

A Better World is Possible! By Raj and Paxus

Progressives, activists, radicals, and anti-authoritarians staging protests and demonstrations against corporate globalization have adopted the slogan "Another World is Possible." Presumably this slogan refers to an imagined society in which social justice and human rights are taken more seriously than economic power and military force-in which people collectively and cooperatively control their lives, rather than living subject to the whims of CEOs, landlords, and multinational corporations. But is such a world really possible, or merely a utopian fantasy?

Twin Oaks Community in Louisa, VA is one example of a society in which the values behind the anti-corporate globalization movements have been put into practice in everyday life. We're an intentional community-a commune, based on a model like kibbutzim. Founded in 1967 by 8 people dedicated to building a better society, Twin Oaks has grown to more than 100 people. We operate several businesses (casual furniture production, soyfoods, and book indexing) on our 465 acres of farm and wood lands. We use a "labor credit" system in which all kinds of work-from cooking to accounting to building houses-are valued equally, and we put the money we make toward things like more buildings, an artificial pond, computers, and more. Everyone works the same amount-currently 42 hours a week-and no special status or benefits are attached to any one kind of work. Any one member can work in many different jobs of co's (our gender-neutral pronoun, in place of his or hers) own choosing-so the same person turning the compost might well double as the holder of one of our highest elected offices and also work as part-time auto mechanic, gardener, book indexer, tofu maker, or in many other jobs. We report our own work hours, using a trust based system-the same system that allows us to function without locks on any of our doors or passwords to our email accounts. Our work system is nearly entirely volunteer - there are over 200 jobs to keep the infrastructure of the community running, and we are able to get all but one of them covered by willing workers. Only one dishwashing shift per week is required and assigned. The rest is your call from the wide range of creditable activities. No one ever has to worry about unemployment.

Our resources are shared by all members, and nothing is for sale within the community. We have canoes, a hot tub, a small fleet of golf carts to help our elderly get around campus, a dozen computers hooked to the internet, collectively owned musical instruments and equipment, a weight room, a dining hall, a pond we built for swimming, a retreat cabin, 2 sweat lodges, a teepee, a large yurt and a mud pit. We live in a total of 8 residential buildings, and every member has a private room. One of my favorite institutions is commie clothes, which is an attic filled with many different garments, sorted by size and type, maintained and cleaned as a creditable community labor area. Most people have personal/private clothes as well. The famous white bike system from Amsterdam is alive and well here-if you see a bike and you need one, you take it. We pay ourselves 2 dollars a day and the community covers all our personal needs like health care costs, food, and housing. Our economic structure allows members to work overtime, within certain bounds, to earn extra personal money for travel.

Almost no one here carries wallets or keys. These are icons of a failed society. I don't miss them, nor my wristwatch, which I have retired also, due to our peculiar relationship with time. Our weeks start on Friday and end on Thursday, and our clocks across "campus" are in frequent disagreement. There is little respect for the concept of weekends and people schedule their own days off, often choosing to work just a little bit everyday. We are not an especially punctual group. There is much more emphasis on getting it done right than getting it done fast. We have almost no crime. Correspondingly, we have no police or jails. Our harshest punishment is expulsion, which happens once every few years. And while the written policy on expulsion has been debated, amended and committed to thick binders over the years, what usually happens is that people choose to leave because of social pressure, well before the formal process is initiated.

We have a vibrant culture that includes regular singing, drawing, and knitting groups, campfires, "coffeeshouses" with performances, volleyball and soccer games, Spanish and French speaking

tables at meals, several bands, and much more. We do not have a group religion (our membership includes Atheists, Christians, Pagans, Quakers, and many others), and have no central leader or guru. We've regularly agreed for the last 35 years that television is generally a cultural toxin, and thus choose to have no TV reception-though we do show videos in our home theater several nights out of every week, and have high-speed internet access on our shared computers. We teach each other like mad, and almost any skill, from juggling to Web design, from welding to cooking for 100, can be learned here. We eat delicious, healthy hot meals twice a day in our dining hall. We strive to eliminate sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination from our lives.

Every year sustainability becomes more important to us. We try to live with little environmental impact-so we use bikes instead of driving cars on our property, and share a fleet of 18 vehicles for outside use among our 100 members, rather than using private cars. (The average group of 100 Americans owns more than 50 private vehicles.) No member drives to work. The community's labor budget funds a daily "bus" service to Louisa, a thrice-weekly trip to Charlottesville, and a weekly trip to Richmond, so that a single trip can take care of dozens of people's errands. The night before a trip, members submit descriptions of errands they need to have taken care of, and the assigned "tripper" does them all--purchasing chocolate for one member, returning another's borrowed videos, taking still another to a dentist appointment, and more. We have a structured vehicle sign-out system to organize personal and work-related trips outside of "tripper" times and destinations. We have our own community mechanic who keeps the cars in good shape and emitting only a minimum of pollution. Each new building we put up nowadays is more environmentally sound than the one that preceded it. Most of the produce we eat comes from our own enormous organic garden.

We're committed to seeing our values made manifest in the world. While no member can engage in outside activism as co's full-time job, our economic planning process allows us to allocate money and working hours to help causes we support. We manage to put thousands of dollars and hundreds of work hours toward these efforts. Some members participate in prison workshops, some cook with Food Not Bombs in nearby Richmond, some attend anarchist, progressive, or feminist events and workshops. One member currently teaches a class on revolution at an alternative high school in Charlottesville. Several members serve on boards of directors of non-profit organizations. We're part of an organization of like-minded communities called the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, or FEC. FEC communities share their resources and decision-making powers equally among members, provide for members' needs, and commit to nonviolence, sustainable living, and non-discrimination.

We welcome scheduled visitors. There are several different ways to visit our community and see "another world" for yourself. Showing up unannounced is not one of them! We operate a 3-week long visitor program 11 months out of the year, which is a structured introduction to our way of life for people who might want to live with us and people who are simply interested in experiencing our lifestyle up close. We also have guided tours on most Saturday afternoons, open to anyone who calls to let us know they're coming. Occasionally we have 1-week long visitor programs for people who can't spend a full three weeks here. There's more information about these programs, and about us, on our Website: www.twinoaks.org. You can also email us or call (540) 894-5126.

Raj Ghoshal grew up in a library outside Chicago. He came to Twin Oaks for a brief stop in between college and graduate school, and has since been unable to extricate himself. He has lived at Twin Oaks for 1 year.

Paxus Calta was abandoned by his wolf parents and raised by liberals in the suburbs of Boston. He has hitchhiked on sailboats across the Pacific, danced atop Russian tanks before Yeltsin made it fashionable, smuggled Tibetan monks across the Himalayas, worked on the North Slope of Alaska, and fought nuclear power plants in eastern Europe. He has lived at Twin Oaks for 4 years.