

LOOKOUT!

June 1986

Number 18

IT'S THE LATEST!



U. S. AIR FORCE (AROE); U. S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

NUCLEAR SUNBATHING

INSIDE:

ELECTION WINNERS: THE USUAL
COLLECTION OF IDIOTS, DUNDERHEADS,
AND CRIMINALS

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LOOKOUT HAS A SOLUTION

DIATRIBES AGAINST RELIGION,
PRIVATE PROPERTY, AND
INSTITUTIONALIZED IDIOCY

THE ARTIST AT WORK...

"I still cut down 15 to 20 trees a year...I have to free us from the terrible curse of New England, which is the tree. New England is a jungle and it needs to be beaten back." -- Landscaping tips from the terrible curse of the American city, architect Philip Johnson, whose insipid variations on the concrete box have become an inescapable blight on the urban landscape.

AT LONG LAST: SOLUTIONS TO TWO PERENNIAL S.F. PROBLEMS

News Items:

Already spending over \$70 million a year to dispose of its 640,000 tons of garbage, the City of San Francisco is in danger of soon running out of places to put the stuff.

Despite broad opposition, the highrise construction boom continues unabated in downtown San Francisco, drastically altering both the appearance and the character of the once-lovely City by the Bay.

Two of San Francisco's most persistent problems could be solved in one fell swoop, according to a just-released report by the blue-ribbon Livermore Commission.

Lawrence Livermore, chairperson of the group, which was established for the purpose of introducing sanity and common sense into everyday life, told reporters that he was seized by the inspiration for his bold new plan while waiting for a bus on a downtown corner.

"Everyone complains about the City's skyline being wrecked by all the highrises, but nobody does anything about it," he observed. "It suddenly struck me that the solution could be to put all the office buildings underground."

Livermore went on to say that since most downtown businesses were essentially troglodytic in form and anthill-like in function, there would be little appreciable impact on the affected employees.

"The big problem," he acknowledged, "is how to deal with all the buildings already in place above ground. But that's where the second part of my plan comes into play."

Livermore went on to spell out a concept whereby neighborhood garbage pickups would cease, and people would instead be asked to bring their household refuse with them when commuting to their downtown jobs. The trash would then be disposed of in the spaces between the various skyscrapers, spaces currently being used, to little avail, for vehicular traffic.

"In other words," Livermore said, as a beaming Mayor Feinstein looked on, "the downtown area, which currently serves only one function, and that only during business hours, would do double duty by becoming our long sought-after landfill, providing us with ample room for our garbage well into the 21st century."

And the icing on the cake, or "the cherry on top of the sundae," as Livermore put it, was the proposal that once the financial district is completely entombed, the resulting mountain could be landscaped into a delightful urban park, the centerpiece of which would be Mayor Feinstein's pet project, a downtown baseball stadium. "Of course, it might then be more appropriate to refer to it as an uptown stadium," the Mayor quipped.

Predictably, some objections to the plan were raised, but Livermore dismissed them as the work of cranks and nay-sayers, "who lack the vision and foresight to plan for our city's future." Among the most vocal critics were environmentalists who pointed out that the City could eliminate the enormous expense of burying its garbage (and possibly even turn a profit) by introducing mandatory recycling.

"These people are living in the past," Livermore snorted disdainfully. "Don't they realize all that ecological nonsense has ben passe since the 1970s? Modern San Franciscans have more important things to do than go rooting through their garbage sorting it out for some crackpot recycling scheme."

As for suggestions that spending 40 or more hours a week underground could prove depressing for downtown office workers, Livermore suggested that they could cover their former windows with colorful posters that "could even be an improvement over the views they currently have."



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SEE HEAR 59 E 7 St

Welcome to the Bimillennium: 2000 YEARS OF YOUR GOD DAMNED GLORY

Sick of manufactured hoopla over non-events like the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty? Having a hard time getting excited over the Golden Gate Bridge's 50th birthday? Were you less than thrilled (assuming you can remember that far back) with the orgy of red-white-and-blue patriotism (and merchandising) that accompanied the American bicentennial?

Well, to borrow a phrase from our most quotable President, "You ain't seen nothing yet." Coming up fast (assuming we last that long) is not only the turn of the century, but of the millennium. Think about the amount of misplaced sentiment oozing about with the passing of each ordinary year and multiply it 2000 times. Worse yet, imagine the commercial possibilities.

McDonald's brings you this Historical Moment from the 14th century: "It was the best and the worst of times. In the palaces and courts of Europe, the nobility cavorted in previously unimagined glamor, while in the streets people dropped like flies from the bubonic plague. McDonald's had not yet come into being, and so the peasants were forced to subsist on a meager diet of roots and grains..."

"Why did the Roman Empire fail to survive? Some historians attribute it to a lack of organization. What if they'd had IBM business computers in those days? Why, we might all still be speaking Latin..."

"If Leonardo Da Vinci were alive today, he'd probably be designing fine automobiles for General Motors..."

You get the idea. I'm sure you can come up with similar examples. But the advertising onslaught will be only a minor irritation compared to the political pressures; capitalists and communists alike can be expected to make an all-out push to demonstrate that their particular system is in the planetary driver's seat as we enter the 21st century and the third millennium.

And what about the religious crackpots? It's a safe bet that visitations, manifestations, prophecies, and their assorted pogroms, persecutions, and putsches will enjoy a bull market unlike any seen since the commencement of the Christian era.

Which brings us to the crux of this diatribe: this is the *Christian* era, is it not? I mean, what are we counting those 2000 years from? Sure, you might get a Jew or a Chinese to tell you that it's really a very different date, based on his or her calendar, but if you ask them what year it *really* is, for example, what date would they like printed on their paycheck, most likely they'll all agree that this is 1986 A.D., *Anno Domini*, "in the year of Our Lord."



© Winston Smith

The Lord of which they speak is of course one Jesus Christ, an itinerant and apparently unemployed carpenter who attracted a certain following in the ancient Roman colony of Palestine with his pronouncements on morality and philosophy. There is little or no evidence to suggest that he intended to found the mind-boggling array of spiritual, commercial, and political enterprises that have since sprung up in his name; it is, in fact, unlikely, since he consistently preached a doctrine of poverty and simplicity.

But brooding about the contrast between what Jesus said and what his erstwhile followers have done could easily be a full-time and not very productive occupation. So in thinking about the effect Christianity has had on the world, it would be best to skip right past the religious bunkum and go to the meat of the matter, that being money and power.

How did Christianity get so big, and so fast? The world in which it had its beginnings was in many ways similar to our own. A mighty empire had held sway for so long that its authority was barely questioned, but its power, unbeknownst to most, was already severely eroding from both within and without. The privileged classes, enjoying the comforts and luxuries accrued through several centuries of relatively undisturbed civilization, amused themselves with philosophy, art, and more mundane pursuits of pleasure. The peasants, slaves, and colonized peoples did their best to survive.

There was a state religion, consisting of a bewildering variety of deities of whom the best known today are the ones after which the planets are named. There were also a number of sects and cults, particularly in the outlying stretches of the Empire, and Jesus's native Palestine was home to a number of them; it might be compared to the modern American deep south.

Christianity itself of course didn't come into being until some time after Jesus's death; its organization can be largely attributed to, or blamed on one Paul, commonly called St. Paul, who wrote a number of the books of the New Testament and took it upon himself to explain to the world what Jesus had *really* meant by some of the more obscure things he'd said.

What emerged was a highly organized and authoritarian church, with a hierarchichal and patriarchal structure rivalling that of the Empire itself. That, in fact, is very likely why Christianity triumphed over the ancient, but largely unstructured pagan religions, and ultimately, over the Empire itself.

By the fourth century, most Emperors had become pawns of the Church, and when the Empire completely disintegrated, it was the Church that came closest to taking its place. For nearly a thousand years, the Church set both the spiritual and political agenda for Europe, and when, following the Renaissance, Europe became the dominant force in the world, the Church went along for the ride.

Or perhaps the Church (by this time, actually, the schisms of the Reformation had turned one Church into several, but with the curious result of multiplying rather than dividing its power) was really in the driver's seat all along. Much of the impetus for the colonization and plundering of the New World (and certainly much of its moral justification) was provided by religious authorities. Just as the medieval Crusades had provided brigands and murderers from all over Europe with a spiritually sanctioned excuse for laying waste to the Middle East, *conquistadors* and cowboys could practice genocide in the Americas, secure in the knowledge that they were saving heathen souls for Christ.

But surely as the 20th century draws to a close we have grown beyond such primitive belief systems. And surely you can feel the sarcasm oozing from those words; a few minutes glimpse at the pay-salvation TV preachers (one of whom, Pat Robertson, has a real shot at becoming President of the United States two years from now) will tell you that we have hardly progressed at all from the Dark Ages.

When Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini came to power he was widely accused in the West of leading that country back into the 14th century. How do American

proponents of theocracy differ, unless of course, you're of the opinion that it's all right to run the government according to Holy Scripture as long as it's *your* Holy Scripture.

Robertson, Falwell, and many others of their ilk daily advocate not only the persecution of religious, sexual, and racial minorities, but even genocide and planetary suicide in the name of fulfilling their interpretations of "God's word". The traditionally hidebound Catholic Church appears liberal by comparison, but faced, as are the Main Line Protestant sects, with stiff competition from the fanatic fringe, it, too, has been moving forward into the past under the direction of its reactionary Pope John Paul II (who replaced, for those with short memories, another John Paul who died under mysterious circumstances only a month after taking office. Some suggest a *coup d'etat*; it wouldn't be the first time).

But religious *dementia*, while nothing new, does seem out of place in our supposedly sophisticated modern world. Where then is it finding its ever-increasing stock of customers? And why are the majority of those "getting religion" these days attracted to the most primitive and cruelest cults?

One explanation could be that people as a species are just plain stupid, and, despite a veneer of civilization, haven't really changed all that much since the days of human sacrifices and drinking the blood of virgins. A similar case could be made regarding the apparently unending willingness (albeit also often religiously inspired) of people to enlist and die in whatever harebrained military crusade is presented to them. History is not a good hobby for the would-be optimist.

But one does detect occasional outbreaks of intelligence; and with luck they could spread. I think it's safe to say that even in the America of Bible-toting Rambos there are millions of people who look upon both church and state as jokes in the worse sort of taste. The problem is that the more intelligent people are, the less inclined they are to join in mass movements or organizations that might protect or further their interests. Idiots, on the other hand, seem inherently inclined to gather themselves into institutions.

Yes, as in so many things, it seems to come down to a race against time, with time the most likely winner. Will we even make it to the year 2000, and if so, will it be as a planet at least no worse off than today, or as squabbling bands of tribesmen foraging for survival in a nuclear wasteland? The Christian fundamentalists, secure in the belief that Jesus will be coming soon to rescue them from the ruins they have made of this garden earth, are not going to bother themselves worrying about the legacy they leave behind. Those of us who plan on being around for a while might do well to remember the words of John F. Kennedy, by all evidence not a particularly religious man himself: "Here on earth, God's work must truly be our own."

Most people reject my views as extremist, impractical idealism. "Trees worthy of respect as living beings? The industrial revolution a great leap backwards?" The timber industry is basic to our economy. Remove it and you have instant depression. The whole business world runs on paper and would grind to a halt. A conventional 500 pound bomb dropped on every financial district in the world could not be more devastating. True. But it's a step in the right direction.

Louis Korn, Fort Bragg,
from the
ANDERSON VALLEY ADVERTISER

LETTERS TO THE LOOKOUT

Dear Lawrence:

Just thought I'd write to clarify a few points about your article entitled *What Will the Revolution Change?* (LOOKOUT #17).

There is no such creature as an annual uprising on the UC Berkeley campus. Last year's Biko Steps was the first mass protest since the Vietnam Era. While it can be said that the ebb and flow of the University was not greatly affected, anti-apartheid activists have been visible in other areas beside the campus. Our organization has made contact with rank and file labor militants and tried to break the barriers of traditional student activism. The action at San Francisco's Pier 80 demonstrates this point. The BAFSAM (Bay Area Free South Africa Movement) seemed ineffectual as little information was distributed by the informational picket line and their actions did nothing to address the problems of South African cargo coming in. [As a result of using] direct action to stop shipment of SA cargo, no ships carrying SA cargo have arrived in S.F. since Pier 80 (March 10, 1986).

To judge the actions at Berkeley to be one isolated event would be to take it out of context.

The University administration tried to change the issue to one of Time, Place, and Manner, which means that they could dictate to us how we could conduct our protests beyond mere ineffectual gestures. We felt we had significant support on the campus for the Shantytown. 300 people came to spend the first night (March 31) and 600-1000 folks came to spend the second night (April 2) knowing full well that the cops would be coming. We also managed to build 25 shanties at Biko Plaza, but CAA's (Campaign Against Apartheid) quarrels with United People of Color lost the momentum of the protests. Maybe (UPOC leader) Pedro Noguera's political opportunism got in the way. To blame it all on one person is pointless. Our actions at the campus made the front page of the *Johannesburg Times* and have inspired other student groups around the nation to take similar action against apartheid. If judged on this level, the Shantytown was a success.

Another point about building a Shantytown at Biko Plaza is the the cop shop is in Biko Hall and all they have to do to arrest people is to walk around to the front of the building and cart people off to Santa Rita. California Hall is situated at the center of campus and it would be harder for the police to cart folks off. It is also the office for the chancellor.

Also, I must make it clear that the violence was not caused by activists. The UCPD and 17 other Bay Area police forces were present to respond in force. The policy of the administration was to crush dissent by using excessive violence to scare people away. Affinity groups were extremely effective in blocking the police's exit. Those injured actually thought they could block the departure of the arrested activists nonviolently and seemed to be caught up in the heady euphoria of resisting the cops.

As for informing people about the sickness of society, I feel that the alternative media is stifled by the profit motive. Remember that Madison Avenue spends billions yearly and has centralized the media so manipulation of one's fears can be instantly achieved. The question of communication becomes tantamount to the survival of anti-capitalist and anti-statist forces. Empowerment of yourself and others seems to be one answer to the current dilemma. How this is to be achieved via communication is one question that should be further explored.

The Campaign Against Apartheid is a loose confederation of student radicals, anarchists, Maoists, and trots. We support militant direct action as one method of empowering people. Our meetings are held on Sundays at 1:30 pm, 613 Eshleman Hall at UC Berkeley. The meetings are open to all who are interested (except the police, of course).

Love and Anarchy,
Clark Libertine
San Francisco

LAWRENCE!

Nice zine, as usual. I have started pasting up mine. I hope it is of interest to people. It's mainly odd pictures and poems, including several by Yeats (he's the greatest) and a bunch by me (he's okay, but I can't understand most of his stuff) as well as zine reviews and stuff. If you would like to write something real brief it would be cool; if not, don't think I'll be hurt; I'll just STEAL something from the LOOKOUT. Here is my favorite poem that I wrote (I only call it a poem for lack of a better name).

*The 80s ARE OVER, or nearly so;
the moment is merely a mask being held
up for the benefit of confidence and fear.
You get to make the world the way you
want it. Times are changing; period
follows period.*

OKAY, enough about my zine for now, or till I send you a copy. I have one or two wee bones to pick with you Lawrence. I have nothing against vegetarians or nonsmokers, or people who don't drink, so please don't give me any hassle about my habits. I really believe in freedom of choice on any issue. I am annoyed by the the big pressures from people to stop smoking. People get this idea in their head and then push it to an extreme. They should know by now that no amount of yelling at me will make me want to quit smoking; that will come when I decide it myself. I enjoy smoking. I do keep it down to a minimum, cause when I get up to a pack/pack and a half a day, I can feel it affecting my health (shortness of breath, lack of appetite, lethargy). It's kind of like this drunken driving mania. I fully support it, but it pisses me off that in this state I can't have one beer and drive, cause I'm under 18. They've taken it beyond the point of driver safety. If you are a minor, ANY amount of alcohol in the blood makes you legally drunk. A DWI conviction costs the guilty person thousands of dollars. And that's what I get for one beer, just so they can raise the number of DWI convictions so they can say, "Wisconsin is cracking down on drunk drivers." Arrgghh.

Ah well. I did want to pick the Budweiser bone with you, too. I can't remember what my argument was for that. Basically the same as smoking. Plus the fact that it's not Coors. OH YEAH! I have a shantytown bone to pick, too. I helped build one of these in Madison a month or so ago. Here are the reasons to do it (my reasons):

1. Fun; people I liked were involved.
2. Great news footage of cops ripping the shanties apart and people chanting, "Welcome to South Africa."
3. Singing old protest songs; listening to the Dead and to reggae and to the DKs. Seeing all dem hippies and punks hanging out together.
4. (goes along with 2) Spreads the word via TV.

You should know that so many people only have their TV, and when they see a bunch of people willing to be arrested and get punched and dragged across nails for their cause, they might say, "Hmm, if those people are so committed to this idea, maybe there's some worth to it." The nice thing about protest as opposed to prankster action (which I also like, but that's not what I'm arguing for) is that the protesters get all the good press, doing something literally constructive. Working together. People see the camaraderie and the healthiness of the protesters, therefore they can go along with what they are saying. Then when the cops come, it's like this vicious authority destroying peoples' homes. The cops get all the bad press. People are influenced by instantaneous images; they don't actually think about it. They see two cops dragging a nice-looking teenage girl, who is screaming bloody murder, and they see cops ripping apart these peoples' homes. I mean, obviously, they aren't really their homes, but like I said, it's all in the instantaneous image. OK, enough about that.

I like the sabotage idea too, because it's more DIRECTLY effective. But that's not really all that matters. How does the headline LOOKS GLUED SHUT BY APARTHEID PROTESTERS look? Anyways, in Madison we were doing it on the Capitol lawn; we were the only ones in the country (I think) who did that, cause we were saying that the state should divest. Anyhow, sabotage of the Capitol would be real hard and very dangerous; the place was crawling with security.

Oh yeah, I enjoyed your article about New York City, though I'm not sure which I'm more

If Taxation is Theft, What About Property?

afraid of, icchy houses dropped in from helicopters that all look the same and have magnets on their refrigerators and pool tables in their basements, or criminal types that want to kill me. Well, they're all out to get me one way or another anyhow.

As for your summation of my 17 year-old condition, "self-destructive phase", get that notion out of your head! I have no patience with the self-destructive or self-mutilating types. While you could say I'm destroying my lungs with cigarettes or my mind with drugs, at least I have a cause. I don't care how unpopular this notion is these days, but drugs actually do stimulate my creativity, and that is probably what is most important to me. I hate it how people seem to have this knee-jerk reaction that drugs can be recreation or escape but the old idea of mind-expansion or anything else positive couldn't possibly come out of it. Fuck 'em. You can tell me what drugs do for you or to you, not me. Same way about cigs. I probably shouldn't smoke all my life. Have quit for months at a time. I realize it's not an essentially good thing. It's like a security blanket. As James Dean once said while taking a drag on his cigarette, "This is my mother's tit." Wow, cool, live fast, die young. Too cool to live, too young to die.

But I ramble. Please write if you feel like it, and remember, the moment is yours; exercise no caution.

Yours for a literate
underground,
Andrew
Milwaukee WI

Dear Lawrence,

I just read LOOKOUT #16. I completely agree with you *re* the *Make the Borders Go Away* article; right now I'm going through the USA (leaving Sunday) and you wouldn't believe (well, you might) the rigamarole I have to go through -- visa, customs, I'm only allowed in the country a certain length of time, etc., you know...

In Australia we have a lot of this crap; fortunately it's not as bad as previously. Australia is of course a part of Asia, but no one there thinks of it that way. A group called National Action have a slogan "Asians Out" written all over walls in Sydney and Melbourne; fortunately, a lot of these have been changed to "Racists Out". Asians come to Australia much like Mexicans to the US, I guess. The situation is further paralleled by the way irate white Australians go on about being *Australian* as though their families had been there 1,000,000 years.

However, I do feel Australia should have as few people as possible. The land and animals and plants have been wrecked enough by 200 years of "civilization" without more people using up that fragile environment.

David Nichols
Tetbury Glos., England

Dear Mr. Livermore,

Here at Bill's Small Engines, your publication is a continual reminder of how out of control our world is -- or perhaps, how much control some want of our world to the deprivation of the rest of us.

The enclosed issues of PROCESSED WORLD you may find enlightening, if more enlightenment is needed.

But the question still remains -- what will we do about it? That answer may be in getting people to turn off their TV and in schools teaching children to think instead of stand in line.

Bill Evans
Laytonville
Planet Earth

I like to do all the talking myself. It saves time and prevents arguments. -- Oscar Wilde

Industry is the root of all ugliness -- Ibid.

Pictures of America: on a busy corner of 24th St., the shopping and social thoroughfare of the moderately upscale Noe Valley, sat a woman of 75 or 80 who looked altogether too frail to be out in the Saturday afternoon hustle and bustle. She was trying to sell bits and pieces of sentimental junk, the kind everyone's grandmother has a houseful of. Things like potted plants and knitted doilies; at even 50 cents or a dollar they were overpriced, and nobody was buying. A few people, obviously touched (touched? anyone with a heart would be stricken) by the woman's plaintive tone, offered her handfuls of change.

All right, so the lady wasn't starving. She most likely collects enough from Social Security to pay for her food and rent. Maybe she was just trying to raise the cash for a bottle of booze. Frankly, I don't care what she was hoping to do with the money. A person of her age (or any age, for that matter) should be entitled to live out her life in dignity and comfort. But that sentiment would appear to run directly counter to the trendy new social Darwinism, best expressed as: "Every man for himself, and to hell with the women and children."

I thought back to an argument (okay, a discussion) I'd had a couple weeks earlier with a local Libertarian Party leader. The Libertarians have a lot of built-in appeal because they (quite sensibly) oppose all laws regulating drugs, sex, gambling, and a host of other concerns best left up to the individual. But they also stand for the dismantling of welfare and social security systems on the grounds that governments have no right to forcibly confiscate (via taxes) the property of one person to provide for the well-being of another.

What, the Libertarians ask, is taxation but officially sanctioned robbery? Any citizen who refuses to pay (and is unable to afford a well-connected accountant) is likely to come face to face with armed agents of the state who will seize his property and possibly kidnap and imprison him. How can we accept such clearly criminal behavior, even if it is in the name of helping the poor?

Given the fact that the bulk of our tax money is dumped into pursuits that at best wasteful and more often than not murderous, Libertarian arguments have a seductive logic to them. Shouldn't charitable efforts like providing for the elderly or disabled be purely voluntary? Don't mandatory social security or welfare programs violate our all-important private property rights?

Well, to paraphrase cartoon hero Leroy Lockhorn, just because something makes sense doesn't mean it's true. There's a double fallacy at work here, the first part of which is that taking care of those weaker or less fortunate than us amounts to some noble abstraction called "charity". Wrong; it's just a simple prerequisite of being human, like refraining from killing your neighbor, or not going out of your way to make life difficult for others. True, not everyone is willing to live up to even these minimal standards; that's how governments and police forces first came to be accepted by the public. Even the Libertarians (for the most part) acknowledge the legitimacy of laws aimed at protecting people against violent assaults on their lives or property. But what they're overlooking is that to arrange or participate in a social structure that denies any of its members the

The whole place stank of orange blossoms. -

- H.L. Mencken, on the occasion of his first visit to California.

necessities of life is an act of murder on the installment plan. It's that simple.

And our sacred, God-given right of private property? If taxation is theft, why is the same any less true of property? What is property, but the control of a given object or area by force or the threat thereof? Sure, some folks acquired their riches by good, honest labor, and others quite innocently inherited theirs, but it's not as if the game of wealth and power were being played on a level field. Horatio Alger stories aside, mere survival represents a major victory for many, while a leaky tax shelter is as close to disaster as others will ever come.

Whole cultures, the Native American among them, managed to thrive for centuries with only the vaguest concept of private property. Our own reliance upon it has made possible (and morally justifiable) such marvels as slavery and its watered-down permutations like feudalism and capitalism.

Don't get me wrong; I'm no commie who wants to reduce you all to a diet of boiled cabbage in the name of social equality. I don't even care, assuming you're sufficiently deficient in taste, you care to cruise around in a tawdry European sports car or prance about in Calvin Klein blue jeans. Just don't try to tell me, or that woman on the street corner, that your "right" to pursue these dubious luxuries supersedes her, or my right to luxuries like food, shelter, or life itself.



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Winston Smith is one of Mendocino County's pre-eminent cultural institutions, an artist who, like the proverbial farmer, is outstanding in his field. If you'd like to see more of his work, he (very occasionally) publishes an artzine (he'll probably kill me for calling it that) called FALLOUT. Issues #1 and #2 are unavailable (if they ever existed at all -- I've never seen them), but you can order #5 for \$2 post paid, or for \$4, you can have #3, #4, and #5. Winston's address is POB 1535, Ukiah CA 95482.

NOT

THIS IS A WORTHLESS

by Joe Britz

WARNING: This month's column may end up overwhelmingly optimistic, but it can't be controlled at the moment. I'm feeling too excited, positive, thrilled to be alive, all those alien emotions, to convey anything different. Yeah, everybody, this really is me, Joe Britz, with pen in hand. You know, a former full-time member of the "why-is-life-so-depressing-I-think-I'll-kill-myself" club. It's just that I now believe I've discovered a new sort of perspective on life. A born again PUNK? Nah, I don't like labels; I just thought the term was amusing.

All right, now don't do skipping over to the next article just yet! I'll try to keep this from sounding like a boring sermon. Sure, I know there's an infinite amount of ugly evils throughout the world which gradually cause a near madness to the clear-thinking, compassionate ones among us, but changes will occur in time. We simply have to persevere while attempting to preserve life's remaining beauty for the eventual, inevitable solutions to be worked out.

OK, I'll assume for the sake of argument (and also so I'll have something further to write) that the reader agrees with this constructive outlook. But what about the ordeal of day to day existence and the struggle against getting entangled in society's web of greed? Well, though there might be more ample opportunities for one person to resist than another, I firmly believe that each and every one of us has direct control over his/her life and must vehemently reject the attempted hold by the minority of powermongers. As the great NEWTOWN NEUROTICS song *Wake Up* says: "They've got you exactly where they want you to be, shackled in feelings of inadequacy...Don't sit around, you've got to wake up and live!" The lyrics aren't meant to be preachy or whiny, they're only intention is to state the obvious fact. Isn't it time to take back your life?

The next part becomes sort of difficult. How do you go about retrieving something which you've been conditioned to surrender for your entire life? I guess the answer is different for everyone and depends on how intricately the trap has been laid out. For me, it was simply a matter of leaving lots of miserable aspects of my life behind and moving across the country. And from the point of decision onward, I felt an increasing destruction of the "shackles". This feeling climaxed with the drive to the west coast, a truly uplifting experience. I'm not quite sure how to describe the incomparable emotional high of mountains, blue skies, and sunsets, so I'll just say that it was like getting another chance to live.

All right, so I'll wrap up this disgustingly cheerful column with a few more lines from that NEWTOWN NEUROTICS song. This track, from the *Beggars Can Be Choosers* LP helped me to develop my new philosophy. You should have read some of the despairing junk I used to write in my old zine (it flowed out with more ease than this column haas, but wasn't nearly as rewarding upon finishing). Well, here are the additional lyrics I wanted to share: "For years and years they've been telling you lies, Your full potential's never been realized, And then you slip into the attitude of I make a mess out of everything I do."

MUSIC CAN MAKE YOU STUPID

Review

NO MEANS NO, VICTIM'S FAMILY, MR. T EXPERIENCE, COMPLETE DISORDER, LOOKOUTS at Own's Pizza, Berkeley, May 25

by Joe Britz

(Ed. Note: Joe may be carrying his new positive optimistic outlook to improbable extremes in his review of the LOOKOUTS, but as a believer in the free press, I'll have to print it anyway. Also, in his haste to praise my band (do you suppose he's feeling insecure about his status with the LOOKOUTS?), I think he neglected to emphasize how totally great NO MEANS NO were: the best band I've seen this year)

This was the complete show I've seen since moving to S.F. and it renewed my enthusiasm for live gigs. In my former prowlings of New York City, corpunkrate rock (huge "clubs", video, heavy admission, blaring new wave muzak between sets cutting off all communication except by bullhorn) predominated.

This one was a total underground endeavor. Don't get the idea that it was put together by a group of elite, stuck-up bores, though. Nothing could be further from the truth. From advertising to organizing to the friendly atmosphere surrounding the place, warm feelings radiated. And you could even buy ice cream and pizza between sets!

The opening band, the LOOKOUTS, came all the way down from the mountains of Mendocino County. I have been listening to their demo tape regularly over the past few months, so I knew I had to arrive on time to catch these guys. Despite a couple of problems with feedback and the PA, the band was fantastic! They played a 30 minute set of original songs from their cassette with a couple of new ones thrown in. Their dynamic stage presence (*Give me a break, Joe...Ed.*), lyrics ranging from political concern, as in *One Planet, One People* or *Don't Cry for Nicaragua*, to just plain hilarious, as in *My Mom Smokes Pot*, and thrashing, upbeat music made the LOOKOUTS my favorite for the evening (which says a lot!) I can't wait to see them again in mid-June (opening for MDC at the Farm June 14).

Next up were COMPLETE DISORDER from Marin. This group had a fast, clear sound to it with the guitarist and bassist sharing lead vocals (*regular singer Danny Disorder was unable to perform, having run afoul of his mother or something; details were sketchy...Ed.*) The lyrics measured up to my lofty political/social ideas with one glaring exception: a pro-police song which the singer introduced by asking, "Where would we be without them?" Where would the blood-sucking ruling classes be, he should have asked.

MR T EXPERIENCE followed and received the best response. If you've ever seen them before, you probably wouldn't be surprised. The only non-3 piece band of the evening, MTE lived up to all the good things I've heard about them. Thrash, surf, a MONKEES cover other than *Stepping Stone*, and no metal made this my second must-see-again group in one night.

I can't say the same for VICTIM'S FAMILY. This Sonoma trio were okay, but at too many times bordered on the metal line. When the guitarist kept away from that annoying, wanking sound I've grown to know and hate, they were pretty good (*But Joe, we're talking about artists here...Ed.*)

NO MEANS NO, direct from Victoria, Canada, closed out the show. They literally had someone doing cartwheels on the dance floor with their brand of funk/thrash/pop. I especially enjoyed the part when the singer put down his guitar for a few songs and just danced, jumped, and sang while the rhythm section raged on!

Final observation: I thought it significant to note that members of each band were enjoying the other groups and not behaving in the standard "bored musician" pose. How can we have an effect on the world if we become obsessed with our own self-importance? One of the best shows I've EVER SEEN! (*Definitely the best one of the month, anyway...Ed.*)

BUT SERIOUSLY, FOLKS...

No, really, it was a great show, and as good as the music was, in my opinion it took second place to the spirit of friendliness and cooperation that made the music possible. This was exactly what has been missing from places like the On Broadway and Ruthie's that exist primarily as commercial enterprises.

Most of the best shows this year have happened at Own's Pizza, which is a sort of outgrowth of the New Method Warehouse that was closed down last winter as a result of equal parts of stupidity from the local police and some of the people attending shows there. Own's will be closing soon, too, but now there's hope that something even better will take its place. Recently the people from MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL put down a deposit on a warehouse that, if everything goes well, should serve as a venue for shows as well as a community center for all sorts of other cultural activities. It

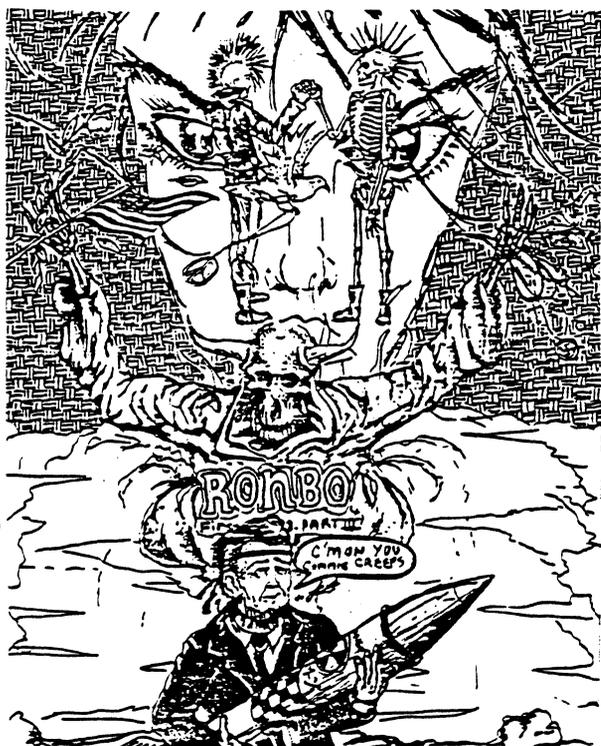
It's a dream that's been a long time coming true, and it's not a reality yet. But the first steps have been taken, and if enough people want it to happen, the first shows could be underway by fall, or even sooner. Money, of course, is a big problem, but just as important is how to keep violence and/or vandalism from destroying this place as they've done to so many others.

I know not everyone will agree with this, but I think one important step would be to adopt and stick to a no-alcohol policy. I know that might not seem fair to the many people who know how to use alcohol in moderation, but it only takes a few people who don't to destroy an entire scene for everybody else. There was no alcohol allowed at the May 25 Own's show, and it didn't seem to be interfering too much with anyone's fun; if anything, people looked livelier and friendlier than normal. I did see several characters who'd been hanging around the front swinging wicked-looking canes at each other (in preparation for taking them out on the dance floor?) decide to leave when they learned they wouldn't be able to drink inside. No great loss, in my opinion.

Anyway, those interested in getting involved in the new warehouse project should stay tuned to MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL; sometime in the next month or two, there should be a meeting announced for everyone who wants to help. It's not too soon to start thinking about what you can do to make this place a success. Musician, artist, writer, organizer, whatever your skill, you have a chance to create a whole new environment from the ground up. Get your imagination in gear and see what you can create.

I care not who makes the country's laws, if only I could write its songs. -- Thomas Paine

Graphic by Jimmi Skidmark



NOSTALGIA:

ROCK AGAINST REAGAN: THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED...AGAIN

July 19, 1984... Hard to believe it was not even two whole years ago; already it seems as remote and colored by the tricks of memory as if it had happened way back in the 1960s. And its mingling of the politics of protest with the music of an alternative culture would have been far more at home in the 60s than on that broiling, sun-stroked parking lot in Orwellian midsummer.

All week long the muggy heat had been more typical of a Midwestern tar pit than of the "cool grey city of love." Overhead, the constant grinding roar of the helicopters made normal conversation, or even thought, next to impossible, especially for those of us from Mendocino, where the Vietnam-style CAMP choppers had been terrorizing the countryside.

In normal times it's often possible to think of San Francisco as being its own little kingdom or city-state, blissfully detached from that remote specter known as the United States of America, but this week of the Democratic convention, that was not an illusion that could be comfortably maintained. The ordinarily jammed city streets entered into a state of limousine gridlock. The TV cameras were everywhere, and so were the people who usually only seen inside the electronic box.

Careening down a Market Street sidewalk (on foot) the morning of the big concert, I nearly collided head-on with a beady-eyed, squirrely little man clad in a Very Expensive dark three-piece suit. It was only as he scurried away that I recognized him as Imperial Tribune George Will, one of the handful of Reaganites capable of speaking in semi-coherent sentences, and thus constantly being called upon both in print and the broadcast media to defend the indefensible.

It gave me something to think about as I continued down the street. Will and I were of similar age and educational background, and blessed or cursed, as the case may be, with similarly grandiloquent vocabularies, yet here he was wallowing in the very bowels of power while I was hop, skip, and jumping my way to a punk rock show that was about abolishing everything he stood for. Had one of us taken a wrong turn somewhere?

A couple blocks away, inside the box-like crypt known as Moscone Hall (and what a misguided memorial to one of the few decent men to ever hold public office in San Francisco!), the "mainstream" elements of the Democratic Party wallowed in a sea of styrofoam and polyester, but beyond its air-conditioned confines, beyond the multi-layered Berlin Wall of "security" forces, a convention of a different sort was beginning to gather. By mid-afternoon there were about 5000 people, very few of whom appeared to fit into Ronald Reagan's vision of a Brave New America.

Sure, a lot of them were just there to be entertained, and some were only looking for a fight, and not necessarily with the police; there were some of the then tiresomely typical scuffles between skins and punks that were tearing the "scene" apart. But there was also a lot of togetherness, and cross-pollination of cultures, as hippies, punks, leftists, and anarchists of all stripes mingled on stage and in the audience.

This event had not just come together on the spur of the moment; it represented a couple years of work and organizing that finally seemed to be bearing real fruit. What was happening here had little or nothing to do with the nihilistic, self-destructive punk-rock movement that had gained so much media attention during the 1970s. Many of the bands involved had been criss-crossing America with a travelling road show of culture and politics called Rock Against Reagan. On the airwaves and in print, the MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL gang had been reporting on and at the same time galvanizing a new youth movement with hopes of, as 7 SECONDS sang, "...succeeding where the hippies failed."

The music was great; all in all it may have qualified as the concert of the 80s. Afterwards, nearly 1000 people marched to the Hall of Justice on Bryant Street to demand the release of a group of protestors who had been illegally arrested that morning while conducting "War Chest Tours" of downtown corporate offices where the dirty business of maintaining the American Empire is conducted. The police attacked the crowd and arrested nearly 300 more.

And then... Nothing. From what would have seemed to be the beginning of a whole new era of protest and activism, the Bay Area punk scene wandered off into oblivion. Bands continued to put out records and put on shows (though they were fewer and more frequently marred by violence), but the heart of the

scene seemed to have gone out of it. If punk was going to be about nothing more than music and bizarre clothing/hair styles, people could just stay home and watch MTV, and many of them did.

Like so many promising developments of the 1980s, punk appears to have run into a dead end. But what has happened to the thousands of young and not-so-young idealists who only a couple years ago saw themselves as the vanguard of a new social revolution? Did they, following in the footsteps of their 60s predecessors, casually trade in their dreams for the comforts and security they once scorned?

There are signs to indicate that this is the case. If it's true that the cynic is merely a frustrated idealist, there must be a lot of frustration going around these days. This is also evidenced by the amount of escapism presented in the name of entertainment -- something which has always been true of mainstream culture, but which is now increasingly obvious in what's left of the punk scene. Where it was once almost pro forma for a band to have at least a song or two devoted to social-political commentary, many of today's most successful bands proudly proclaim that they have nothing to say other than, "Have fun (and buy our records, of course)." Heavy metal and neo-60s psychedelia have been dredged out of the past and touted as the latest trends for modern punks to follow. And most frightening of all, many bands still singing about politics have taken a decidedly right-wing, even fascist turn in their lyrical content.

So is there any hope for the modern counterculture? As I've said in the last couple of issues, I think the whole concept of punk has outlived its usefulness, or at least been taken over by people who've ranged far afield from what it once stood for. But there are just as many people, if not more than ever, who still share the vision of a peaceful and caring world, where creativity is valued more than acquisition and compassion more than power. Is there a place for them in the cold, cruel world of the fast-fading 80s?

I wouldn't be knocking myself out producing this zine every month if I didn't think there was, and this past spring I've been seeing signs that the time of hibernation is past. One of the most encouraging was a show that happened in early April at the Farm and brought together poets like Peter Plate and Greg Fain (outstanding! the best poet I've heard in years) and the TRIBAL WARNING THEATER (reviewed in LOOKOUT #15) with MDC, perhaps the greatest punk band of them all.

It was a Thursday night and the show had hardly been advertised at all, but several hundred people turned up. It was the first time MDC had played locally since the Rock Against Reagan show, and it was obvious that most of the people were there to see them. But this was more than just an exercise in nostalgia; there was a lot of new energy coming forth here, too. There were people who'd never seen MDC before, people who'd never even heard of them, and there were punks who, from the looks on their faces, had never encountered anything resembling a poem.

The intermingling of cultures reminded me of the multi-media happenings of the 60s, or of the very early days of punk. Can it be that we're entering into another one of those periods, where possibilities take precedence over despair and imagination seems to offer a way out of the darkness? Or are we meant to continue wallowing in the terminal stasis of our times? Those of you who regularly read the LOOKOUT know what I believe; the time for rebirth is long overdue.

Cultures, like all living things, flourish and die, but they always leave their seeds to begin the process over again. Many of the people who devoted their lives to previous movements abandoned their ideals when the world failed to transform itself overnight, but none of that energy was ever really lost. As the Chinese say about thunder in winter, it merely sleeps underground until the time comes for it to once more take to the skies.

That time is coming now. With a tide of war and fascism threatening to engulf the world, the need for an alternative culture was never more desperate. Protest alone is not enough, though it's hard to imagine how anyone with a conscience or heart could be silent in these days. But more importantly, people need to be shown that there are other ways to live, that cooperation can replace competition, that life can be both fun and meaningful.

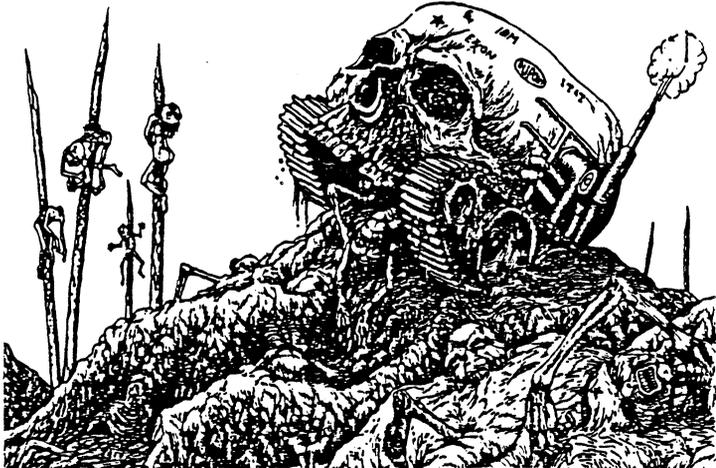
So maybe things were great back in '84, or '77, or '67 compared to now. We have the lessons of both the victories and the mistakes of those times to build on. The best is yet to come. Unfortunately, so is the worst. We had better be ready for it.

Graphic by David Hayes

the return of: **MDC**

with: **VICIOUS CIRCLE** from Australia
ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT
TEST SUBJ-X
LOOKOUTS

SAT. JUNE 14TH 8 PM at the **FARM** PETROD AT ARMY SAN FRANCISCO



SHOW MAY HAVE BEEN MOVED TO AN EARLIER HOUR CALL THE FARM TO BE SURE.