

Letters to the Editor

21st October 1979

Belatedly, I'd like to comment on John Raftery's article, "Personal Growth and Human Needs in Late Industrialism..." (S & S, March '79). Reading it, I experienced an upsurge of doubts and confused feelings; I shall try to express some of these.

In the first part of the article, sadness as I recognised some truths; how irrelevant the growth movement seems in the face of overwhelming basic survival needs - for warmth, food, shelter and freedom from blatant oppression. But that is to deny the validity of the need for growth and self-actualisation, only to affirm that overwhelming numbers of people in our world are still at the bottom of Maslow's need hierarchy, and to feel grief that that should be so.

Later, rebellion against his developing argument. I can't/don't/won't believe that "self-actualisation" is a synonym for selfishness and crass egotism. Growth is to do with seeking to know our selves, exploring and expanding our consciousness and unconscious. In so doing, we contact others, we reach out and we are touched. We do not grow on an unpeopled star. And our awareness of others is not confined to those physically nearest. With self-growth comes an awareness, a

relatedness, an emotional link with humanity. How can we shut out the suffering? Yet true, that in our economic system, our materialism, we collectively feed on those who have nothing.

John Raftery says "The embodiments of a higher sanity...are those who minimise their total needs and so their consumption and waste". These needs are "consumer" needs, needs which use up the earth's finite material resources. Yes, minimise these, for the sake of all of us. But how can we deny or limit our growth needs, for which the resources are intangible, unlimited and renewable? What justification can there be for shutting down ourselves until we are only barely, woodenly ticking over?

Raftery translates Maslow's "need hierarchy" into a "vicious need circle", and attacks those who tyrannise and drain others to fulfill their selfish needs. Yet these are not people who are growing; these are people stuck at a lower level of need - food, safety, egoism - who have the means to satisfy these needs, but somehow not the ability to assimilate them. Overfed, yet empty and hungry, they grab and gorge and kill in their quest. This is an indictment of a perversion of needs, not of personal growth. Instead, the growth movement may be, in the end, the breaking of the vicious circle. How else

can a person escape from his/her blind consumption, but by developing the insight and self-awareness that gives the possibility of change? The growth movement is far from being merely a bankrupt happy pill for the western middle classes. Drawing together the fragments of our selves, perhaps we can begin to heal our fragmented world system.

On a more immediately personal level; without having begun my inner travelling, I doubt that I would have found the strength to come to work for a time in a small, struggling "bush" community, leaving everybody and everything familiar. I have no messianic vision. I am one infinitely small part of a sometimes unjust and wrong-headed system (maybe so because that system is "hooked" on the western european model of development?). I am often too much of an outsider in this culture and lifestyle to fully understand exhilaration. And yet, my being here introduces new possibilities. In a male dominated society and culture (incalculably more so than the

sexual inequalities of contemporary Europe), my presence as a single woman provokes questions about traditional roles and aspirations amongst the students of my school. Together we have begun to explore ideas about development - to follow the industrial, oil-based western model, or to seek alternatives which may preserve ourselves and our environment? Kerosene and charcoal or solar and water and water power? In my more formal teaching commitment, can we begin to chip away at the destructive stereotypes about women's abilities? And so it goes on... Through being aware of the alternatives, comes our freedom - freedom to make responsible decisions and choices.

Perhaps most importantly, we are communicating, we are working together, we are reaching out and beginning to know one another.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Morrison
Kenya

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