfront when we stood with the full moon



MARY MANNING

I think one of the things that gives people eyes for those moments is a common prayer life. One night during eucharist at our Wednesday liturgy I saw everybody carrying little bits of a broken-up sun, carrying stars away in their mouths afterward, forming new constellations with their separate ways, their routines, their dead-ends, their tangents and voyages -- brilliant, undulating constellations.

That day, the sky met the pavement. We were walking around in the sky. The Kingdom was here.

That day, before the sun was broken up into stars for us, we all emptied our mouths saying, God I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.

And I believed it.

May we remember that it is a gift to see the moments that bind together the details, the constellations that bind the stars, the Easter that resolves our Lent but does not change it.

May we carry this sight, these moments with us into Pentecost, seeing that the Kingdom is now, and that the spirit is with us, giving us sight, revealing this vision.

*Alayna is marrying a wonderful guy this summer.*

## The Mustard Seed



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# Genocide CANADIAN STYLE

BY  
Kari Reynolds

Elizabeth Penashue, Innu grandmother and activist, sits on the floor of balsam fir boughs in her neighbor's tent. She is using a hand-crank-operated sewing machine -- the kind that Singer travelling salesmen brought into isolated areas around the world. With expert hands, she stitches large pieces of canvas together with long double seams. She is making a new tent for her family, which will be larger than the one they are using now. As she works, she chats with an elderly Innu woman who offers suggestions on tent-making. Suddenly, the peaceful scene is disrupted by the screaming noise of war-planes flying low overhead.

The Innu are the people of Nitassinan, a First Nation encompassing most of Labrador and eastern Quebec. For thousands of years they have lived a nomadic lifestyle as hunters and gatherers. They are justifiably proud of their culture, and they are struggling to maintain it. They have never signed a treaty, or any agreement concerning their land.

In recent times, the Innu have been pushed into villages on the outer edges of their homeland. The interior is being taken over by industrial and military interests. Hydro dams and mining projects have destroyed large sections of their communally-owned land. Most of the rest is overflowed by military jets from Germany, the Netherlands and Britain. These air forces, by invitation from Canada's Department of National Defense (DND) do low-level flight training over the lakes and valleys of the Innu hunting grounds. A bombing range, where the jets drop various kinds of dummy bombs, is just a few miles from Elizabeth's camp.

The camp was deliberately set up near the bombing range as a protest last spring. Innu have been protesting the militarization of their land for years, often on the runways at CFB Goose Bay, where the jets are based. There have been many arrests, and Innu have been sent to the jails in St. John's, Newfoundland. Yet the Innu families that came from several communities to be part of the pro-

test were willing to risk that. Stopping the flights is a matter of great urgency. The current ten-year military contracts with NATO countries are up for renewal. It is feared that the war practices will be increased and expanded.

Elizabeth packs her new tent along with her family's belongings into a kamatik which is pulled by a ski-doo. The hunters could not find much game, or any fish, to feed their families, so they move camp farther from the bombing range. At the new site, they call other Innu hunting camps on a short-wave radio to tell them about their new location. The men do find fish and game, but Elizabeth notices that their meat doesn't look or taste right. She believes that the stress on the animals from the jets has physically changed them.

The NFB film "Hunters and Bombers" shows contrasting images of Innu in their camps and villages, and military men at CFB Goose Bay, speaking about the flight testing. In one scene, Wing Commander Ray Hollett counsels a class of pilots in training, "Don't take any risks. Think of it this way: the ground is cold and hard. Your little pink body is warm, and fragile. Keep them safely apart. That is your primary aim." Ironically, the land that gives the Innu life is characterized as a source of danger, from which the pilots are protected only by the technological cocoon of the warplanes.

The jets continue to fly over the camp, so the Innu decide to move their protest to the center of the bombing range. As they snowshoe through the woods towards the bull's-eye, Elizabeth pauses to look around. "Look at the rivers, look at the trees," she says. "Look at the flowers, the moss, everything. Very very nice. That's why I fight the government. Look at the land, my mother's medicine ... How many more years is the government going to make a mess, waste everything?"

A long-awaited environmental assessment report on military training in Nitassinan was made public March 2. Outrageously, it claims that there are few



serious problems with low-level flying. It does not recommend changes to protect the environment. Rather, it suggests that DND be allowed to more than double the number of flights, to 18,000 per year. This fits in suspiciously well with the federal government's plans to allow four more NATO air forces to train over Innu land. Also, a new bombing range using live explosives, and land and air combat practice, are not ruled out as being dangerous to the environment.

The Innu are being bombarded on many fronts, both literally and politically. They ask all peace-loving people to show their support, which can be done in a number of ways.

- Get involved in protests at embassies and Consulates of NATO countries engaging their forces in Nitassinan.

(At present Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands are testing while Italy, France and Belgium have been invited)

--Write letters to:  
David Collenette, Minister of Defence, Sheila Copps, Minister of the Environment, or your own MP at House of Commons, Ottawa, K1A 0A2.  
--Join people interested in coming together for prayer and action around this issue -contact William at 534-1157

For information about the above (and more) contact the International Campaign for the Innu and the Earth at:  
(416) 531-6154 or  
(905) 849-5501  
fax: (416) 531-5850

Kari is a long-time activist in support of the Innu.

## GOOD WORK

BY  
Len Desroches

Working Directly for the War Machine: "Choose a Career, Live the Adventure"

A local neighborhood newspaper recently dedicated two full pages to a "career" in the military. It was headlined by the Canadian military's own current clever logo: "Choose a Career, Live the Adventure". I wrote to the paper: "I was disappointed that you presented the military purely in terms of a "career". The bottom line of the military is the ability and willingness to kill other people when ordered to do so." "We are being dishonest not to present that, when we present the military as an option for young people.

I hope that young people will be given all the options when presented with "career opportunities". (St. James-town T.O. - Nov. 16, '92) I was somewhat surprised when the paper not only printed the whole of my letter (the above is just an excerpt), but headlined it with: "'Kill when ordered' bottom line of military career". This demonstrated how normalized a "career" in the military has become - and how sometimes, by grace, some publications actually welcome being reminded of the real implications in presenting this to young people.

General Electric's President, Charles Wilson, noted in 1944: "The revulsion against war not too long hence will be an almost insuperable obstacle for us

continued on page seven....



# ARIST

Here, then, I present 11 reasons to oppose computer technology, the big and the small, on the job or on your lap:

**1** The computer manufacturing industry contaminates the environment. Lenny Siegel and John Markoff reported in *The Clinton Quarterly* in 1985 "The manufacture of chips, printed circuit boards, magnetic media, and other high-tech products uses some of the most dangerous materials known to humanity." They go on to describe the toll the industry has taken on the people and environment of California's Silicon Valley. This includes "the area's alarmingly high incidence of birth defects and miscarriages," cancers and other diseases. "Today, scarcely a week passes without the revelation of a new leaking storage tank, poisoned well, or pollution law violation."

**2** Computer use is hazardous to one's health. In his book *Currents of Death* (Simon & Schuster, 1989) Paul Brodeur details many studies that found high rates of birth defects and miscarriages among women who use video display terminals (VDTs). Despite intense and continuing pressure from government and industry to suppress and discredit the findings, the evidence is bleak. A study of 1,583 women in San Francisco during 1981 and '82 "has shed disturbing light on the dozen or more unexplained clusters of birth defects and miscarriages that have occurred in North America during the past decade. Other studies have shown similar results."

**3** Computers cost jobs. Maybe not your computer, maybe not your job, but a prime feature of

## from SILICON SLAVERY

computer technology in the workplace is getting one person to do what formerly required two or three or fifteen. Robots and computers go hand in hand and together displace workers by the thousands. It may be argued that the jobs displaced weren't much to begin with, i.e. factory or office drudgery. Tell that to the folks on the unemployment line.

**4** Computers stress people out in their jobs. The Computer and Business Equipment Manufacturers Association projects that by the year 2000 every white collar worker will use some sort of computer workstation. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has studies showing that clerical workers who use computers suffer higher levels of stress than any other occupational group -- including air traffic controllers. The monotony of office work has led some to call it the electronic assembly line. The impersonalism of the VDT and the reduction of physical activity (you don't even need to put paper in the typewriter anymore) add to the "technostress." On-the-job surveillance of employees by their employers through their computer terminals is now widespread.

## 11 REASONS TO REJECT

**5** Computers distort reality. To be useful to the computer user, information must take the form of "hard data" -- numbers, facts. Jerry Mander, in *In The Absence Of The Sacred* (Sierra Club, 1991), fears that with the rise of the computer "objective, linear knowledge will begin to dominate while other, more subtle forms will recede. Like the wilderness, which has disappeared from the landscape and from our minds, many ways of thinking will also disappear."

**6** Computers are dangerously impersonal. We are raising a generation of children who not only spend more time in front of a video screen than in a classroom; much of the video use is in the classroom. Between TVs, video games and computers, the one thing these children are not learning is how to interact with other human beings.

What's worse, as Gregg Easterbrook wrote in *The Washington Monthly*, March 1983, is that computers

"provide the illusion of human interaction. Asking questions of a computer, for instance, is reasonably similar to asking questions of another person -- better, maybe, because the computer answers exactly what is asked, doesn't grumble, and doesn't mouth off. Working with a computer, all movement and dancing words, is reasonably similar to work-

## Computer technology

ing with another person -- but easier because it's less emotionally demanding, safer, and you certainly don't have to look your best. Computers, unlike people, are wholly controllable and predictable. You can't fail to get along with a computer; it will never turn on you, and it will never insist on talking about what it wants to talk about or doing what it wants to do. It will never find you boring, never ask a favor. Anyone who has used a good computer has sensed this secret allure."

The long-term consequences of this are unknown but very scary. When computers are seen as preferable or superior to people, human life is devalued and no crime is unthinkable.

**7** Computers displace our ability to survive without them. That is, the more we allow computers into our lives the more we find we are dependent on them. Someone who uses a calculator needs to be able to pull out a pencil when the batteries run low. If my bicycle gets a flat or a broken spoke I can fix it or walk or catch a bus or use a car.

But computers engage us far more thoroughly. By revolutionizing the task, they become essential to it. How could NASA or NORAD function without computers? It is becoming increasingly difficult for smaller, less technical businesses and institutions to do without them.

While I was researching this article I tried to look up Paul Brodeur's book at the Rock Island library. The computer was down, however, so I was out of luck. There was no back-up system, and the outdated card catalogue was no help. I later discovered the book was on the shelf the whole time, but I had no way to locate it.

Others tell me of how their jobs grind to a halt when the computer's down, or how they can't write when their word processor is on the blink. I recently called a sporting goods supplier to request their mail order catalog. The clerk was happy to comply, but alas, the computer was down and he could not even jot down my address on paper! I would have to call back, he said. (I didn't.)

### Standards for Technological Innovation:

1. The new tool should be cheaper than the one it replaces.
2. It should be at least as small in scale as the one it replaces.
3. It should do work that is clearly and demonstrably better than the one it replaces.
4. It should use less energy than the one it replaces.
5. If possible, it should use some form of solar energy, such as that of the body.
6. It should be repairable by a person of ordinary intelligence, provided that he or she has the necessary tools.
7. It should be purchasable and repairable as near to home as possible.
8. It should come from a small, privately owned shop or store that will take it back for maintenance and repair.
9. It should not replace or disrupt anything good that already exists, and this includes family and community relationships.

-WEINDELL BERRY



8 Computer technology speeds up our lives, detrimentally. I often hear people say how computers make their jobs/lives easier. "I couldn't write (or edit, publish, make flyers, etc.) without it." Of course they could -- people surely did back in B.C. (before computer) days. They mean they couldn't do it as fast. Speed is the thing.

Eric Gill used to say that the question should be "can this or that technology enable me to do the job better?" Not "can I do it faster?" Our hurryhurry-hurry lifestyles may be good for business, but they're awful for workers, for interpersonal relationships, for our mental and physical health.

For 3 million years humans moved at a speed normal to their environment, keyed to natural rhythms of sun, moon, seasons, plants and animals. With industrialization came machine speed -- humans adapted to rhythms of assembly lines and expressways. Now, in an evolutionarily-insignificant time span, we are accelerating to electronic and computer pace. We now value the lightning-fast "hand-eye coordination" Nintendo provides our children. (What is it for? Ronald Reagan says it makes better bomber pilots, and I believe him.)

E.F. Schumacher wrote in *Good Work* (Harper & Row 1979) that our technological society makes immense claims on our time and attention. "This, I think, must be accounted its greatest evil. Paradoxical as it may seem, modern industrial society, in spite of an incredible proliferation of labor-saving devices, has not given people more time to devote to their all-important spiritual tasks; it has made it exceedingly difficult for anyone, except the most determined, to find any time whatever for these tasks."

9 Computer errors can be catastrophic.

The Center for Defense Information catalogs hundreds of "false alarms" that U.S. strategic forces have experienced, indicating an "enemy attack" based on computer information. Several of these pushed forces to the "alert" status, only to be later dismissed as a flock of birds, a rising moon, or a faulty microchip. What happens when the error is discovered a few seconds too late?

During the Gulf War our high tech weaponry was

praised for its "smart" capabilities. But 70% of our "smart" bombs missed, and the result was a "clean war" that cost only a quarter million Iraqi lives!

This is fallible computer technology -- perhaps more fallible than most technologies because of its sheer complexity. When we accept the technology we must accept the real possibility of worst-case-scenario computer disasters like nuke plant meltdowns, airplane crashes, or the launching of a nuclear war. You won't be able to blame "typewriter technology" or pen and paper for that one.



10 Computers serve the interests of big governments and big business. While most users focus on what computers can do for them, they overlook a more basic issue: computers were designed for big business and governments to get bigger.

Their first serious application was to guide Allied missiles in WWII. Then IBM worked out business applications, and it wasn't until the mid-1970's that personal computers began to appear. Looking at computer technology generally, it is not individuals but governments and huge multinational corporations who benefit most from it.

In *The Rise Of The Computer State* (Random House 1983), David Burnham chronicles the computer's use in the surveillance of the entire U.S. population. "In addition to allowing large organizations to collect large amounts of detailed information, computers and the linked telecommunications networks have considerably enlarged the ability of these organizations to track the daily activities of individual citizens."

Surveillance, global marketing, warfighting, and wholesale plunder of natural resources are all made pos-

miracles of forgiveness. We look to technology for rest and comfort, for healing, for peace, for security, for our livelihoods, for feeding the hungry of the world and instructing the ignorant -- in short, for salvation from the drudgery, danger and darkness of a low tech life. The computer has dazzled us with its awesome powers and, lip service to the contrary, we have little need of any other god.

Jesus warned that "where your treasure is, there your heart is also," and that we cannot serve two masters. Maybe money is an even stronger idol than technology, but it's a close race. Ours is a jealous God who won't tolerate rivals.

Can we view the computer as a blessing from God to be used in God's service? I think not. As with nuclear weapons, I cannot regard as a divine gift something that so effectively separates us from God's creation and hath wrought so much evil. And to put it to "good use" means we must first ignore all its negative aspects (see above).

It saddens me to see so many Catholic Worker newspapers buying into the computer craze. Surely we all make compromises to live in this world, but this is one area where I feel we need to hold the line. We have tried to keep this paper as low tech as readability permits -- we use an ancient manual typewriter and set headlines with transfer type. We paste up by hand with x-acto knives and adhesive wax. For all the reasons listed above, I hereby call on all CW houses to consider abandoning their word processors and try a simpler -- even if a little more time-consuming -- path.

Everything we touch, eat and do nowadays is affected in some way by computers. It gets harder and harder to resist the techno-onslaught in our lives. The day may come when this old typewriter ceases to function, cannot be repaired, and replacements are unavailable. Perhaps then, as in so many other areas of life, it will be time for more compromise -- and God have mercy on us all. But let us do it with open eyes and informed consciences, with fear and trembling.

*Chuck Trapkus is a member of the Rock Island, Illinois Catholic Worker Community.*

sible, or at least easier, with computer "megatechnology." Computers have enabled instantaneous international money transfers that allow today's huge corporations to exist in the first place, to become global, centralized and monolithic.

11 Most importantly, our technological obsession is idolatrous. Since the dawn of the electronic age our society has placed far more faith in the God of Technology than in the God of the Trinity. We are assured that technology will solve all our problems. We are more impressed by miracles of modern technology than by



## An Experiment in Truth

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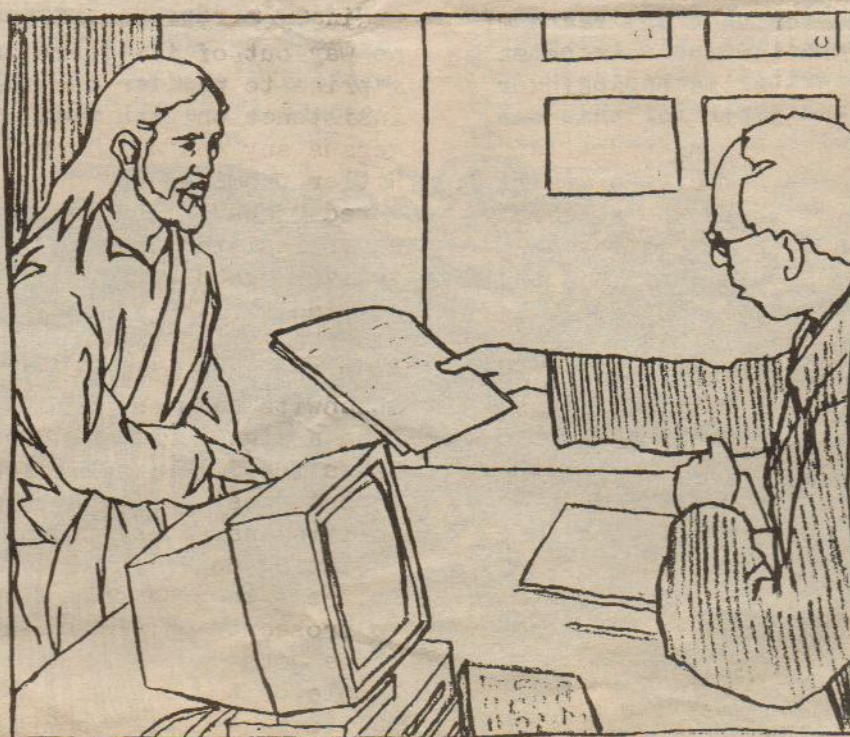
What does this mean? It means that how we live is becoming removed from reality - our human reality, the reality of the natural world - and increasingly dependent on a machine to create the artificial alternative. The phenomenon of virtual reality is but one glaring example. When we are dependent on a computer, our experience is merely derivative - created and shaped by the machine.

Have you noticed how much the language of electronic media has seeped into our everyday conversations? We "get input". We "connect". We "communicate". We get "overloaded", "blow a fuse". And, of course, we are all "in process". Notice behind these words that movement toward the reduction of discourse to the receipt of information.

Information is very different from knowledge, from meaning, from wisdom. It is, to paraphrase Ellul, the reduction of facts, conversation, learning, to the demands of logic. In its very structure, the word implies process - "in-forma-tion" - that the recipient is, albeit unwittingly, being acted upon, being created.

The Media is the backbone of the information highway. The word "media" is the plural of medium, a "means by which something is communicated". (Oxford English Dictionary) Let us look at that standard disseminator of information, the TV news - CNN ushering the world under its electronic umbrella. We are presented with information on, say, what is happening in the former Yugoslavia; impartial, objective fact. But what do we really get? Woven invisibly into the report is the agenda of the owners of the TV company. Every few minutes the news will be punctuated by more information - about how cheap and fun it is to go to McDonalds, or how sexy you'll be in Calvin Klein underwear. Then it's back to Bosnia - the impartial detailing of more killings. (Slovenka Drakulic points out that the documentation of atrocities can easily become pornographic: in other words, it numbs us to everything but immediate sensation.) The information we're given is

short, so our stunted, TV-trained minds can absorb it. There is little history, depth, context given. And, I think, above all, we have no way to respond - are not expected to respond. We sit back passively and are fed, formed. All that is important is that we have that information, although we have lost sight of why, and the killing of thousands is given equal weight, time, as the McDonalds commercial.



"I suggest you get some computer skills"

Bombarding us with information numbs our critical, ethical faculties; our capacity to make choices about how to respond.

As we are drawn into the ambit of the machine, so we lose the ability to "function" without it. With pocket calculators, we don't need mental arithmetic. With Spellcheck on the disk, it's OK if our spelling gets a little rusty. We lose our concentration, our capacities for intellectual wrestling, accustomed as we are to the easy stimulation of the TV. Study, the life of the mind, is debased in our society, reduced simply to the means to get a specific qualification, with anything else abducted away to an ivory tower. And what about the knowledge of the land, learned like language by our grandmothers and grandfathers, of plants and soil and seasons, of care and husbandry, lost with the family farm in little more than a generation?

Ellul contends that the driving force behind this deprival is efficiency - the continual streamlining of means as the end they strove for becomes irrelevant. (An example that springs to mind is how the drive to productivity and cost-effectiveness in

medicine has pushed health so far into the background that in Britain's National Health Service, for example, "patients" have now become "consumers".)

It may sound as if I'm throwing a lot of disparate ideas together here, but my point is, simply, that these things are connected - the mindset of efficiency fuels the power of multinational companies and the power of computer technologies.

Mass culture is a dynamic agent of this streamlining, universalising trend: Madonna, Coke, Levis and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles for sale across the globe. "Choice" is the buzzword, as possibilities play between a bewildering array of essentially identical products: let's see, I could have Classic Coke, Diet Coke, Clear Coke, Caffeine-free Coke, probably Caffeine-free Diet Coke... and then there's Pepsi's offerings... Perhaps the only meaningful choice is whether or not to boycott the stuff.

In this dizzying new world psyche, that both nurtures and is nurtured by computer technology, there is no room for real creativity, spontaneity, difference. The drive to efficiency seeks only the fastest route from A to B, a never-ending sequence of choices between only two options. The millions of switches through which a computer is programmed have two responses: 1, or not-1. Everything that a computer does boils down to yes or no. No maybe, possibly, but, what if.

How does this inform us on a spiritual level? It seems to me that this definitive polarity of 1 or not-1

is the starkest representation possible of Other: me or not-me. Where could such negation not lead us? Everything is divided - into black and white, Us and Them, male and female, Jew and Gentile; into all those categories that, in Galatians, St. Paul promises us are ultimately resolved into One.

Meanwhile, back at Zacchaeus House ... we're still trying to put the paper out.

It must be said, our disentanglement from the glamour of high-tech has been messy. We approached this issue as a Gandhian "experiment in truth", and as such the experience of how this issue happens is as important to us as the end result.

First we met to decide to what extent we wanted to eschew modern technology. Could we use an electronic typewriter? (No) Could we use white-out when we made mistakes on the manual? (Yes) Could we use the photocopier? We had quite a debate over this one, but finally decided, in consensus, that if we were doing this we might as well go the whole hog.

New possibilities have opened up as a result of these decisions. Not being able to reproduce graphics has involved us in what promises to be a happy partnership with illustrator Nina Price; not using photographs has meant Nina can develop the original photos into her own artwork. (No photocopying also extended to editing, as I remembered a little belatedly when standing at the Shalom House photocopier early one morning, halfway through copying Kassie Temple's article!)

Typing up the articles into columns for layout has presented its own challenges. None of us can type well. Nor did we have a decent manual typewriter. Once we found one with a good font, Al volunteered to get it spruced up, and Verna said she'd type for us. A number of lessons here - the house is geared up to put the paper out with an expensive (donated) computer and laser printer, not with two or three much cheaper low-tech manual typewriters. A lot of the hassle involved with this issue, as we try to get manuscripts readable for Verna, and rely on her generosity as we can't do the work well enough ourselves, shows us merely how our skills have leapfrogged over typing straight from writing and calligraphy into

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## GOOD WORK

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to overcome. For that reason, I am convinced that we must begin now to set the machinery in motion for a permanent war economy." (G.E. internal publication, July 19, 1972 - as quoted in "National Boycott News, Winter 92-93) "It boils down to who wins the battle of the dollar - the military or social problems," stated G.E. vice-president for defence sales, L. Berkley Davis, in 1969. (Is it any wonder that the CIA so wildly exaggerated Soviet missile capabilities during the Eisenhower/Kennedy years - as a necessary manipulation for maintaining a permanent war economy?) G.E. continues to be one of the largest recipients of U.S. federal weapons contracts. G.E. also releases more cancer-causing chemical into the air than any other corporation. As Nobel Prize recipient, Rigoberta Menchu stated: "For the corrupt ones, war has been good business." (Fellowship, Oct.-Nov. '92)

A "permanent war economy" has in fact poisoned every aspect of work in North America - and, of course, elsewhere. To quote from Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's chief propagandist - searing words that still burn through history: "Even if we lose, we will win, because our ideals will have penetrated the hearts of our

enemies." The ideal of the permanent war needs the ideal of the "permanent war economy". Both ideals have "penetrated" our hearts! There is no way that the Nazis lost the moral war: the festering, pus-filled sores of day to day militarism cover this sweet earth like cancer from some massive, pathetic addiction.

Working Indirectly for the War Machine: "I just put wires together"

Over the many years of leafletting the workers at Litton Systems regarding their role in making weapons of mass destruction (such as the cruise missile), many of those who sincerely did not approve of such weapons told us: "We just put wires together." Unfortunately, in a permanent war economy, every cog in the war machine is vital. We can no longer say, "I just do the research at the university," or "I just make the laws," or "I just test the weapons." When Albert Einstein realized how his work was used to bomb the innocent civilian men, women and children of Hiroshima, he boldly declared: "If I had known they were going to do this, I would have become a shoe-maker." What a lot of people fail to understand is that Einstein was very serious. He understood that the repair of shoes is "good work", - very good work - compared to the "career" of

bomb building. To make his intention clear, Einstein declared: "Non-cooperation in military matters should be an essential moral principle for all true scientists" - and researchers, and designers, and factory workers, and lawyers, and judges, and bishops, and welders, and security guards, and suppliers,...

From scientist to shoe-maker is a big transformation, a big risk. But as Einstein insisted: "Killing in war is no better than ordinary murder." There is no way out of it: there is a price to pay for our insistence on good work versus any and all "jobs". Hitler promised and delivered "jobs". The people never insisted that he deliver "good work" - and he didn't. The "jobs" eventually led to Auschwitz. Over the gate of the Auschwitz camp one could read a sign declaring "Work makes free". (If we scream "jobs! jobs! jobs!" at our politicians, rather than insisting on "good work", it seems to me hypocritical to prosecute only them when those jobs happen to destroy people or the earth. Most politicians will eventually give what the people really want: jobs or good work. We need to persist relentlessly in our insistence on good work.)

production into useful and needed products, such as road-rail vehicles.

This is what the workers learned as they involved themselves in creating practical alternatives to war production: "The specific things we have achieved are: first, we've demonstrated beyond any doubt the ability of so-called ordinary workers to decide what products they should make, how they should make them and in whose interests they should be made. And so much so, that they've seen through the whole myth of hierarchical management."

The "myth of hierarchical management": I believe this is at the very heart of the cancerous grip which the permanent war economy has on our very souls. The myth of hierarchical management is at the heart of the permanent war economy as it is at the heart of armies. To continue to allow the military corporations' insatiable appetites to determine how we define and structure work in our culture is slowly sapping all spiritual life from us. The myth of hierarchical management in both the economy and the military denies our capacity to respond as a community to God's grace; to live community as we work

.... continued from page six

hunt-and-peck on the computer console. This tells us nothing about the efficiency or inefficiency of the manual typewriter - only that we lacked the equipment and skills to give it a fair chance.

As I write, Bill and Hobo are preparing for layout. Obviously, this paper is still in its lengthy labor pains. I know that without that nifty little delete key, proofreading will be a lot harder this issue. Editing, too, as Bill had no way of knowing how long the articles would turn out until Verna had typed them, and so some editing will have to be for space rather than content. Again, these things would be resolved by experience.

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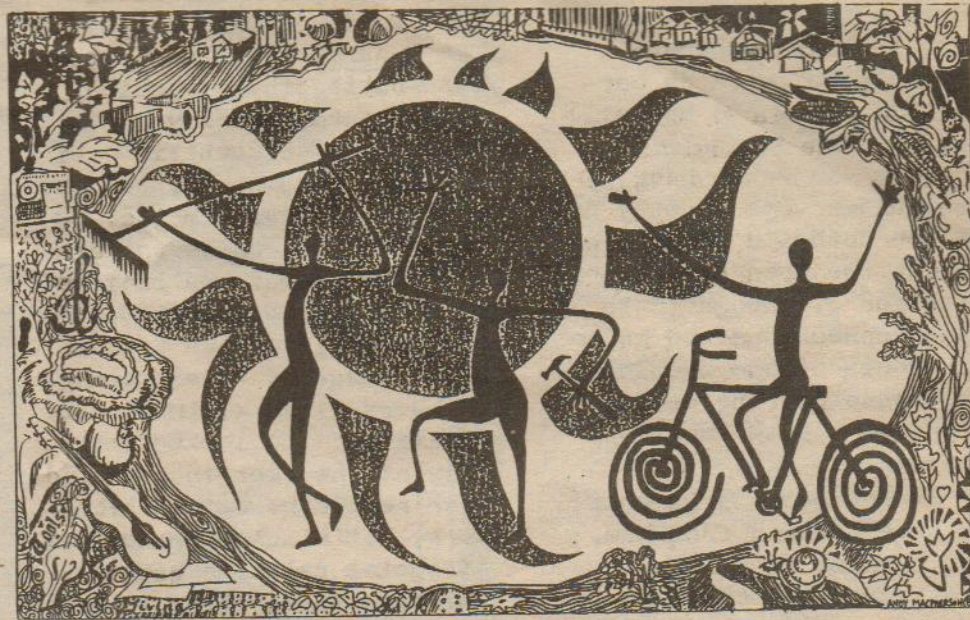
Hobo and I are nearly finished the layout so it's time to write the end to Jo's article. The layout has not been smooth.

I confess. We used the photocopier - for graphics only, mind you. Some great graphics just weren't the right size.

It was particularly exciting working with our community calligrapher, Paul Murphy. Stepping away from the computer has shown us a little more of the beauty that can be created with a low tech pen. It was his idea to add colour to the front page using a stamp that he would carve. In spite of the prospect of stamping 4000 copies of The Mustard Seed, everyone around here responded with enthusiasm (you'll know if it lasted depending on whether your front page has a beautiful stamped impression or an odd blank space front and centre).

Where do we go from here? Trash our computer? I'm not sure. I guess we talk about our experience. And see what we learned. As for the next issue - we'll see... William

Jo is a member of the  
Zacchaeus House Community.



— TOOLS FOR LIVING —

#### Hopelessness Defied: Lucas Workers Spark a Revolution of Values

In the hard struggle of dismantling the genocidal war machine, the word Lucas defies hopelessness. Lucas Aerospace is one of Europe's largest designer and manufacturers of aircraft systems and equipment. In 1974 a committee of Lucas workers got together and drew up a plan aimed at stopping the massive layoffs and converting military

and as we resolve our conflicts without hatred or murder.

In contrast to the words of General Electric's president regarding a permanent war economy, I would say that "we must begin now to set the machinery in motion for a permanent peace economy."

—from Len's book *ALLOW THE WATER - anger, fear, power, work, sexuality, community - AND THE SPIRITUALITY AND PRACTISE OF NONVIOLENCE.*



## VOLUNTARY POVERTY OF TECHNOLOGY

BY

*Katharine Temple*

Call it what you will -- post-industrialism, the computer age, an information explosion, virtual reality -- no label has captured our twin fascinations quite like a glossy ad in a recent New Yorker, for a Lincoln Continental no less.

On The One End, There's  
Luxury

On The Other, Techno-  
logy

Now There's a Point  
Where They Both Come  
Together

The Perfect Balance of  
Luxury and Technology

We all know something is going on, something with global proportions, in the world-wide expansion of unprecedented technologies and the organizational, economic and class structures intertwined with them. There is an air of excitement about getting caught up in the fast lane, even for those who want to change the system. At the same time, all is not well.

Almost nowhere do we hear any real questions about the newest technological systems, apart from complaints, say, about smart bombs that are dumb, computer errors, bureaucratic hassles, or cost, all of which imply that if these separate aberrations could be corrected, all would be well. But, all is not well.

It was Peter Maurin, co-founder with Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker, who taught the need for "clarification of thought;" to make connections, to go to the roots of the problems. Unfortunately, he died in 1949, on the threshold of the nuclear age.

But because of what we have learned from him, and because we are aware that something critical is happening, we have to deepen and clarify our own thought about the massive changes over the past fifty years.

Perhaps it is precisely this prevalent piecemeal approach that presents the biggest obstacle to the needed work of clarification about modern technology. More often than not, when questions do arise, it is machine by machine, in a kind of "show and tell" litany about the merits or demerits of a particular apparatus or procedure. Take, for instance, the computer. Usually the first or second question that comes up about The Catholic

Worker, our newspaper, is how we use the computer to get it out, and seldom do we get back to the content of the paper. Or, the discussion moves to ways we could use the computer more efficiently, without further considerations on how the computer transforms the ways of work and the social relations of work.

Not to see the whole is part of the problem, as Peter Maurin pointed out. Atomization is indeed basic for the stream-lining necessary for the mass production and expansion that is at the heart of modern technology.

In other words, to see an individual machine as part of the whole system, and inter-related to all the other parts, requires a leap of reason that is not in the machine itself, and that the machine does not have space for.

When it comes to the big picture, however, we run into a whole other set of difficulties. One big stumbling-block is how few reliable guides there are, people who are not firm believers that things will get better through a radicalization of what we have now.

The thinker who has helped me the most in these matters is Jacques Ellul (who died last year at his home in Bordeaux, France). The Technological Society was written in 1954, but I am convinced it remains the best place to start.

The lens through which he views society is the concept of technique, "the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity." He looked not only at the emergence of machine technology as hardware, but also the ensemble of social relationships by which we integrate our lives into the centrality of the machine. He examined the whole range of what has happened when the logic of the machine -- rational efficiency or quantification -- becomes the standard for our ways of thinking and believing, making and doing, organizing and controlling.

Which brings us to what Peter Maurin might say about "The Perfect Blend of Luxury and Technology," the specific form of power which now entraps and destroys. The immediate answer is simple. He would, no doubt, announce "Voluntary Poverty" and "Manual Labour" as he always did. The harder question is

whether we can grasp what he would have meant.

A voluntary poverty of technology would involve a deliberate giving up of superfluous machines and devices, especially gadgets, new and different products for the sake of variety, or organizational props. The weight would move from "Why not use whatever is available as much as possible?" to "Why use it unless it is absolutely necessary (that is, there is no alternative) for the Common Good, and is available to poor people?"

*Next Year in  
Jerusalem!*

BY

*William Payne*

"So, how are things going at the house?" I hear this question very often as of late. More often, it seems, or perhaps it's just that it is more difficult to answer these days...

"Well," I try to begin, not sure where to begin. "Has money become a problem?" I am asked. Money has always/never been a problem. Financially, we've always been precarious, at best. And I don't think that that is a problem in itself. Certainly Francis wouldn't. Nor would Dorothy. There is always enough, though never any extra... God's way of keeping us honest.

"It is no more ethical always to give than always to take." I wrote that in my journal a while ago. More specifically, I copied it into my journal, from somewhere else; I don't remember where. But it fits how we're feeling. Especially for those of us who live in Zacchaeus House and share in running it; we're tired.

What happened? Well, a year and a half ago we moved from a ten room house to a 28 room house. On the positive side, we have moved to a neighbourhood where people involved in the community have been able to find affordable housing adjacent to Zacchaeus House. In fact, more than half of the people now involved in running the house on a daily basis are people who live in adjacent houses. On the negative side, the number of people who actually live in Zacchaeus House itself and help run it has stayed the same. Before, we were three people sharing our home with usually six or seven others. On Close Avenue, we are three people sharing our home with ten or fifteen or twenty others.

The attention paid would itself be a means of loosening the hold we have given to the technological mindset.

*Katharine Temple lives and works at the New York Catholic Worker. She originally hails from Southern Ontario.*

### HOUSE NEEDS

*baby security gates  
blankets  
20- or 30-quart Hobart mixer  
10-12 cup coffee maker  
stamps  
mason jars  
board games  
garden tools  
van*

Time to reexamine what we're doing.

So we made a decision not to try to give what we don't have. We decided not to take anyone new into the house for a while (of course within days of this absolutely firm decision we'd made three exceptions!).

We've decided to focus on rebuilding our community and our friendships (tired people tend to hurt one another). We've decided to pray more together. And we've decided to waste some time together looking at where we've been and dreaming about where this is all going.

It's actually starting to feel exciting again (I couldn't've said that a month ago)! A dozen of us are going away for Pentecost Weekend as part of this path together -- a time of prayer and reflection on where we're going together. We ask for your prayers, that this time together will truly be a time of indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We are certainly open to ideas and input from our extended community and from our readers. And, of course, as we struggle to follow Jesus, as a community of broken people (who are nevertheless a lot of fun!), we are always open to new companions on the journey. If you think you'd be interested in exploring possibilities of sharing our life of voluntary poverty, hospitality, justice work and community, give us a call!

Next year in Jerusalem!  
Next year may all be free!

*William would especially like to thank Verna Kemp without whose help this issue would never have seen fruition!*