

LETTERS

Chronic seizure

IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT YOU EDITORIALIZED about Lithuania as superficially as the *Miami Herald*.

If the Baltic States were "seized illegally" in 1940 by the Soviets, the same Baltic States were "stolen illegally" from Russia following World War I. Lithuania had been part of the Russian empire since 1772. The whole area had been occupied by the Germans during World War I. Following the German defeat and the civil war going on in Russia, the Allies thought it was a good time to break up Russia. They did their invasion in Siberia and left it to the hostile Baltic States to grab off all they could. As most of them sided with Hitler in World War II, you can't blame the Soviets for trying to get back what they could.

The tragedy is that the Baltic revolts are only a small part of the worldwide strife of hundreds of groups that differ from the parent country in ethnic, religious or language elements. These are fast becoming the wars of the '90s. Just pull out any foreign map and you can find the most bitter, malicious and killing wars over all continents. Currently the United States is the rare exception, but with Hispanic enclaves building up all over our country we could join the strife.

In the meantime, let's hope Mikhail Gorbachov's troubles aren't multiplied by Bush's meddling. It would be sad to start the Cold War all over again just so some "ethnic" wins what he thinks is freedom. That is, freedom to kill or be killed for what?

William M. Wilkerson
Florida City, Fla.

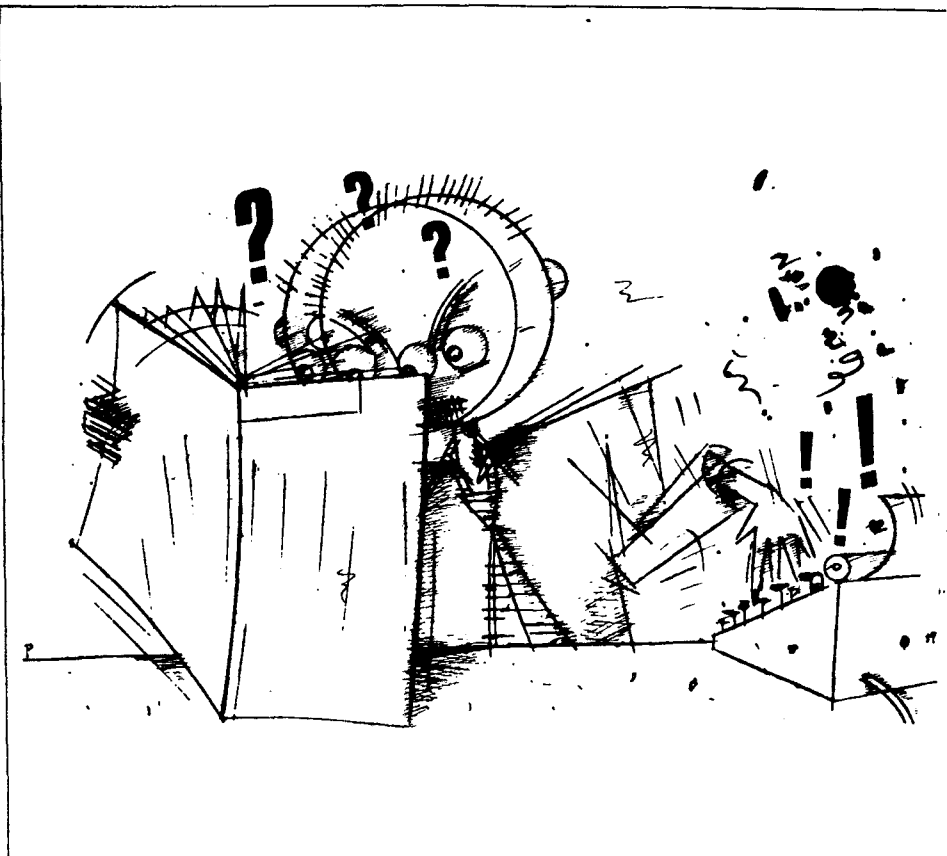
Socially irresponsible

I AM WRITING TO EXPRESS MY DISAPPOINTMENT over Jeff Balch's pitch for *Shopping for a Better World* (JTT, March 14). As Balch acknowledges, *Shopping for a Better World* "severely simplifies" complex environmental and community issues.

What Balch doesn't mention is that the realm of labor relations is virtually ignored. What if a company has a woman on its board of directors while simultaneously acting to prevent its largely female workforce from unionizing? *Shopping for a Better World* would rate such a company high on women's advancement, but would you?

This is not a hypothetical example. Consider a company like Sara Lee. *Shopping for a Better World* gives the company high ratings in every category of corporate citizenship except one (doing business in South Africa). *Shopping for a Better World* would have you believe that, at least in this country, Sara Lee is a good corporate citizen. But the booklet doesn't tell us that Sara Lee's Hanes subsidiary waged a long and bitter struggle against the unionization efforts of its low-wage workforce. On top of that, workers in both the Hanes division and in the Sara Lee bakery division suffer from high rates of carpal-tunnel syndrome and other repetitive-trauma disorders.

Moreover, while *Shopping for a Better World* rates Sara Lee high on community outreach, how does that square with their apparent decision to close a Deerfield, Ill., plant, throwing hundreds out of work, or the company's recent actions to force a strike in New Hampton, Iowa, where they are the dominant employer in town?



There is something dangerous about this "quick and easy" guide to socially responsible shopping. The only thing worse than ignorance is thinking that you know something you don't know. Most corporations are not socially responsible. The entire notion of a guide that helps you pick and choose among oil companies borders on the absurd. The real way to shop for a better world is to cut down on our consumption of fossil fuels, not to drive home from the gas station feeling satisfied because the company you bought gas from is "socially responsible."

Andrew Strom
Hyannis, Mass.

Uninduced

SALIM MUWAKKIL'S ARTICLE (JTT, APRIL 11) WAS principally devoted to persuading readers that Rep. Gus Savage (D-IL) did not in fact make public anti-Semitic remarks. Since Savage's remarks were unambiguously anti-Semitic, Muwakkil's arguments would have been unavailing were he to quote the remarks. So he didn't. And the editors didn't either.

Muwakkil's unscholarly arguments are, unfortunately, too typical of your publication to induce me to resubscribe.

Barry Blyveis
Columbia, Md.

Some milk is good milk

IN AN ARTICLE I WROTE FOR *IN THESE TIMES*, "Farmers and activists unite to keep cows drug-free" (Feb. 28), you chose an unfortunate and inaccurate subhead for one section. I refer to the heading above the article's concluding paragraphs—"No milk is good milk." Nothing in the article substantiated such a false and alarming phrase, and I certainly would never have used it. In fact, the subhead appears unrelated to anything that follows.

Please consider that, as noted at the end of the article, I wrote as communications coordinator for the National Family Farm Coalition and was attempting especially to convey family dairy farmers' point of view regarding what they see as an unneeded and potentially destructive additive product. The last thing I or they could have hoped for in this attempt is that a negative message about milk in general would be delivered. As the article's authoritative sources pointed out, milk is highly tested and regulated in this country and remains safe and wholesome.

Farmers more than anyone want to keep it that way. That's why we're working with environmental, consumer and animal-protection advocates to defeat synthetic BGH, which is as yet unapproved by the Food and Drug Administration.

Drink milk. It's good for you.

Brian Ahlberg
Washington, D.C.

The far side

IN LATE NOVEMBER 1989, CONGRESS APPROVED and President Bush signed a new foreign-aid appropriations bill calling for transferring to foreign governments \$14.6 billion during the current fiscal year.

This huge giveaway comes at a time when the federal government continues to operate at enormous deficits. While we are being taxed to provide billions for the governments of other nations, our leaders are deceitfully covering up the true size of the deficit. Both former Congressional Budget Director Alice Rivlin and current Comptroller General Charles Bowsher insist that the deficit is exceeding \$200 billion per year—twice what the administration is telling us.

This single foreign-aid appropriation is only one part of all the money we give away. I have been a local leader of the John Birch Society for many years and would like to point out that none of these transfers of money is authorized by the Constitution. They should all be terminated. We fund the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and lots of other international funds. We even pay for the defense of Germany, Japan and South Korea, which is a form of foreign aid. These nations can and should take care of themselves.

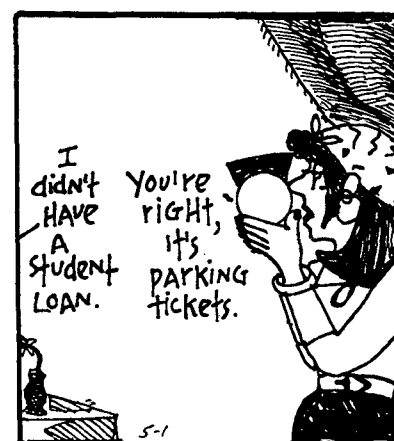
What has foreign aid bought for America? It's almost a total disaster. Besides speeding our nation toward bankruptcy, foreign aid has led to America being despised by the peoples of most of the nations of the world. They know that our dollars have been used to keep tyrants in power (Gorbachov in the USSR, Jaruzelski in Poland), destroy good leaders (the shah in Iran, Somoza in Nicaragua) and force some wasteful and ill-conceived programs (agrarian reform in South Vietnam and now in El Salvador). We have also built bureaucracies nearly everywhere, lined the pockets of thieves (Noriega, Ortega, Ceausescu), and even fueled the war-making capabilities of both sides in several regional conflicts (Arab-Israeli, Southeast Asia).

The sooner that we, the American people, demand an end to all foreign aid, the better off we'll be and the respect that our nation once enjoyed all over the the Earth will begin to return.

Bruce Taber
Kansas, Ill.

Editor's note: Please keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

SYLVIA



by Nicole Hollander

By Richard Grossman

THE "CLEAN AIR" BILLS THAT THE SENATE passed early this month and that the House is now considering masquerade as public-health protection. In fact, they legalize increased poisoning by substituting industries' own pollution-control technologies for public-health standards. If these bills become law, citizens now struggling to protect their communities will have to wait until the next century for "health" to be a criterion for industrial policy.

These are anti-democratic and people-poisoning bills. They not only demonstrate how powerful the auto, chemical, petroleum, agribusiness, military, steel and utility industries have become but also reveal the unwillingness of national environmental organizations to demand a society not based upon poisons and destruction.

One would not know this from the president ("I am an environmentalist"); from Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell ("The American people want action, they demand action and they are right."); from press coverage ("A historic crackdown on air pollutants"—*Boston Globe*; "Industries dismayed"—*New York Times*; "A sweeping clean air bill ... orders industry to eliminate airborne toxics."—*USA Today*); or from environmental groups lobbying for crumbs despite secret deals and closed doors that even Clear Air Coalition Director Richard Ayres called "atrocious."

No doubt about it: Americans know that our air is severely hazardous to human health. The chemical industry produces more than 500 billion pounds of "products" each year and dumps almost the same amount as "waste." Chemical production is doubling every eight years. More than 750 million pounds of pesticides are sprayed annually. The 1977 deadlines for carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and ozone were pushed back to 1982, and then to 1987, and still have not been met. According to Barry Commoner, there has been "no statistically significant change in annual emission of particulates, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide" since 1982.

Reporting on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union on April 8, the *New York Times* said that the polluting practices there "seem all the more ruthless because they increased at a time when their dire consequences were already known." But this is no less true for the U.S.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), through Republican and Democratic administrations, has been accountable only to the president, not to the American people. Law enforcement has never been its major preoccupation. As David R. Wooley, executive director of the Center for Environmental Legal Education at Pace University, writes, "If 20 years of experience under the Clean Air Act teaches us anything, it is that the EPA cannot be relied upon to carry out the act unless Congress' commands are expressed in clear mandatory language backed up by an effective judicial remedy against agency inaction." Clean Air Act case law since 1980, Wooley reports, "is filled with dozens of unsuccessful attempts by states and citizen groups to compel the EPA to comply with unequivocal commands in the act."

The 1970 Clean Air Act, according to former Sen. Ed Muskie (D-ME), one of the

Cleaning the air gives way to protecting profits

act's authors, "was premised on a new and basic public-policy tenet: that the federal government has a responsibility to assure that the health of the public is protected from the effects of air pollution." Not that the act and its 1977 amendments were ever adequately enforced. But they did mandate that protecting public health "with an ample margin of safety" was the law of the land. And they did provide us some tools to defend our communities against industry and government complicity.

Citizen action: In recent years, many thousands of community-based groups have organized to stop the poisoning, to render the poisoners liable, to get care for the afflicted. Initially, they turned to the EPA and the Justice Department for help. But they quickly discovered that these agencies preferred to run interference for the poisoners and destroyers, so they developed their own independent strategies. The current legislation is designed to undermine these citizen groups.

The bills do not call for new technologies. They do not require the polluters to stop producing poisons—or even to stop polluting—and thus do not require industry to phase out any of the most persistent deadly chemicals. Instead they invite us to spend this decade dickering with the EPA and industry over what are the "best" emission controls for each pollutant and trying to get industry to install, operate and maintain these technologies correctly. Once this is achieved, the EPA administrator is called upon to inquire if there is a need for further "risk assessment." If he concludes there is, he must conduct such an assessment, after which the agency must decide how much risk is "acceptable," and then set and enforce emission standards accordingly. Of course, since the steel industry has already obtained from Congress a 30-year extension on meeting health standards from cancer-causing coke-oven emissions, the EPA administrator may choose to be helpful to other industries as well.

The Waxman bill in the House (the best of the sorry lot), calls for technology controls to be phased in over two to eight years and then for health standards to be phased in—with extensions available to the poisoners upon request. So it will be at least 13 to 19 years before these health standards are even on the agenda. And do not think for a moment that the polluters will accept these health standards lying down: their past record indicates that they will appeal to the president, flood the EPA with their own studies, go to court, threaten to shut down and otherwise whine for as long as possible.

And now, the really bad news: The result is that it will be, at best, the year 2003 before this law will permit citizens to have legal standing in air-poisoning prevention based on the goal of ending the killing of people, plants and animals. The only real force today for environmental protection—locally based citizen groups—will be restrained for a generation, limited to arguing with industry and government over setting and enforcing industry's own "best" technology standards.

For autos and power plants, health also is not on the table. Tail-pipe standards are fixed until the "second tier" deadlines—also technology-based—kick in around the year 2000. (The second-tier standards have been substantially weakened in all the bills.) This is despite general acknowledgment that there will be so many more internal-combustion engines on so many more roads by the year 2000 that the air will be fouler than it is today even with these standards. Los Angeles was given an extension on ozone until 2010, and other major cities like Chicago, Houston, New York and Philadelphia until 2005—unless the EPA chooses to declare cleanup efforts too costly and to extend the deadlines even more.

The acid-rain sections mandate certain reductions in electric-power plant emissions. But they introduce the brilliant idea of selling and buying what Congress has chosen to call "offsets," or pollution rights. In other words, a utility that is spewing less than a certain amount of poisons can sell its "rights" to more spewing to another utility, thereby ensuring more emissions than they are technologically capable of controlling. Given that power plants producing electricity waste two-thirds of their heat—and waste more in electrical transmission—just "controlling" some of the current emissions, while laudable, hardly addresses the real challenge: using less energy by being more efficient and moving into solar power.

In 1969, our legislators on the floor of Congress talked about phasing in alternatives to the internal-combustion engine, about standing up to the power of the auto industry, about zero pollution, ample margins of safety, citizen empowerment, land-use planning, mass transit, energy conservation. In 1990, they do not talk about stopping poisoning at its sources. They refuse to take timid steps toward mandating conservation and moving to solar, to require cars that get 100 miles per gallon by the end of the century and to mandate recycling.

Under the Senate bill, citizen groups lose their legal rights until 2003.

They do not acknowledge how much job blackmail is being used by industries and government agencies to intimidate workers and communities. They do not provide any economic or political protections for people under the thumbs of unscrupulous poisoners and employers.

Not only have they refused to give citizens the resources and tools to protect themselves, they have also denied us the ability to stand up for public health until yet another generation of our children has been thoroughly poisoned.

Who believes that our chances of stopping the poisoners in 2005 will be any better than today? We have seen over the past decade how the poisoners, grown fabulously wealthy from their dirty work, have taken over the regulatory agencies, con-

fused and intimidated the press and purchased our politicians for a song.

Can't be bothered: I joined a group of college students who had come to Washington, D.C., from all over the country to rally for clean air. The Student Environmental Action Coalition, which was coordinating the event, had made appointments for the students with their congressional representatives in advance. Only about half a dozen of the more than 400 students actually got to meet with Congress members. But whether they met with them or their staff, the students were patronized: not only were they just students but they were calling for zero emissions, phaseouts and bans, no new poisons, a superfund for workers—the necessary steps, but ones that Congress is terrified of taking.

After a spirited rally on the Capitol steps, the delegation moved to the House, where Rep. John Dingell (D-MI) was convening his committee on energy and environment. Congress members came and went. Presidential timber lumbered by. But the doors of this committee never opened up to the students. No elected official stopped to talk, to ask why they were there, to solicit their views.

After a few hours, the students began to sing. And they chanted: "We want in. We want in."

The Congress of the United States of America responded by summoning police reinforcements. About 25 new police officers arrived, hands on their holsters, not a smile in the bunch.

So that's where things stand today. It appears that all the principal players—the White House, Congress, the polluters, the national environmental organizations—want and need a bill they can call "clean air" more than they want clean air or an empowered citizenry. As long as they can get the public to believe these bills are about clean air, they will be able to enact anti-democratic and poisoning legislation in the name of the environment.

It would be better to have no new laws today than these laws. And given how strong the polluters are, we need to consider strategies that do not bring us begging to Congress. After all, the Berlin Wall did not come down because of a piece of legislation.

It is time for the Clean Air Coalition to denounce these bills and the atrocious legislative process that created them. If these bills are going to pass anyway, better that they pass over the clear and strenuous objections of the coalition and of people everywhere.

There is still time to stop these bills from becoming law. Many members of the Clean Air Coalition are thinking about condemning these bills and starting over with national educating and organizing. Earth Day Chairman Denis Hayes has labeled the bills "gutless."

We must stop this fraud, this legalization of poisoning. For what the students who serenaded Dingell and his comrades in grime in the halls outside his committee room sang is sad but true: "This air is your air, this air is my air/ People are dying for lack of clean air/ George Bush has sold out, Congress has compromised/ Our air is owned by industry."

Richard Grossman is publisher of the *Wrenching Debate Gazette*, Somerville, Mass.