

ABOUT VEGETARIANISM

By BOB PINKUS

1971 WAS A YEAR in which the quest for compassion grew larger. Over 2,000 vegetarians from 46 countries came together for 13 days at the University of Maine at Orono from August 16-28th to learn, share, and be together in their quest for a more compassionate world.

During August of 1976 hundreds, perhaps thousands, of vegetarians from all over North America will come to Ithaca, New York to carry on that quest. Hosted by the North American Vegetarians of Malaga, New Jersey (the same group which hosted the 1975 World Vegetarian Congress in Maine), this 1976 North American vegetarian convention will be a time of sharing, planning, learning, and being together for a period of about eight days.

What is all this about? For many vegetarians the knowledge that one need not kill animals to live is enough of a reason to become a vegetarian and to help spread the word. For others the realization that one can live on less than half the 2,000 pounds of grain required by an American flesh-eater these days if one consumes one's food directly rather than inefficiently via animals gives one reason enough in a world of hungry people to become vegetarians and to spread the word. For some compassion begins with the self, with the realization that better health is possible on a natural vegetarian diet. Still other people realize that a vegetarian diet costs less and thus enables us to do more with what money we may have than merely fatten the profits of the agri-business giants.

There are many reasons for vegetarianism, and there are many vegetarian journals which can help one to understand these reasons. North American Vegetarian, of 501 Old Harding Highway, Malaga, N.J. 08328, publishes "Vegetarian Voice" and offers autonomous affiliation to any vegetarian group. "Vegetarian World", published from suite 216, 8235 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90046, offers diversified news to vegetarians, and membership in a book club. The "Vegetarian Review & Digest", published from Box 221, Haverford, Pennsylvania 19041, is a new vegetarian newspaper published on a quarterly basis, giving news of interest to vegetarians and others.

All of these groups and journals help to provide a continental voice to those who see the need to relate to other forms of life in a manner which does not interfere with the right to live unmolested of those individuals who happen to be animals. Perhaps the development of a new consciousness which is bound up with non-interference in the life of other beings will result in a transference of that consciousness and an ultimate realization that people are entitled to the same freedom from interference in their own lives.

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BECOMING A VEGETARIAN

I once believed that one needed to use force to end oppression. Later, when I examined that premise, it seemed that although it might be valid in certain cases on a practical basis, in one sense it represented a contradiction. For, how could one really teach others to cease the use of force by the use of force? Finally I realized that if in one's day-to-day actions one were an oppressor, whether of human beings for profit or power, or of animals for food and clothing, then one would have to accept that oppression would become the rule of life. Oppressors in fact must expect not only to oppress but to be oppressed. If one could abandon oppression and live in peace and harmony with one's neighbors, not interfering with their lives, not eating or wearing them, I realized, perhaps one could change one's relations with everyone, could build a better world.

At this point vegetarianism became meaningful to me and became a vegetarian. I have been one since. Many, I suspect, have become vegetarians for similar or identical reasons. To live without taking life seems to be the basis for a compassionate world's creation. Putting this on a practical level, vegetarianism is a first and easily attainable step for anyone. It does not require forceful actions, demonstrations, bombings, or petitions, for anyone can become a vegetarian simply by switching one's diet. No one's permission is required but one's own. In this way one demonstrates an essential truth to oneself—a truth of nonviolence by affirming our basic harmless natures as human beings. If we can abandon murder in daily life perhaps we can come closer to the utopia of love and compassion which we all really want. Vegetarianism is a primary and meaningful step in that direction.

AN APPEAL TO HEALTH

Sterility, cancer, disfigurement, birth defects, liver damage, and other horrors are being attributed to one of the many modern chemicals found in foods of animal origin these days. That chemical is PCB, short for polychlorinated biphenyls, reported to be hundreds of times more toxic than DDT. PCBs have been widely used industrial chemicals in the past, in items as diverse as industry itself is. A July, 1971 incident involving a heat exchanger used in the manufacture of a chicken feed supplement which leaked PCB into the feed resulted in 77,000 chickens being destroyed rather than going to market. Burning discarded plastics and other materials in which these chemicals are used is another way in which PCBs get into the environment. Plastics, cements, adhesives, transformers, even newspaper—and the list is endless—have in the past been found to contain PCBs.

PCBs are getting into foods too. A 1972 study by the FDA showed one out of five samples of fish, cheese, milk and eggs tested from 3,500 samples, contained a measurable level of PCB. Of 670 fish samples tested by the FDA in 1972, 54% contained PCB in amounts ranging from a trace to 35 parts per million. Eggs showed PCB in 29% of 550 samples tested; cheese and milk showed positive in 6% and 7%, respectively, of samples tested, although one milk sample had a PCB concentration of 77.5 parts per million. The significance of these levels may be seen in the fact that

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a level of five parts per million in the diet of mink on mink ranches in the Great Lakes region caused complete reproductive failure among the animals. Since then the mink ranches have switched to other foods than the coho salmon previously used, and officials have warned citizens not to eat the fish.

Speaking in 1975, Russel Train, administrator of the federal Environmental Protection Agency, said:

"Well, we thought that the action back in the early part of the 70s in limiting the use of PCBs to closed systems would probably largely eliminate the movement of PCBs in the environment. We are finding high PCB levels in salmon, striped bass, and other fish in the Great Lakes, the Upper Mississippi River, Southern California, the Gulf of Mexico, the Hudson River, as well as other waterways in New York, and I'm sure we would find them elsewhere in the United States..."

In fact the U.S. Geological Survey found varying levels of PCB in the waters of New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Virginia, South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, and California in 1972. Since then studies have continued.

It was the knowledge gained from the Canadian Wildlife Service, however, which had found quantities of PCB in polar bears, seals, and Arctic fish — thousands of miles north of the nearest site of industrial usage — which prompted researchers to make a major breakthrough on the problem. What they found is frightening: In early testing of foodstuffs, FDA researchers had been checking foods for levels of DDT. In some of their tests it later was learned that what they were finding was not DDT at all,

component or sunlight to accomplish its degradation.

PCB has been shown to be twice as effective as DDT in causing thinning of bird eggshells. Thus many species may be threatened with extinction by the presence of PCB's in their foods. PCB's have also been found to cause cancer in laboratory animals; and according to the Delaney Amendment, items which do this are supposed to be banned from foods for human consumption.

Studies linking diet to cancer described in the New England Journal of Medicine show that food contaminants, a diet high in animal fat or alcohol or deficient in vitamins A and C may be causing various types of cancer by enhancing the activity of cancer-causing agents or changing digestive microbes, resulting in formation of cancer-causing metabolites. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, figures for the first seven months of 1975 indicated a 5.2% increase in cancer deaths. These statistics were corroborated by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company which found a similar unexplained rise in cancer deaths among its policy-holders.

DOES VEGETARIANISM HELP?

Can being a vegetarian help in the fight to remain free of polluted food? The vegetarian publication AHMSA had this to say on the subject in 1972:

"We start with the spraying of a poison, DDT, on the water of a lake in California. The concentration was 1/50th part of 1 ppm, or 1:50,000,000. Plankton, living in the water, concentrated it until they had 5 ppm. Fish, eating the plankton, had anywhere from 40 to 300 ppm of DDT in their bodies. At this point, spraying was halted; the lake was measured, and NO DDT could be found in it, so it was assumed to be back to normal. But...all the grebes died off (a grebe is a diving/swimming bird with webbed feet). The grebes were killed by the DDT they had taken in with their food (fish). Carnivorous fish in the lake had built up a concentration of an astounding 2500 ppm. Upon examination of the dead grebes, their fatty tissue was found to be loaded with 1600 parts per million of DDT, and the grebe colony dwindled to 30 pairs... These pairs mated in vain. ... (This concentration of poison is one of the most powerful arguments for vegetarianism today, from the health standpoint). Although we are not concerned here with radioactivity, concentration will be similar in pattern. ... On the Columbia river, which has eight reactors on it, the water contained "traces" of radioactivity. The plankton, living in the water, had 2000 times as much radiation. The fish that ate the plankton had 15,000 times as much as the water. The ducks that lived there and ate both had 40,000 times more. The eggs that were laid around the river contained a million times the radioactivity. You see the progression? From a trace up to a million times of a 'trace'."

One thing we can do to avoid such products as fish, cheese, eggs, milk, or other products containing PCB's. But even if we merely become vegetarian without going to this extreme, much danger of PCB will already have been averted.

The future of our planet and the future of each of us who inhabit it is in our own hands. Together we can help to create a bright future for all."



but PCB, as the substances are alike. With this knowledge it was still later discovered that ultraviolet light degrades DDT vapor into products that eventually become PCBs. Presenting their paper to a meeting of the American Chemical Society in Dallas, researchers Kenneth Molanen and Donald Crosby showed how PCBs, which have been used in solvents, coatings, and other industrial applications, could have been found thousands of miles from their nearest obvious sources. DDT blown by the winds and borne on the waters of the world, reaches everywhere. "Since only a small fraction of the total amount of DDT ever applied has been accounted for," their paper says, "our results give clues about the eventual fate of DDT in the environment."

DDT survives for about four years in the atmosphere, plenty of time for the ultraviolet