



ETHICALLY SPEAKING

53 Prospect Park West, Brooklyn NY 11215 (718) 768-2972

Volume 94, no. 3

Haiti Projects in Partnership: A Carribean NAFTA?

On Sunday November 14, at 1:30PM, Haiti Projects in Partnership BSEC will host a panel discussion on the pending *Caribbean Basin Initiative Enhancement Bill*. The legislation seeks to lower United States tariffs and trade barriers to products of the Caribbean and Central America. The speakers represent United States labor interests and the movement in solidarity with Latin America and the Caribbean.

The speakers will be:

Cajuste Lexius, trade union activist, former leader of the General Confederation of Labor, one of the largest labor unions in Haiti.
Mark Levinson, Chief Economist at UNITE and Editor of *Dissent* magazine.

Merrill Smith, Executive Director of Haiti Advocacy, a non-profit organization established to inform the Haiti Solidarity community on issues of immigration, trade development and human rights. He served as Directing Attorney at Church World Service in Miami representing Haitian asylum-seekers.

Rev. Tom F. Drive, Paul Tillich Professor of Theology Emeritus, Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He is a member of the Haiti Task Force of Witness for Peace.

The discussion will be moderated by Steeve Coupeau, Lecturer in Political Science, College of New Rochelle, New York. He is also the Public Relations Officer of HPP.

2-3-4 Oxfam Luncheon



Help
Fight
Hunger!

On Sunday, November 21, after Platform (12:15PM), join us for our annual 2-3-4 Oxfam Luncheon, raising funds for the Oxfam America self-sufficiency program and collecting food for CHIPS, a local Park Slope food bank. Bring 2 cans of food for the food bank, 3 dollars (or more) for Oxfam, and a dish to share for 4.

Leader Notes: Financial and Other Religious Practices by Lisel Burns

What do I know about financial practices? Ethical Society Finance Committees generally keep the Leader out of the money end of things, and for good reason, really. I remember going with our former member Sharon Peterson to a Long Island Cemetery to do a burial ceremony for her father. To my dismay, the cemetery staff person insisted upon taking payment before we even went to the grave. While from his perspective it may have been a prudent business practice, it wasn't pretty.

Under present arrangements, Brooklyn Ethical Society members have the use of my ceremonial talents as part of their BSEC membership. After I do their family memorial, wedding, or commitment event, our tradition bids them only make some contribution to me or to the Society in my name.

For nonmember ceremonies, we do have a fee-for-service arrangement. When I first talk with the nonmember family, I don't mention the money side until they do, but I know it's out there weighing on their minds. Sooner or later they ask how much it will be to work together for the event and the two or three discussion sessions I require before it. When I tell them that I use a sliding scale, and it's their task to decide on an amount between \$200-\$500 that seems a fair fee, most of the couples say "That's great!" and we go on. When I do get a noticeable reaction, it's generally the financially stretched couples breathing easier, or those on the upscale end looking a little uncomfortable, saying "Wouldn't it be simpler to just set the fee?"

Why am I doing this? Sliding scales in all possible fee situations just seem to me so much fairer than a set fee reducing access for people with minimal discretionary income. But it goes even deeper than this. I do recall that the 1918 Ethical Movement Leaders' statement listed "Bringing a moral perspective to all human relations" as its first principle. Believing myself willingly accountable to this principle, I prefer to help people think about the value of something than submit us to prevailing commercial principles. I hope that this sets a tone for our upcoming relations, and shows how Ethical Culture might be different from most enterprises.

At BSEC, I think we also need to achieve a

communal sense of what a moral perspective might bring to our own shared financial situation. For example, an excellent architectural report by Kimberly Neuhouse recently informed the Board that roof leaks and significant drainage problems threaten our lovely landmark Meeting House. Solutions will require significant outlays of money, from our savings or from our community, even if outside matching funds are found to help us.

With members of modest means in the majority at BSEC, we're now exploring a sliding scale "Season Ticket" for Sunday Lunch program to eliminate the rigidity of the six-dollar weekly fee and ensure lunch with dignity to people for whom the current fee is a real strain. Perhaps it's not fair (or kind) to meet new fiscal needs with an across-the-board tax or significant raise of the minimum pledge. At the same time, I still dream of a refurbished library we are proud of, and I want us to flourish, not evince powerlessness around money matters.

Given that 30,000 of our planet's children are dying each day from preventable causes, the sliding scale of the world economy puts the entire BSEC community on the wildly wealthy end of things, if not in the top few percentiles of human well-being. Don't we therefore have a moral obligation to develop a fiscal discipline that produces an annual BSEC surplus, monies beyond our reasonable needs, held by us in "trusteeship" (in Gandhi's economic theory of the same name) for social/economic projects or assistance to those whose goals we are called by our deepest shared values to support?

To do right by staff and members we will need a budget that pays fair wages with benefits to offset our government's "Dodge City" plans to protect us from possible disabilities and probable unemployment in old age. To do right by the larger community we were founded to enhance, we will need to get on top of our own self-sufficiency and act with generosity.

In the upcoming months I look forward to Mark Kaufman and his Finance Committee's coaching both Board and members on ways of getting and spending as an important part of our year's exploration of "rooted, responsible, and reflective ways of living."

**THE BROOKLYN SOCIETY
FOR ETHICAL CULTURE**

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<http://www.bsec.org>

Leader: Lisel Burns

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Youth Group: Rita Wilson & Tony Severo

Ethically Speaking is published six to ten times a year by BSEC. This issue was produced by Bob Strock, Lisel Burns, Anne Klaeyesen, Larry Sherman, and Charles Horwitz.

Ethically Speaking is written by a number of BSEC members. Views expressed in this publication are always open to friendly discussion. Our newsletter staff, like the membership at large, may vary in their thinking on many issues, yet we are all committed to putting deed before creed, and to strive constantly toward living out, each in our own particular way, the Ethical Ideal of eliciting the best from ourselves and others.

VIEWPOINT

Response by Larry Sherman

There is a major, but little recognized, struggle within our Ethical Society to take us in a new direction, a direction that will redefine who we are and ultimately threaten our very existence. It is a direction that places creed before deed, values before issues. Values, the social principles, goals or standards held or accepted by an individual, class or society, evolve from the issues of life, from our experience. Values give guidelines for our personal interaction with each other and the issues of our experience. The way we deal with each other is crucial if we want to find common ground. But do you really think we can find common ground with Khalid Muhammad, Farrakhan, Kahane, Pat Buchanan, a Mussolini, Jesse Helms, elements of the anti-abortionist movement, the creationists on the Kansas Board of Education?

These are not people of "good faith". In 1932 Jews in Germany made the mistake of thinking fascists were people of good faith. Blacks made the same mistake in the early days of the slave trade. Labor made the same mistake when it accepted the open shop. We thought we were dealing with people of good faith as we were led into the Korean and Vietnam wars.

To state that "creationists are not evil, just misguided" is to understate their threat. To ask the question "Are we missing a crucial point the creationists see?" is to take us down the path of self-destruction. Do we really want to have a dialogue with skinheads, fascists, and the KKK, hate mongers? Do we think they would listen? If the answer is yes then we have learned nothing from our past and are condemned to its repetition. Our legal system, use of the courts, education, the vote, demonstrations, activism, programs around issues: these are the proper, meaningful, effective and ethical responses of a Democracy. This should be the direction of the Ethical Society.

Reflections on the Anti-Klan Rally by Bob Strock

To say I went to show support to the passionate, committed people actively trying to crush the Klan into non-existence would be to give me too much credit. But I felt like I should be there, so I went.

Three things struck me: the isolation and ridiculousness of the Klan "rally", the heavy (but not at all unexpected) police presence, and the remarkable diversity and fragmentation of the crowd.

The Klan members who did show up looked like little boys playing dress-up. Without their masks, they were nothing; with them, they would have struck a fearful presence. The Klan hood and mask is a symbol that communicates more clearly than any of their incoherent gibberish, and perhaps as such should be protected by the First Amendment. But then again, the anonymity of the masks is inseparable from their symbolic power, and also was the key to the Klan's reign of terror at the height of its influence. With such a history, the act of wearing a Klan mask becomes itself an act of hate speech, and may not be protected by the First Amendment after all.

The police presence was typical of the city's current regime. The crowd-control tactics seemed gentle in comparison to other events I've seen on TV (no helicopters ten feet off the ground), but I was amazed at the convoluted structure of the barriers. It seemed the police went out of their way to keep the crowd from joining together into one coherent mass. From my vantage point across the park, I could see at least four separate cells of dissent, well-separated by a maze of fences and armed guards, all far away from the target of their rage, and all unable to unite in one collective voice.

The fragmentation of the protest paralleled the fragmentation of the people who were protesting. There were so many shades of dissent, and every shade incorporated an opposition to the KKK. It's sad, but it seems that so often the only way a large group of people can unite is through their opposition to another group (that or a sports championship).

It's easy to denounce the Klan, because the power of the symbol is so clear to people on both sides of the issue. But what about the devil we don't know? I saw plenty of forms of intolerance and hatred in all corners of the fragmented opposition. I'm sure I displayed a few myself without even knowing it.

KKK. These three letters are a knife which cuts into the deepest wound in American society. It is a wound that will not heal until all people are cured of the misconception that anyone can be seen as superior to anyone else because of their race. It is a wound that will take generations to heal, if it heals at all.

What is freedom? What is self-determination? Is it an end, or is it a means to something else? Clearly for the freedom fighter it is an end. But once freedom is achieved, what then? In the most basic sense, freedom entails the right to be left alone; to not be bothered, and to do as one wishes, as long as it doesn't interfere with the rights of others to pursue the same. But is this all that freedom means? Assured freedom means freedom from constraint. But does freedom from constraint open the door to something else; something that reaches deeper and further than the right to be left alone in a detached universe of individual pursuit?

I think it does, and so do many at the very end of the twentieth century. It is the need to give individual freedom greater substance that I believe fuels much of the debate about values these days, and makes the return to religion such an attractive option for many.

Ethical Culture cherishes freedom greatly. It values highly the dignity and rights of the individual. But there is another pole to Ethical Culture which responds powerfully to the hungers of our times. That is the need to locate ourselves as individuals within the larger web of underlying relations and connections: with humankind past, present, and future, and with the natural world from which we emerge and on which we depend. It is this deeper appreciation which suggests for us our obligation, and what we must do. It also provides the basis of a religious view of life, which finds no recourse in the supernatural, but answers the need for deeper meaning and purpose.

Joseph Chuman, Leader - Bergen County Ethical Society

NOVEMBER 1999 BSEC CALENDAR

11/1 – 11/6

Tuesday, 11/2

7:30-9PM: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus* directed by Bev Grant. Call 768-2972 for info.

Wednesday 11/3

6:30-10:30PM: *Pinewoods Folk Open Sing* with potluck supper & snacks. Bring your voice and instruments. Free Admission.

6:30-8PM: *But Is It Right?* An open and ongoing discussion focusing on basic ethical notions and every day moral dilemmas. Tonight's topic: *Exploring personal responsibility.*

8-9:30PM: *The Creative Process*, a series of discussions with guest speakers in the fields of literature, music and art. Tonight's guest is author Ernesto Mestres.

Thursday 11/4

7-9PM: T'ai Chi Chuan with J.P. Harpignes. \$12/class; \$40 for 4; BSEC members free.

Friday, 11/5

7PM: Y.E.S. Youth Group Meeting. Contact Rita Wilson at 284-0241 for info.

8PM: The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents *The Moonlighters* with Bliss Blood, Henry Bogdan, Daria Klotz and Andrew Hall. \$8 Admission at the door.

Saturday, 11/6

10-11AM: *The Art of Belly Dancing* taught by Salome. Free to BSEC Members.

11/7 – 11/14

Sunday 11/7

10AM-12:30PM: Children's Assembly.

10-11AM: Parents' Discussion Group.

11AM: Sunday Platform with Leader Lisel Burns: *Responsible for What?*

Tuesday, 11/9

7:30-9PM: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus.*

Wednesday 11/10

7:30PM: Wedding Couples' Workshop with BSEC Leader Lisel Burns.

Thursday 11/11

7-9PM: *T'ai Chi Chuan.*

Friday, 11/12

6:30PM: Membership Potluck Supper for new, old, and future members. Call the BSEC Office for more information.

8PM: The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents singer, songwriter, and cultural activist *Bev Grant* with songwriter-storyteller *Jay Mankita*. Admission \$8.

Saturday, 11/13

10-11AM: *The Art of Belly Dancing.*

Sunday 11/14

10AM-12:30PM: Children's Assembly

11AM: Sunday Platform *Paulo Freire: Theory and Practice for Modern Living*, with educator and author Ira Shor.

1:30PM: HPP Special Event on the controversial new Caribbean trade bill.

11/15 – 11/21

Tuesday, 11/16

7:30-9PM: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus.*

Wednesday 11/17

7:30-9PM: *Games Galore Night.* Family entertainment with games and light refreshments. Admission \$8 per person or \$6 if you bring your own game. Call Bruce Leibowitz at 336-3683 for information.

7:30-9PM: *Faith Conversations.*

Thursday 11/18

7-9PM: T'ai Chi Chuan.

7PM: The Richard Price Book Discussion Group discusses *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Dandicat.

Friday, 11/19

8PM: The Good Coffeehouse concert series presents presents Third Friday with the Park Slope Food Coop: *Classical Plus* featuring Hayley Gorenberg on violin, Tracy Fitz on flute and Martha Siegel on cello, and *Cellennium*, a Cello Octet with soprano Maxine Sullivan performing compositions by Heitor Villa-Lobos. Admission \$8.

Saturday, 11/20

10-11AM: *The Art of Belly Dancing.*

Sunday 11/21

10AM-12:30PM: Children's Assembly.

10-11AM: Parents' Discussion Group.

11AM: Wampanoag Festival.

12:30PM: Oxfam Benefit Luncheon.

Membership News

BSEC is planning a fund-raising auction for March 26, 2000. We need donations from members and friends. If you have any services you can offer (dinners, baby-sitting, tours, etc.) or products you would like to donate, please contact us. We will also be needing storage space (garages, basements, etc.) Please contact Larry Sherman, Ruth Pikitch, Bruce Leibowitz, or the BSEC Office.

New Year's planning is in full swing! Antoinette Wagnerman is chairing the planning committee. If you have ideas or would just like to help, contact Antoinette or the BSEC Office.

Robin Feld's studio was a stop on the Gowanus Artist's Studio Tour the weekend of October 23rd & 24th. The tours are a chance for people to see artists' works in their natural habitat, and Robin to get exposure and hopefully a sale or two.

Kurt Johnson and co-author Steve Coates will be at the Community Bookstore in Park Slope (143 7th Ave near Garfield) on Nov. 11 at 7:30PM, reading excerpts from *Nabokov's Blues*. The book is the first full accounting of Vladimir Nabokov's work as a scientist before he gained fame for *Lolita* and other novels. "Readers with a taste for science and literature will love this book, which is both entertaining and polymathically informative - rather like the English/Russian, naturalist/novelist, scholar/artist Nabokov himself." -Publisher's Weekly

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

William Wordsworth

11/22 – 12/1

Tuesday, 11/23

7:30-9PM: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus.*

Wednesday 11/24

6:30-8PM: **Newcomers' Workshop:** *The Eight Commitments of Ethical Culture.*

8PM: **Core Values Workshop**, with Leader Lisel Burns and Anne Klaeyens.

Thursday, 11/25 Happy Thanksgiving!

Saturday, 11/27

10-11AM: *The Art of Belly Dancing.*

Sunday 11/28

NO Sunday School or Parents' Group

11AM: Colloquy - shared reflections.

Tuesday, 11/30

7:30-9PM: *Brooklyn Women's Chorus.*

Wednesday 12/1

6:30-10:30PM: *Pinewoods Folk Open Sing.*

6:30-8PM: *But Is It Right?*

8-9:30PM: *The Creative Process* with composer Bernadette Speech.

November Platforms

November 7:

Responsible for What?

With BSEC Leader Lisel Burns. What relation love of self and others to responsibility? How to find ways of living that balance both self-interest and the needs of others? At the heart of moral life we find the need to live in services to ideals of both love and responsibility. The poetry of Rumi, the Sufi mystic, has intriguing answers.

November 14:

Paulo Freire: Theory and Practice for Modern Living

Ira Shor, a pioneer in the field of Critical Education, and author of *Empowering Education*, will discuss the work and philosophy of the great Brazilian educator (and his mentor) Paulo Freire.

November 21:

Intergenerational Wampanoag Festival

With Remi Gay and the students of the Children's Sunday Assembly, in an intergenerational celebration of abundance and gratitude, drawing on Native American traditions. Followed by a Brooklyn Ethical tradition, the 2-3-4 Oxfam Luncheon.

November 28:

Sunday Colloquy

Shared reflections on Thanksgiving.

December 5:

What Are My First Things? Personal Priorities for the Next Millennium

With BSEC Leader Lisel Burns. Setting up a life so that our most cherished values are honored first requires foresight, insight, courage, and discipline. What conditions can we create to elicit these qualities in each other?

Platforms are held every Sunday morning from 11AM to 12:15PM in the main hall of the Meeting House on Prospect Park West, followed by a convivial and delicious buffet lunch. Please stop by!

WHAT DO WE WANT?

- We want to live ethically ourselves and encourage others to do the same.
- We want to support others in their efforts to live ethically.
- We want to help families of all kinds to bring up children who have positive moral values and a principled approach to solving moral problems.
- We want to help people act upon their ethical concerns in the larger community.

As caring individuals, and as members of the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture community, we are committed to helping each other find rooted, responsible ways of living amid the challenges of the year 2000. To that end we dedicate our core programs and activities.

From the Fall 1999 BSEC Vision Statement

Love your intellectual enemies, may usefully be added to the stock of moral commandments; keep an open and hospitable mind to opinions and ways of acting, thinking, and feeling which naturally repel you. And it will help us to discipline ourselves in this difficult behavior if we reflect that the views most contrary to our own are nevertheless sure to contain some element of truth which we cannot afford to disregard, and which will serve the purpose of correcting and supplementing such truth as we may ourselves possess.

Felix Adler - An Ethical Philosophy of Life



Ira Shor Speaks November 14th

BSEC is proud and honored to welcome pioneering educator Ira Shor for a very special platform on November 14.

New ways of living require a philosophical outlook morally suited to the times. This platform will offer an overview and demonstration of the critical thinking of the legendary Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, whose philosophy and pedagogy of the oppressed challenge all of us to become subjects in our own lives and in democratic dialogue with others.

Ira Shor is a professor at the CUNY Graduate Center, and an internationally respected writer and activist in the popular education movement. His books on the critical work of Paulo Freire are in great demand.

We hope everyone takes this opportunity to come and learn from one of the great educators of our time.

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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