

village view

by Andrea Leonard

Celebrating the Bicentennial is, as everyone knows, a commemoration of a revolution; yet let anyone propose revolt in 1976 and the FBI starts breathing down your neck.

Does that strike you as inconsistent? On one hand we're urged to honor and glorify the rebels of two hundred years ago; on the other, any attempt to rid ourselves of unsupportable burdens is deemed "un-American".

Future historians may shake their heads in wonder at the sleeping giant that is the American people. We have the strongest and best tools available to any group of citizens of any country in the world, yet continue to permit ourselves to be led, sheeplike, one by one, to slaughter. Why? Because we're so divided.

Our government exhorts us to conserve energy resources, pointing out these supplies are finite and near exhaustion. It does little or nothing to support alternate energy resource development or to conserve energy within its own sector.

On the contrary, it supports expansion of off-shore oil drilling, construction of the Alaskan pipeline, and bows to demands of Mid-East oil producers, letting the average American consumer pay the piper and pick up the tab.

Technology for energy conservation isn't lacking. Many other countries enjoy the same standards of living Americans do at lower cost in energy use. If you've travelled outside the United States, you've found heated rooms, hot water, convenient transportation.

Yet Americans consume five times as much energy, per capita, as other citizens of the world, and twice as much, per capita, as Europeans. Are we, as individuals, profligate? Hardly. We're victims of the system.

Heat, hot water and transportation at lower rates or by more efficient methods aren't available to the average American homeowner, housewife, or driver. And neither the government nor American industry seems to be willing to make it available.

For decades Europeans have been using energy more efficiently than we. Heat from all possible sources, from garbage incinerators and from industrial complexes, is piped to buildings, public and private. Water heaters are installed at the point of use; that is, in bathrooms, kitchens and laundries instead of in the cellar. These operate only upon demand, not all day and all night.

Americans could save 3% of its entire energy consumption by converting from central hot water tanks to point-of-use water heaters in homes.

West German factories use 40% less energy to produce a ton of cement, or steel, or paper, than American factories through more efficient technology. It's no secret. We could do it too.

West German industrial plants generate some of their own electricity for power and heat. Why don't we do the same? Our public utilities fight it by setting exorbitant rates for the supplementary electricity industries would need over and above self-generated power.

Europeans heat only living areas of their homes, leaving sleeping rooms cold. While we might view this as hardship, how many of us open our bedroom windows at night for fresh air while the radiator beneath the sill pours its warmth into the night?

How much time do we spend in bedrooms, rooms heated 24-hours a day to a cozy 70°, except when we're snuggled under blankets? Zoned heat could insure warm bedrooms when needed, could permit each American home to save hundreds of gallons of oil each year if the rooms actually in use were the only ones heated to comfortable temperatures.

Smaller, lighter-weight automobiles are energy-savers. Asians and Europeans have used them for years. That's what's been available to them. Some Americans — more and more since the energy crisis — have turned in their Detroit-built gas-gulpers for Asian and European-built cars.

Detroit declares, however, now smaller American cars are coming off the assembly lines, the demand is for larger models.

Is it? Or are we being sold a bill of goods by automakers who reap a higher profit on the larger models? Even if true, if the larger ones weren't made, people would buy the smaller ones.

Furthermore, thirty years ago one of the little German-built "bugs" on the highway was occasion for head-turning and wonder. Today, driving daily between Hyannis and Osterville, half the cars on the road are mini-models, usually of foreign origin.

Do you believe your eyes? Or do you believe what the Detroit hucksters want you to believe?

Energy is just one area where we're hoodwinked.

Schools, we're assured, have to be built to educate children. All right; we build a new school. Before it's open, it's being vandalized. If you don't believe it, go over and take a look.

Now we're being sold a program of serving breakfasts in school. We've accepted the school lunch program; now comes breakfast. Next: dinner.

School administrators and teachers would like to educate the children, but between feeding them, evaluating them, nursing and medicating them, monitoring their home

environments, providing work-study programs, developing new arts, crafts, sports, and recreation classes, education is taking last place on the priority list.

"It's the state law" is the reply to questions. And, it is, you find. It's also the law property-owners support these absurdities, without recourse and without control over costs. The laws are passed in the Legislature, but no funding is voted to implement the programs, so property-owners pick up the tab, here, as well.

Where's the key to unravelling this mess? It's at the ballot box and only you can turn that key. The mechanics of change are in your hands, citizens. If the Legislature doesn't act, petitions for public referenda can bring questions directly to the ballot.

Repeatedly taxpayers organize, form associations, investigate, meet, argue, fight, split, fragment and fade into puffs of smoke. Sound and fury aplenty, but no results. Concern is short-lived; apathy returns.

During the up-coming three months you'll hear anguished screams about rising taxes. You'll be clutching your own wallet with aching despair matched only by the victim of highway robbery.

When it's all over and the decisions are in — along about the 4th of July when the Bicentennial climaxes — you'll bandage up your financial wounds and go watch the parades and the fireworks.

Will you do more? Will you seek out petitions to **change** the laws? Will you vote for those who would **change** the regulations?

Will you support movements to stop waste? Waste in government, energy, production, human effort, time, brains and material?

It's about time for another revolution! Not a bloody one; the way our country is set up, that's not necessary. But what is needed is definition of a single goal, learning how to reach it, and working with others to get there.

Set one goal. Don't be side-tracked by anything else. Keep your efforts fixed on that single achievement. Learn the methods of winning that first goal. Once that's behind us, the next will follow quickly and more easily.

Unless we stop wishing and start working, there's going to be nothing left to work with — or for.