

May 19, 1992

Mr. Brian Lamb
C-SPAN
400 N. Capitol St. NW
Suite 605
Washington DC 20001

Dear Brian:

I enjoyed very much your interview with the chairman of the Center for Public Integrity. One of the things I like about C-SPAN is that you do not have just the tired old cast of people who make the rounds of the talk shows.

In line with this, I would like to suggest Michael Lerner, the editor of TIKKUN magazine. Although I am not able to watch every broadcast hour of C-SPAN, I have not heard from any of my friends or elsewhere that he has been on your network.

I'm enclosing some material that will tell you something about him if you are not a TIKKUN reader. The "Editorial" which was probably published sometime in 1989 was so perceptive and on the cutting edge of the environmental situation that I sent copies of it to people like Al Gore, my friends in the Natural Resources Defense Council and others.

I have some other ideas on local California people you might interview and will send these suggestions shortly.

Sincerely,



Laguna Hills CA 92653
(phone: )

Editorials

Michael Lerner

The Destruction of the Planet

Experts in ecology are increasingly convinced that the survival of the human race, perhaps of all life on the planet, hangs in the balance. If we do not immediately and decisively shift our entire relationship to nature, there is good reason to believe that after another ten years have passed we will have done irrevocable damage to the life-support systems of the planet.

Piecemeal solutions are wildly inadequate—they serve more to soothe our frayed nerves than to seriously confront the issue. So the media select one of the innumerable ways that we are destroying our natural environment (the destruction of the ozone layer, for example), and eventually governmental figures acknowledge that there is a problem.

Yet even when one such issue gets attention, the solutions are too little, too late. Afraid to challenge existing methods of production and consumption, government regulators delay for years the target dates for addressing the problem, set unconscionably high "acceptable" levels of environmental damage (poisons on our apples and other foods, as well as poisons in the air, thus get defined as "safe?"), and make exceptions that guarantee that even when the specific problem is being addressed it is *not* being solved. Meanwhile, we focus all of our energy on two or three explosive areas that have caught the media's attention *this* month, and the damage proceeds apace on dozens of other fronts.

The irrationality of our relationship to nature simply boggles the imagination. In the twenty-first century people will look back and picture this entire age as one of pure self-destructive frenzy, as though we had all become Neros fiddling while Rome burned. It's not as though we can claim that we don't know what's happening. Every night's television brings new information about toxic wastes for which there is no acceptable method of disposal, rain forests in the Northwest and in Central America that are being destroyed, animal species that are being wiped out (elephants, we are told now, may soon be gone—killed for the ivory in their tusks), waterways that are permanently polluted and oceans that are being stripped of all fish, food that can no longer be eaten because it is covered with poisonous

chemical additives and preservatives, and air that is increasingly dangerous to every form of life that is exposed to it.

Nor are we much reassured by the minimal legislative efforts to combat the problem. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), allegedly created to institutionalize our concern about the environment, may serve more as one of the many ways that we pretend that somebody is doing something, that the alarmists must be wrong, that there's somebody in charge who knows what's happening and will eventually take care of business. So we are not totally shocked when somebody like Henry Waxman, an environmentally courageous congressman from Los Angeles, reveals in March 1989 that the amount of poisons being poured into the air wildly exceeds our worst fears, or when he charges the EPA with total failure to do its job adequately. Yet even Congressman Waxman gets restricted to very piecemeal solutions because he can't count on a social movement to raise larger questions and push for larger change.

The psychic numbing process by which we distance ourselves from the possible consequences of nuclear weapons, from the meaning of world hunger, and from the pain that is a consequence of the unfair distribution of the world's resources is manifested in our attitude toward the environmental crisis. Overwhelmed by the scope of the changes we might need to make in order to guarantee the earth's survival, each of us makes the choice to avoid thinking about the issue, to go about our lives as if there were someone else in charge. The media contribute to this mind-set by framing each particular story as though it had no relationship to all the other environmental horror stories. Not only do the media fail to give us any sense of the depth of the disaster we are facing, but their very inability to remember and include in this week's story what was happening last week colludes with our own desire to believe that last week's problem has been solved.

The environmental crisis is a crisis of moral leadership and is a direct result of the breakdown of a moral community. The breakdown of any larger community of shared meaning and purpose leaves each person to fend for him- or herself. The competitive marketplace

rewards us to the extent that we develop personalities that are adept at using and manipulating others. Absent a shared moral community, the person who puts time and energy into saving the planet seems a bit kooky or, even worse, a holdover from the sixties.

One part of the solution is obvious: we need an international system for rational planning of industrial production, farming, fishing, mining, energy resources, and the like. The human race could pull together, decide to prohibit all forms of interference with the natural environment that are destructive to the long-term survival of the human race, and enforce its decisions. But for this plan to work, we would need a moral revolution: a rejection of the self-interest ethics of capitalism. We would also need a powerfully decentralized democratic process so that we could all participate in the discussions and the decision-making processes, as well as a democratically elected and accountable body that could coordinate the various local decisions.

Rational planning sounds boring and unimaginative—it conjures up pictures of do-gooder bureaucrats making decisions for people with whom they have no contact. People have good reason to be suspicious of these kinds of bureaucracies—which is why a program to save the planet must be part of a larger program of democratization. Moreover, the energies mobilized in a massive struggle for democratic control over the environment provide the only basis for combating the incredible power of the second major obstacle to planning: the multinational corporations and those governments that think they can best serve their own people by providing a hospitable business climate for these multinationals.

Rational planning, however, runs counter to the ideology of the free marketplace and the logic of capitalism. Equally important, it runs against the interests of the richer and more powerful countries which can impose their will on economically and politically dependent nations.

But when production decisions are made on the basis of who can get rich, the collective costs to the planet are not factored into the equation. The consumer gets what he or she wants and the producer makes a profit, but nobody speaks for the interests of the human race. The continued adherence to the primacy of the "free marketplace" ensures that every environmental reform will be limited. The fear of challenging the sanctity of the marketplace, the deep belief that any larger system of planning must necessarily undermine human freedom, guarantees that any attempt to protect the environment through centralized planning will be dismissed as communism—or at least ridiculed as utopian or messianic.

Ironically, this is the very moment in history when the cheerleaders for the West are yipping it up about the triumph of capitalism and the demise of socialism throughout the world. The failure of the planned economies of Russia and Eastern Europe and the introduction of market elements in those regions are seen as proof that rational planning will necessarily be less efficient than free enterprise.

Tikkun has little sympathy for the Eastern European systems of government that are wrongly called socialist. Using the language of socialist visionaries who described a society in which working people, through their control of the means of production, would exercise power over all of society's institutions, the ruling elites of Eastern Europe have actually managed to impose bureaucratic dictatorships that organize the masses to serve the needs of the apparatus. The demise of this system is welcomed by all democrats. Far from proving the failure of a system in which the working class controls the society, the erosion of the bureaucratic dictatorships puts genuine socialism on the Eastern European agenda for the first time in many decades. If the people of Eastern Europe choose capitalism instead, it will be a testimony not to the failure of democratic planning, but to their legitimate anger at decades of totalitarianism.

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Ecological planning will work only if it is done fairly, which requires substantively democratic procedures so that people can participate as part of a community debating and deciding how to use the world's natural resources. The people who must be stopped from cutting down rain forests (many of whom believe that they need to continue their work in order to survive economically) cannot be convinced by appeals from North Americans who are economically well off, any more than the workers at defense factories will vote for disarmament programs advocated by upper-middle-class suburbanites who would not have to face the economic dislocations that disarmament might engender. It is not unusual for people in these circumstances to say something like this: "You so-called rational people ask me to worry about the long-term consequences of what I'm doing; that's easy for you, because your short-term survival is ensured. But unless I can ensure my own short-term survival, I refuse to take seriously the long-term issues

you raise. Moreover, I can't take seriously your moral tone, which urges me to worry about the long-term consequences, when I know very well that you in the industrialized countries of Europe and North America have been responsible for creating most of the pollution and most of the raping of the resources of the world."

The major obstacle to rational planning is not Third World countries or the economically marginal, but rather the multinational corporations and the governments that serve their interests. The current environmental crisis requires that the common good take precedence over private interest and over the unrestricted freedom of corporations to make investment and production decisions. There's no way to be serious about saving the planet without facing this broader issue. And precisely for this reason it's important that we challenge the current belief that socialism has died and capitalism has triumphed. Of course, within the constraints of an internationally functioning economic plan, market mechanisms become the most efficient way to organize important sectors of economic life. But without these constraints, the free marketplace has led us, and will continue to lead us, to the brink of ecological disaster.

We must build a movement that does not force people to narrow their political frame of reference and accept minor victories. In fact, only by being visionary and holistic can such a movement energize the American people. When social movements have framed their goals in ways that awaken our collective yearning for a morally centered community, they have been most effective politically.

Yet there remains a major problem. Once we begin to talk about transforming the world, many people tune out. "It's too big for me to handle" is a typical response. "I have enough trouble keeping my own life together." Precisely for that reason, anyone who wishes to save the environment must empower people so that they can overcome their "surplus powerlessness." In the past we've argued that transcending the dynamics of self-blaming and building communities of compassion are essential to this process—and hence we've called for a new kind of liberal or progressive movement that would pay attention to the psychodynamics of daily life and that would speak to people's fundamental spiritual and ethical concerns.

You may not think we have time to create such a movement. In fact, nothing else will succeed without it. Until people feel empowered to address the big picture, they may commiserate about the terrible destruction of the environment, and be genuinely shocked at the changes in the climate and the frequency of cancer and the disappearance of forests and streams and animals; but they will still vote for candidates who advocate the

most minimal and piecemeal changes, and still watch the demise of the planet with the same detachment that characterizes the rest of their lives. Therefore, building a new kind of political community—far different from the hollow shells that parade as the major political parties in America—is a major priority for anyone who wishes to save the planet.

*The author,
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is the editor
of TIKKUN
Magazine*

TIKKUN

A BIMONTHLY JEWISH CRITIQUE OF POLITICS, CULTURE, & SOCIETY

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September 5, 1991

Editor: Michael Lerner

Editor: Michael Lerner

Dear [redacted]:

As we begin the Jewish New Year, I want to take a moment to give you a more personal update about our situation than I can in the pages of the magazine, tell you a little about my own life this past year, and say a bit about the Soviet coup--but first a word about Tikkun's immediate financial situation. It has been two years since we became a reader-supported enterprise--much like National Public Radio or local public television stations. We've been able to continue publishing--not because we've found some wealthy "angel" or organizational support, but because we've discovered that our readers are willing to take our survival needs seriously.

With the November/December issue we will officially celebrate our fifth anniversary. In that time we have been described as a voice of "prophetic chutzpah" and as "one of the most influential magazines in contemporary American political debate." We are doing our best to get advertising revenues, and we've gotten support from some foundations (e.g. the Nathan Cummings Foundation helped finance some important investigative journalism in Tikkun this past year, and we are hopeful that it will continue to provide support in the future). But after all this is taken into account, the bottom line is you: we need your help. We need to find two thousand people who can donate \$100 or more a year, a hundred people who can donate \$500 a year, fifty people who can donate \$1,000 a year, and ten people who can donate \$10,000 a year. We have no one else but you to turn to--we can only function if you are willing to help out.

If you can't possibly afford anything like this, we would still very much appreciate a donation at whatever level you can afford. But I also want to ask that you consider stretching a little beyond what you normally think you can afford to give to a charitable purpose (we are a non-profit organization, and contributions are tax-deductible). Every week I get letters from readers around the world (we have subscribers in Israel, the Soviet Union, Italy, Australia, England, Chile, Brazil, Japan, Mexico, France, and many other countries) telling me how important it is to them to know that they are not alone, that there are other people who have not given up, who share their values and their vision. But because we are so frequently quoted in the media and have made such an impact in legitimating a new way of thinking in both Jewish and liberal circles, people assume that we are a fact, a reality they can count on. But this is only true to the extent that each year there are some people just like you (not people with more money than you, but just like you) who reach into their pockets and give us a little bit more money than they would normally give to a charitable enterprise, because they understand that Tikkun can't exist without that kind of support. Won't you please help us, too?

Politically, this past year was very complicated for us. We printed a wide range of views on how to respond to Saddam Hussein: from those of writers like Daniel Ellsberg and Barbara Ehrenreich who advocated continuing sanctions, to those of thinkers like Michael Walzer who thought the January intervention was a "just war." Tikkun became a rallying point for many who had deep questions about the war, but who also felt unrepresented by the superficial sloganeering of

some parts of the anti-war movement. We sponsored a series of "Jewish teach-ins on the war"---in San Francisco, Boston, and Los Angeles---and found that we were successful in creating a "safe space" for many Jewish liberals to explore the complexities of their feelings and thoughts on the conflict. Out of our experience during the war, we also decided to write a booklet about anti-Semitism on the Left, exploring the difference between being anti-Semitic and being critical of the current policies of the State of Israel.

In April some of the Tikkun staff went to Israel to organize Tikkun's Israel Conference ("Solidarity with the Israeli Peace Movement"). The conference was extraordinarily successful--more than 500 Israelis joined 200 Diaspora Jews in an intense rethinking of the strategies and politics of the peace movement. But even this wasn't all rosy--for an account of some of the complicated dynamics please read the September/October issue. We were particularly delighted to see Senator Paul Wellstone make a special trip to Israel to be with us--the first time a U.S. Senator had come to Israel to identify publicly with the Israeli peace movement and listen to its concerns.

Some of you may have read about charges brought against me in Israel when a right-winger went to the police accusing me of "sedition." He alleged that I had urged Israelis not to serve in the Israeli army. I never advocated this, and in fact my son is planning to enter the Israeli army after completing college (naturally as a parent I'm worried about his safety, but I've always supported his decision in principle). In Israel, anyone can bring a charge, but the police don't have to investigate. While the Israeli police dropped the matter, the American Jewish press (mostly house organs of the American Jewish establishment) attempted to use this incident to discredit Tikkun and me, and to downplay the significance of the conference--the largest gathering of peace-movement-supporting American Jews ever to convene in Israel. And most of these papers routinely ignored requests to print my denial of the charges.

The attempted coup in the Soviet Union happened after our September issue had gone to press. Most of us in the peace and disarmament communities in the U.S. had been doing our best to amplify Gorbachev's warnings that hard-line communists would seek to depose him and block the transition to a freer marketplace and democratic reforms--unless he could obtain adequate Western economic assistance to offset the Soviet economic crisis. Bush lacked the vision to put money behind his fantasies of a New World Order and many right-wingers continue to feel that the deeper the economic crisis and suffering of the Soviet Union, the more Western capitalist economics are vindicated. Nor were U.S. right-wingers particularly worried about the possibility of a coup: even in its failure the coup will be used as evidence that the U.S. must continue to spend hundreds of billions on military expenditures. That conclusion must be resisted by those of us who know that American security and strength will be most enhanced not by new weapons systems but by rebuilding the world's economy to meet the legitimate aspirations of all peoples for economic stability and social justice--and by extending our democratic principles and communitarian values from politics to economics.

Some good news: Tikkun is continually being quoted in the media and our positions--not just on Israel, but also on American politics and culture--have frequently been cited in the public debate. This past year, two of our essays were included in The Best American Essays, a selection of the twenty most distinguished essays of 1990. And Tikkun positions are increasingly recognized as the most viable

alternative to the conservative ideology that dominates public discourse. To mark our fifth anniversary, we will be publishing a book of selected essays from the first five years (a great gift for Chanukah or Christmas). To help us celebrate this important milestone, we will be asking our readers to approach local newsstands, bookstores and public libraries to urge them to carry the magazine (newsstands and bookstores can order from Eastern News Distributors at 1-800-221-3148 and libraries can order from Kable News at 1-800-877-5231), and to host fundraising parties (I may even be able to come to one in your community, if you can raise enough money for the magazine).

On a personal level, this has been an important year of recovery. I'm now two years out of my marriage, and less depressed about it than I was when I wrote last year. I'm surrounded by good friends, and excited and sustained by the love and support I get from people in the Tikkun community. I still don't like being single, but as everyone says, it takes time to meet someone.

Well, this is my personal report to you as we enter Rosh HaShanah 5752, the Jewish New Year. It's a traditional time to reflect on where we've been and where we are going. So let me repeat the bottom line: please take this moment to write us a check or send us your Visa or Mastercard number and expiration date along with your full name and address. We very much need your support--this is the appropriate moment to send it! Please do it now, before you put this down and forget. Make your checks payable to Tikkun and mail them to Michael Lerner, 5100 Leona Street, Oakland, CA 94619.

Meanwhile, let me wish you a very happy and fulfilling New Year. May we all--TIKKUN's readers, the people of Israel, and all of humanity--be inscribed for a year of peace.

Warm regards,



Michael Lerner, Ph.D.

P.S. Please don't feel guilty if you don't have the time to read a lot of the articles in Tikkun. Even when you don't read parts of the magazine, your support for Tikkun, both through subscribing and donating, makes an important political statement--not that you agree with everything in the magazine (I don't myself--because I want the magazine to be lively and unpredictable, about 60% of the articles I pick I disagree with, and some even offend me) but that you believe in the importance of this kind of a voice. We are more than a magazine--we are not only the most visible voice of Jewish liberalism, but also the most prominent place where liberal and progressive thought is seriously (yet sympathetically) questioned and new approaches developed. Keeping that voice alive, both by subscribing and by making a serious donation, is a form of political work--and I want to thank you for being part of the community that is doing that work.