

**Interview with Bob Swann by Shann Turnbull
1984**

transcribed by Heather Davidson

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Shann: Alright. Let's start off this interview by—Bob, you have a worldwide reputation of...you've established in working towards social and economic reform and in the peace movement. Can you tell us where your interests, knowledge, and experience developed from?

Bob: Well it certainly came in from many different angles. I guess my initial concern started back—way back—in my concern about war and violence in general, and led to my becoming a conscientious objector and going to prison during World War II, where, in which I spent two years. Those were very important years for me as they were for, I'm sure, many other COs that were in prison at the time in that many of the ideas that we became familiar with, in prison particularly as well as before prison, were, became the fundamental basis on which the rest of our lives have grown. Certainly mine has grown out of that...

S So you had time to think...

B Lots of time! [laughs]

S ...and also access to ideas. What's—who were the influences that formulated, gave you direction and guidance and formulated your thinking?

B I think the three major streams of influence at that time, for me, included Arthur Morgan, who was at that time—had just left TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority] and had established back in Yellow Springs where he was formerly head of Antioch College, Community Service Incorporated as a [sic] educational, promotional center for helping to revive, revitalize, and...assist small towns, small communities, both from an economic and from a social viewpoint.

S You described Arthur Morgan as the first, the first active bioregionalist...

B Well, probably not fair to say he was the first active bioregionalist.

S First one, first person to put bioregionalism into practice.

B Well I think certainly one of the most active ones in his work in the TVA.

S Which was a bioregion...

B Which was dealing with a very specific bioregion of the Tennessee Valley itself and much of the work that he did there was based on, I suppose, some of the earlier thinking of bioregionalists like **Frederick Law Olmstead** and others who were, were very important thinkers in this direction and certainly Lewis Mumford. In fact,

Morgan gave a course which I took by correspondence while I was in jail called "The Small Community" and one of the books which he recommended and we all read as a text book was Lewis Mumford's The City in History and Techniques in Civilization. So, that was one of my important influences at that time.

Another one was Ralph Borsodi whom I had heard of before going to prison and knew a little bit about, but became much more acquainted with in his books and others while i was in prison, such as his Flight From the City and so on.

S So that was another decentralist...

B Yes...

S ...like Morgan was...

B Exactly. I would say, you know, if you were to look at American streams of decentralism, I think Morgan and Borsodi are the two primary names of Americans that led in the thinking about decentralism, going back to, oh, the early 1920s almost in their work.

S And...Borsodi was more on economics and Morgan was more on the human psychology...

B That's right. That's right. Well, Morgan was more social—he was an engineer, professionally, he was a civil engineer professionally, and I think in his earlier period he adopted the term "social engineering" which has come to not be a very good term in today's world. But he was more concerned with the social aspects than the economic. But Borsodi was an economist.

S And you mentioned there's a third major stream...

B Third major stream was Frank Lloyd Wright, on the cultural, artistic side, which had been my major interest before I went to prison. I was at that time more involved with arts—painting, drawing, the whole art field—and I became interested in architecture and I'd known of Wright previous to prison but I hadn't known specifically. At any rate, I had time to study his works and so on while I was in prison so that when I came out, my interest was in the building design field and that's what I started in.

S So you read sociology from Arthur Morgan, economics from Ralph Borsodi, and culture and architecture through Frank Lloyd Wright.

B Frank Lloyd Wright, yes. All of them were decentralists.

S All of them were decentralists?

B All of them were decentralists. In fact, Wright, Wright used Borsodi's economic analysis in one of his very well-known proposals—the name of which is slipping me right now—but Wright designed a whole rural decentralist community based on Borsodi's economic analysis.

S So you read—you had not met any of these three men...

B No, I'd never met any of them...

S And this is in the years, what, 1943...

B '42 to '44

S '42 to '44

B During the war—

S So I can see how important this was to your life's mission because to my knowledge, you've worked with every three of these men.

B Eventually I worked with all three of them, yes.

S Can you tell us about your work.

B Well, Morgan was the one I worked with first after prison. He invited me to come and work with him in Community Service Incorporated in Yellow Springs, Ohio. And I did work with for a while, for about a year there, and then began working in the building field. About a year after that, I went up to Michigan and began building houses for Frank Lloyd Wright, which I did for three years up in Michigan.

S So that brings you up to about '49 to '50—

B Yes.

S And when did you make contact with Borsodi and how?

B I didn't meet Borsodi or really begin working with him until much later, it was 1966 when I first met Borsodi.

S So what were you doing in these...

B Well in the meantime, I spent most of my time building—building and designing. After the early work with Wright—early buildings with Wright—I began to work on my own, doing my own designing. Actually, my brother and I were partners for a while. He was a graduate architect and we built houses around

Chicago for three years. And then I moved east to Philadelphia and built houses in the east, in Princeton, New Jersey, and in Philadelphia, until 1960. That was the, my major period of active construction and design work. Then in 1960, along with others, including my wife Marjorie, organized the, helped organize the Committee for Nonviolent Action in New England, and we moved up to New London, or New London area, and from 1960 through 1964 and five, really, I was most involved in peace action and civil rights action, in the United States.

S That is in the antinuclear movement...

B Antiwar, particularly anti-nuclear bomb

S You didn't go on that boat with George Benello and into the H bomb area...

B Well, I built the boat that first went out and which was arrested and then George Benello went in a second boat.

S Oh I see.

B That's how I met George.

S Troublemaker...

B All troublemakers...

S So you..

B George and I've known each other a long time because we were connected at that...

S How did you get connected with George?

B Well, only through the peace movement..

S Oh I see

B ...connections through the peace movement

S And...Ralph, of course, Borsodi lived in New England and how did that connection come about?

B Yeah, well, but he had been in India, he had spent some time in India in the fifties, and in fact a book came out of that called Challenge of Asia. He found when he went to India a great compatibility with the Gandhian movement—

S Compatibility of his ideas...

B Of his ideas with the, in the Gandhian movement there...

S How would you...

B Decentralist and of course, Gandhi's whole idea of village development and village decentralism, you know.

S So Borsodi's concept of social organization which he had developed independently, he found to be in congruence with Gandhi...

B Yeah, very much so, and of course, the same with Morgan, too. Morgan who also spent time in India.

S Oh...

B Interestingly...

S What time was that?

B I'm not sure what the years were, now. My recollection is that it was in the fifties sometime. He was called...The Indians were interested in Morgan because of TVA.

S I see.

B Interestingly enough. And by the time Morgan went to India and was advising them on large dam building, which he was an expert in, that was his speciality, he was no longer interested in it, and he tried to convince the Indians that they shouldn't do that. That they should really go in toward...

S That big was not best...

B ...for small...exactly...and interestingly enough, he developed a very close relationship with a few Indians who were doing small village development. And that was what he was really interested in.

S He was appointed by your president Roosevelt as one of the three men triumphant...

B One of the three directors of TVA, the original...

S ...which designed and built the biggest, one of the biggest enterprises of the Depression.

B Enterprises, that's right, that's correct.

S But he was a believer of small is beautiful.

B That's right, yes.

S But his ideas he developed independently also in this country before he went to India...

B I think quite independently, yeah.

S And Borsodi also.

B Mmhmm

S And...

B Again, Borsodi's interest was primarily on the economics...Borsodi was very analytical in an economic sense, very analytical, whereas Morgan tended to be much broader in the social sense.

S He was more interested in the social relationships, the development of people's personalities in small groups..

B And characters...

S And also, was he involved with the technology, tied with technology?

B Well, to some degree, yeah, of course, being an engineer he was also interested in technology but not in the economic sense as much as Borsodi was...Borsodi, for instance, Borsodi did very detailed cost-analysis of how a woman bakes bread in the home and comparing that with mass production of bread, and he came to the conclusion—this is the middle of the Depression now—that a woman could earn more money baking bread in the home, than she could if she went and worked in a bakery, for instance...she would actually be earning more money and baking, of course, better bread, at the same time. And he showed, at that time, what now economists are talking more about, which is the, what economists call the externalities of cost. He began to analyze those externalities right in the beginning and he showed that real social costs accounting would demonstrate that mass production was not as efficient as it was assumed to be.

S A real pioneer...

B A real pioneer...

S In the alternative economics...

B Exactly.

S Well, you were telling us about your contact with Borsodi, his trip to India, where his analytical—independently developed analytical ideas of small is beautiful were reinforced by the Gandhian philosophy and you were going to tell us about how you came in contact with him.

B Well, I met him through the offices of a mutual friend who was a publisher and lived in Boston...Sergeant, Porter Sergeant...Porter Sergeant I had known for some time and Porter wanted to publish one of Borsodi's recent books...what Borsodi called his opum magnus, or magnum opus...the Seventeen Problems of Man and Society. The book, this is the only edition by the way [showing Shann] that was ever printed, actually, in India. It's never been published in the United States as yet. Porter and Borsodi were having an argument about the editor, editorializing on it and never resolved that argument before Borsodi died, in 1977. So unfortunately, the book has never been printed in the United States, actually.

S But how did you meet Borsodi? You met Porter...

B I met him at, in Porter's office.

S Right, and how did you...

B Porter introduced me to him...

S And then you established a working relationship[?]

B What happened was that I had been in the south working in the civil rights movement in the, 1964, what's called the hot summer of 1964, and I saw that what was happening was that while black people were getting more legal rights and discrimination was breaking down after the Civil Rights Act of '64, I realized that economically, they were still just as depressed and still in just the same conditions as anyone else. As somebody put it [?] at the time, while it's nice to be able to sit in a restaurant next to a white man but if you haven't got the price of a hamburger, what good does it do you?

And that was the situation. So I came back from the south convinced that what was needed was an economic program that would make it possible for blacks to get access to capital and credit, which they didn't have. And what I found out that, Borsodi had just come back from India with exactly the same kind of an idea, about what was needed for the Gandhian movement in India. And at that time, Borsodi had just convinced **J.P. Narayan**, who is, any Indian will recognize the name as *the* key leader of the Gandhian movement at that period of time...

S He's the man that had the power to appoint all the prime ministers...

B Yeah, that's right, that's right...

S Now, would Borsodi have met our mutual friend **Garandi Dishponday** at the time?

B I don't think so. I really don't know, at least I've never heard **Dishponday** speak of him. But he knew most of the key leaders in the Gandhian movement, particularly J.P.

S Who was also one of the promoters of the Trusteeship Foundation to promote what Americans call expanded ownership...

B Exactly...

S ...in India. So *you* developed the idea, from your exposure to poverty in the south, of the need to, that the key to improving your living standards was access to capital and credit...

B Right

S ...which is what you're working on right this moment.

B Right

S ...And that, and Borsodi had also had that same insight in 1964/5...

B Yeah. You see, to go back again for a moment, the Gandhian movement in India was that time led by both J.P.[says full name] and Vinoba Bhave and the...

S Vinoba Bhave...

B Vinoba Bhave.

S ...was the land reform...

B The leader of the Gramdam movement. He started the Gramdam movement. It was originally Buddha and then became Gramdam. And Vinoba and J.P.[says full name] had been getting these thousands of villagers to, what they call, opt for Gramdam, that is to adopt a Gramdam approach, and Borsodi realized that what Gramdam was, was very much the same kind of thing that he had started in this country in two or three communities here. Such as the one at Suffern, New York.

S What year was that that Borsodi started?

B Well, Borsodi started Suffern in 1932 I believe it was.

S Was that the precursor of land trusts?

B Yes, exactly.

S And, your visit to India in 1978, you would have met J.P. and Vinoba...

B I did meet J.P. and I also met Vinoba at that time...

S So you got direct, we'll come up to that later...We're back onto establishing a working relationship with Borsodi...

B Yes, well, Borsodi had the insight and he convinced J.P. that it was the right approach, which was that the gramdam movement had been successful in getting land given to landless peasants, but the peasants didn't have any credit with which to improve their land. You know, here they were without any land, and then they were given a bit of land—it wasn't very much, you see—but they had a bit of land but now, how did they get a pair of oxen or a plow or just the simplest instruments with which to work the land? They had no credit. There was no capital available. So Borsodi convinced J.P.[full] that there had to be an approach to capital and credit for the gramdam movement in India. Otherwise it was leading towards a failure. So he came back with J.P.'s blessing in 1966, just when I met him, that this was what he wanted to do. So we saw that what I was thinking of for the south was the same as what he'd been thinking about for India, with J.P. So we combined forces and started at that time the International Independence Foundation, which later became the Institute for Community Economics.

S Which still exists to this day?

B Still exists, and is going, and it primarily is promoting and educating community land trusts.

S Well, tell us about the work you did with Borsodi from 1966...until his death in 1977.

B Well, one of the first things we did was to start this Institute and Borsodi wanted to initiate a pilot program in India. That was his first goal. He had \$2000, mostly his own money, and he wanted to go and get something started. So we went to London and talked with anyone we could talk with there, and it turns out at that moment, Schumacher, Fritz Schumacher, was in the process of beginning the, what became the ITDG...Intermediate Technology Development Group.

S Which year was that?

B Well that was 1967, that was just the next year, the following year...

S So you met Fritz Schumacher in '67...

B Borsodi and I both met Schumacher that year...

S Right.

B ...and that was our first acquaintance but we spent quite a bit of time talking about our mutual interests. And what Schumacher saw right away was that the kind of thing he wanted to do, with starting the small shops and small workplaces as he called them, needed the capital and the credit to get started so he saw the complementarity of the two ideas and how they could work together at that time. And we had considerable discussions about that but *both* projects were in their formative stages at that moment.

S And did Schumacher become affiliated with your initiatives, with the...

B Well there was no, no, what we agreed at that time that we should both develop independently but keeping close touch with each other and see how we might...

S Sister relationships...

B ...fit these together at some future point.

S So that...so what other projects did you develop with Borsodi? How did you develop the first land trust?

B Well, then, what happened was that Borsodi was already in his eighties—he was eighty-three or eighty-four years old at the time, and he had an erratic health situation. He could be going along very well for a period of time and then he would just collapse. And what happened when he was in London, he collapsed. And his doctor told him—this is, I think his second trip actually, in London, but he wasn't married—the doctor told him he had to just cut out of all active things for the time being. So, he sort of dropped out entirely and two of us who were interested in the whole thing, began to work together on it and...

S Who was the other one?

B Ah, **Shuman Gatchauk** and Eric Conch were two good friends of mine...

S And this is the International Independence...

B International Independence Institute.

S And that's when you started the land trust movement?

B That's when we first started the land trust, and, again, see, I had come from the South and the problems with blacks in the South, so I went back south and developed my contacts in the South and we developed a program...by linking up

with people in the Albany area, which eventually became the first community land trust in the United States.

S And this is why you're called the father of the land trust movement?

B I guess it is, yeah.

S And, but the land trust concept, its progenitor, if you will, was the intentional communities that Borsodi started in 1933.

B That's right, that's right.

S There were two, I didn't get their names—could you mention that?

B Suffern, one at Suffern, New York, and one at **Bringuelad**, southern Pennsylvania.

S So you got the first land trust going in '68...

B Well, it wasn't thoroughly going, we were initiating it...

S Started it...

B ...we didn't get the land until 1969.

S Right.

B And you know, it's been going ever since. That was on large scale, that was five thousand acres of land, initiated.

S So that is the, that's '69, and the land trust movement, the Institute...International Independence Institute became the Institute for Community Economics...which became the resource center for the nation, for developing land trusts through this country.

B That's right.

S Right. Now...

B We wrote a book about it in 1972...following up on the experience in the South and so on...

S But in...can you tell us about your 1974 work with Borsodi, in Exeter?

B In 1972.

S Oh, 1972, okay...

B That was 1972 also. Borsodi, as I said, because of his health, he stayed quiet for quite a few years, from I think it was 1968 or maybe before that he...so, he didn't, really didn't do much at all except do some writing in between '68 and '72. And then he decided that he wanted, he was feeling better—his health had come back again—although by that time he was now about 87 or 88. He still wanted to launch something significant in his lifetime, so he initiated virtually singlehandedly in the first place, the alternative currency or local currency which he called the constant, in Exeter, New Hampshire, and because I had been in close touch with him all during that period, he asked me to come up and help him with it. So, I did, and we jointly, along with other people, for a period of time carried on this experiment that he called the Exeter Experiment.

S That...I've read the national publicity in *Time* magazine and *Newsweek* and even...

B Got a lot of publicity, yes...

S ...the chairmen of big multinationals like Amex were interested in that because they saw their corporations being backed by a basket of commodities just like your constants were.

B That's right. He had...he based his work partly on Irving Fisher's work. Irving Fisher was a Yale University economist back in the 1920s and Borsodi had worked with Fisher during that period.

S Fisher was a Yale...

B He was a Yale University economist.

S ...economist. And wasn't he involved in...

B Well, what he wanted to do was to use, he wanted to use a basket of commodities to determine the price of gold and sort of fix a relationship with the dollar in gold, as I recall. But most of his work that Borsodi enlarged on was the developing of an index of commodities that would be useful in determining the value of a currency.

S Can we go back and find out what relationship, if any, was with...Fritz Schumacher, during...at the time you first met him in '67 he was 74...

B Yes. Well I saw him once or twice again when I was in London. We had conversations and...correspondence, and then I, I had been urging John Papworth who was the editor of *Resurgence*—he initiated *Resurgence*—and where Schumacher's articles first appeared, that is, the articles that he's best known for, I

think, like "Buddhist Economics," in the early sixties, going back to the early sixties...

S Could I just stop you there for a moment? The "Buddhist Economics"—When did Schumacher, was it from your contact—was it Schumacher's contact with you and Borsodi who, that got him interested in India? What took him to India?

B Oh, no no no. It was totally independent of that. Schumacher was a pretty well-known economist in England going back to the, well, way back to the middle forties, after the war. He was doing writing for some of the well-known British papers like *Financial Times*. But he was a fairly conventional economist, as I understood at that time—he was more of a Keynesian...

[break in tape]

S ...Schumacher to India, and his ideas of Buddhist economics fall...

B Right. Well that story goes back to his invitation—he was at the, he was employed at the time by the British Coal Board. This was back in the mid-fifties, 1950s I believe, and he was invited to India—oh no, I'm sorry—he was invited to Burma, not India, to advise them on economic development. And had never been to the east before—all of his work had been in the industrialized west. And he had this notion that, when he found out that they were so poor at sixty dollars a month, I mean sixty dollars a year, average income in Burma, he thought that would, must be the poorest country in the world. And when he arrived in Burma and found out that these people were very happy and enjoying themselves—and I mean, it was just unbelievable to him, what a happy bunch of people they were as compared with his knowledge of people in Britain—it made him realize that it was something wrong with the economic ideas of the west and he had to, better had to rethink his ideas. So he said that at that time he *really* rethought all of his thinking and he was very much influenced by the Buddhist ideas. So eventually that became that essay, rather famous essay, that he wrote for, originally for *Resurgence* magazine, called "Buddhist Economics."

S Which year was that?

B Well, I can't remember when that appeared, but I believe it was in the mid-sixties, about '62 or '63 or sometime there...

S Right. But whereas Arthur Morgan and Ralph Borsodi had gone to India, had conceived the idea of small is best before they went to India, and Schumacher was a traditional "big is best" mainline Keynesian, and he got converted by going to Burma.

B I think that's accurate. I mean, that was his own statement to me personally, so I think that's accurate to say, really.

S And then...

B I'm sure he'd done some thinking about it before—it wasn't all a tremendous revelation...but it hit him very hard...

S And you were associated, or responsible for, Schumacher's first visit to the United States. How did that come about?

B Well no, it wasn't his first visit by a long shot. He'd been over here many times before, in fact he, he went to Columbia University, he graduated from Columbia University, and taught for a year or two I think, at Columbia, when he graduated, and this was back in the early 1930s sometime...

S Oh, I see...

B So he knew the United States fairly well but, no, what happened there was that because many of us, including me, had been urging John Papworth and Schumacher to put together his writings into a book, previous to 1972, finally that did happen, and the book Small is Beautiful was first published in England and then the Harpers and Row published it over here, I believe, that's correct. At any rate, these publishers, you know, publishers just don't spend much money on advertising books, as you well know. And, the result was, nothing much was happening. The book was sort of languishing along...with a few hundred or so copies...

S This was 1973...

B This would have been, well, it would have been about then, yes. The book came out in '72, so I just happened, I was in Switzerland in '73, and I ran into him there, quite, almost by accident, and I said to him at the time, "Well why don't you come over to the United States and we'll put you on a lecture tour and promote the book? You know, it needs some personal promotion." Well, that's exactly what happened in 1974. He did come over and the Institute sponsored his trip throughout the United States...

S This was the International Institute...

B Well, it was the Institute for Community Economics at that time. And, we got a lot of help from people like Hazel Henderson and Ian Baldwin, and others too, promoting him, because by that time, there was a growing movement in the United States, that has been developing rapidly ever since, and at the same time, the energy crisis had suddenly hit. If you remember right, it was the same time as the oil, the oil crisis...and so all of a sudden, people's ears were open and our timing had just happened to be perfect. And we brought him over here at the time when people were ready to listen. And the result was that there was a lot more publicity and the book began to catch on...

S Became a bestseller...

B Became eventually a bestseller...

S But it all rose out of a casual conversation between you and Schumacher in Switzerland...And then, how did you get to India in '78? What's the story behind that?

B Well, I'd been, you know, I'd wanted to go to India for a long time and **Rhoda Christnia** who was the director of the Gandhian Foundation in New Delhi, was in the United States, in I guess it was '77, maybe it was '76, I really can't remember. Anyway, he said, "Look, why don't you and your wife, (my wife Marjorie), come to India and we'll sponsor your trip and we'll pay for the cost of it in India, and we'd like you to visit and see all of the things that the Gandhians are doing and just, as long as you can put the airfare over, why we'll pay for the rest of the costs and set up the trip for you," which they did, and so that was how it happened. We were fortunate to be able to see a great deal of India for a period of six weeks, actually.

S And I...you did some work with village currencies also in India, or was that later?

B Well, yeah, I, actually was...a proposal that I made in visiting several of these Gandhian ashrams and talking with the Gandhians that were there. I found that there were quite a few of them who were very interested in the idea of a village currency. So while I was there I wrote a paper on the idea of a local village currency and the reason for it, and that paper then was circulated around India and you know, I've been getting feedback, a little bit at a time, ever since then.

S And just a personal question—how did you get in contact, how'd you get within the sights of John Turner, who wrote Self-Help Building and Housing for People.

B Okay, that was through contacts with **Stan Winness**. Stan Winness, who now heads up the Alternative Foundation, I think it's now called, at that time he had a different name for it...I can't remember...at any rate, he sponsored a conference and I believe that conference was in '76 if I recollect correct, in England on—he just brought together a group of people that were working in the general area of alternative economic and alternative social development...

S And this is from your land trust interests...

B Yeah, primarily.

S And so you met John in '76...

B And John Turner was at that conference and that's how we became connected and...

S I met him in '76 at the UN Habitat Conference, the same year, and it was through him that he introduced us together in a network in 1978.

B 1978, right, exactly.

S So that's why...right. So, did you have any further dealings with Schumacher after that tour that you...

B Well, nothing with any great significance. We kept up some correspondence and so on, but there wasn't...he asked me to head up a kind of American contingency, you might say, for his work, and I was too involved with the community land trust work and felt I just couldn't take it on, it was more than I could handle. This was when he was over in '74, and I told him that, as much as I'd like to, I just didn't feel that was something I could deal with, I just didn't have the time at that time.

S He died in...

B '77.

S And tell us how you then ended up being president of the E. F. Schumacher Society.

[laughter]

B Well, in '79, I believe it was, maybe it was '80, I guess it was '80, in 1980, the...well, before that, the English Society had been started by Satish Kumar and others in England, and I think they may have started in '78, if I remember right. At any rate, two years after that, I believe it was 1980, when Satish first came over here, and he had written ahead to me and others that he wanted to talk about the possibility of an American Society. He talked to John McClaughry and he talked to me, he talked to, I believe he talked to Ian Baldwin, I don't know who all else...and asked us if we would get together and form a U.S. Society. The fact of the matter is, one of the meetings we had was in New York, with several of them that were involved at that time—I'm not sure who were all in that meeting—but at any rate, whoever they were, they said well we ought to ask Bob Swann to be the president. So I became the president by their request, actually.

S And who was Satish Kumar, at that stage, see he's the editor of this tape...

B I don't know exactly when Satish became the editor of...John Papworth left for Africa to work with **Kenneth Kaunda**, Kenneth Kaunda the president of Zambia. John and Kenneth were good friends in London—Kenneth Kaunda was in exile in London until Zambia became independent, and then he went back, he became president of Zambia. He and John were close friends and so Kenneth asked John to go to Zambia and work with him there. At that time, I believe it was at that time, Satish was invited to become editor of *Resurgence*. And he's been editor ever since.

S What year was that?

B I don't know, Satish will know...

S He can put it in himself! [laughter] Well tell us about what the Society's been up to, it formed in when 1981?

B No, it was 1980 when we first started.

S And so you've been going four years and so what you've done and what's your mission?

B Well this will be our fourth year. We've had three lectures, every year since we started. This will be the fourth lecture.

S The Schumacher Lectures...

B Right. At each one of the lectures we've had two lecturers including Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson at the first one, and George McRobie and Elise Boulding at the second one, and then Kirkpatrick Sale and Jane Jacobs at the last one. In addition to that, two years ago, as you know, we started the seminars, and now we've had altogether five seminars...

S Tools for Community Economic Transformation. But can you relate the lecture series and seminars to the purpose of the Schumacher Society? Would you like to say something about the mission, the reason for being?

B Yeah, well, I think...

S And how these things support it...

B Well I think the, as I see the lectures and the seminars, they work hand-in-hand in that the lectures reach a broader audience. They bring in a much wider group of people, into the Schumacher interests and concerns while the seminars are in-depth kind of training, basically training programs...

S For community activists...

B ...Mostly designed for community activists, people who are already pretty far along in their thinking about these things, generally.

S Let me rephrase my question. What I was looking for is the mission of the Society. My feeling is that the mission is to change society, to transform societies, and what is the vision you have, and how does this relate to your impressionable

years as a conscientious protestor from 1942 to '44?

B Yes, well, to me they all hang together. In order to have peace, which was one of my primary interests as a conscientious objector, it's necessary to make some very basic changes in our social structure, and it seemed to me that the people that I've learned from and worked with, like Borsodi and Morgan and Schumacher and so on, are the ones that have best articulated what those changes have to be and what they should be. The Schumacher Society, as I see it, is a vehicle, a medium, by which we can move in that direction to change society, in the direction that's been clearly set out by those men already.

S But implicit in your statement there is that peace is dependent upon the social and economic organization of society...

B I believe so, yes...

S And this is the thesis that is now being taken up by [Stewart Spicer] in his new book, How to Stop the Nuclear Holocaust, that if you take away the ideological tensions, the inequities and the injustice of power, property, money, and technology, removing the tensions by more equal distribution, you'll get a peaceful society.

B Sure, sure.

S And also, empower—liberate people from dominance of centralized political society and big technology. But I'm making your speech for you...

[laughter]

B No, no. No, that's quite alright. As I see it, the ideas are clear—the direction is clear. Schumacher and the others have set the direction, the decentralist direction, basically. The issues are now, how to get there, that is, what are the strategies with which to get there? And I see the Schumacher Society's mission is to work more and more to develop those specific strategies and to find a spokesman and the people that will help to implement those strategies.

S So, in a paraphrase, you see the mission is to popularize the vision of where we want to be and then provide, be an educational vehicle for teaching community activists to make it happen.

B Yes, in very specific ways, in very concrete ways.

S Such as...

B Such as community land trusts, such as alternative currencies—local currencies such as worker management owned industries and so on and so on.

S Can you relate alternative currencies to Schumacher and his experiences?

B Well, I asked Fritz many times about that, actually in our discussions...

S It's something that he hasn't written about to my knowledge...

B That's right, he had not. His general reaction to that, by the way, was that he felt that it wasn't specific currencies, specific directions, we weren't quite ready for. He thought that first he wanted to get the technologies, the intermediate technologies or appropriate technologies, going, and that that would be down the road. But he realized that, he agreed one hundred percent, that for, all from the standpoint of marketing and everything else that he believed in, it was going to be necessary somewhere down the road. He didn't want to focus his own thinking on it because he felt that was not timely enough at the time. In fact...

S But you had gotten together with him—no, you got together with Borsodi in 1966, because you both shared an insight that to empower the poor to be better off, they've got to have access to credit at a small scale.

B Yes.

S Village banking is what we call it today. But Schumacher, did he share that insight?

B Well, it's a hard question for me to answer precisely, because I think he did, but he simply said he wasn't ready to promote that idea yet. He felt it wasn't yet the timing back at that time. Now what he would say today, I don't know. I don't know whether he would agree that this is the right time or not, I can't say for sure.

S And this is what the, the...friends in the trusteeship movement have the same problem with the Gandhian ideas, where Gandhi had the idea of spreading the ownership of the means of production exchange, but didn't articulate the mechanism by which it could be done. And which they're now trying to fill in by working with the seminar series.

B Yes, that's true. I think that's right.

S Well, can you, we've got up to the present time pretty well. Can you, like to tell us about the present economic situation and how the ideas promoted by the Schumacher Society are related to the present economic situation, both in the first world, third world and financial world?

B Well, I guess my first thought is, the readers of *Resurgence* have heard this so many times, it's almost redundant to talk about it at this stage. They've been hearing about it over and over and over again...[laughter]

S Alright. But the editors asked me to interview you on your ideas on economics and I've gotten answer the exam question. [laughter] What I've done is a biography of Bob Swann and his influences which is...

B Yeah, I think one thing that can be said that's interesting is that there is certainly a growing consensus, I think, of people recognizing that we're in a very critical point, historically, where these kind of ideas, these decentralist ideas basically, have become really appropriate and really almost a necessity for the continued existence of the human race. That to me is the interesting thing, that over and over and over again more and more and more people are saying this. More and more you hear people talking about this, the necessity for the basic kind of changes that Schumacher and Borsodi and others advocated. That this is no longer simply desirable, I mean, it's no longer just a matter of, this would be nice direction to go and how awful industrialism has been and so on. They're now saying it's absolutely a necessity for the very existence of the human race.

S They've run out of options and this is the last card in the pack.

B That's right.

S Not only is it the best card in the pack, but it's the last one.

B Yes. So it's now such a vital point, historically, that it is a crucial thing for all of us to work on and I feel that the Schumacher Society is in a good position, a unique position, to help make real advances at this point, in this direction.

S And how would you see the American Society being different from the English Society? Because I've heard Morehouse say that you cannot learn anywhere else in the world the things taught in the U.S. E. F. Schumacher seminars.

[laughter]

B I don't know if I want to make a comment. I think the, I don't know enough about the English Society, that's part of my problem. To the best of my knowledge, their program is primarily the lectures, whereas we have introduced the seminars and...

S Oh, how to get there. So the English Society's focus is on where you want to be, more...

B It *seems* to me that that's, yeah, it's more general outreach...

S And how to get there is done through ITDG.

B I think that's possibly the way to phrase it.

S So they work in a dog and pony show...

B Yes...

S ...What else should I be asking you, Bob, for this?

S Reviewing this tape and what we've been talking about, it seems that many of the ideas that Schumacher has popularized had [sic]its origins way back from the people that influenced you, back in the 1940s—Morgan and Borsodi and...Frank Lloyd Wright. I could perhaps see that from your perspective that Schumacher is really just a new boy on the plot, that these ideas have been going around for some time and that—would that be a fair assessment?

B Well, yes, in parts certainly it is. I think that there are two things that ought to be said about Schumacher. One is that perhaps better than anyone else, he was able to articulate these ideas, partly because, perhaps, he was trained as a fairly conventional economist and then when he changed his viewpoint, he could comprehend the attitudes and the position of the fairly conventional economist and he could phrase and word things in such a way that he could get through to them and others who had been influenced in that direction.

S So he had, not only was he articulate, but he had credibility as being an accepted orthodox respected economist.

B There's no question, he had a great deal of respectability and legitimate credibility. The other thing that I want to say about him is that I think that the unique thing that he introduced, this concept of intermediate technology that's now become appropriate technology, although it had been touched on and worked on by others like Borsodi—Borsodi had developed a number of small-scale technologies in his own work—but Schumacher visualized it and saw it as a key link. In other words, he focused on technology more than anything else as the key link to initiating this kind of change. And that hit a very popular vein, particularly because it came at a good time, of the oil crisis and so on, and it struck a popular vein and took off. Western society is always excited about technology and when somebody comes along with a new idea about technology and expresses it so well, they listen more. So he very naturally had an audience that others didn't have, as it seems to me. That was part of it.

S So summing up, he gave credibility to the decentralist argument, and he was very articulate, and the second point was he sort of crystallized the intermediate technology concept in such a way that could be popularized, and again his articulation...

B He gave it a name, too....that was important.

S He gave it a name. So looking ahead another ten years, and perhaps somebody wants to interview me about you, can I describe what you're doing as extending Schumacher's insight and intermediate or appropriate technology into appropriate banking and currency, the power of access to credit.

B Yes...exactly.

S So, if you want appropriate technology you've got to have appropriate financial mechanisms and that's what your work in alternative currencies is doing.

B Exactly. And in the same way with land, too, the, we're talking about appropriate institutions for holding land and dealing with land and the community land trust is an example. Those, those are all part of, just as you're doing with the cooperative land bank, those are appropriate institutional forms it seems to me. So you're just carrying these concepts further and further as we go along.

S Alright, Bob...

[break in tape]

S Bob, the turning point in your career, or the inspiration, the direction, the template, of your interest in social reform and economic reform came out of the knowledge gleaned by you while you were in prison. But the reason you were imprisoned, we didn't go into that question and that is because of that stage, being a conscientious objector. And all through this interview, you've referred back to your work in the peace movement, and perhaps you'd like to fill in that strand of the story.

B As a matter of fact, it is interesting because John Papworth, then the editor of *Resurgence*, was very active in the British peace movement beginning in the early 1960s and I met John in this country for the first time when he was over on a speaking trip for the British peace movement. He'd been one of the early organizers and activists in England...

S What year was that?

B It was about 1960, '61. I don't recall precisely.

S So...

B About the same time that I was fully engaged. I mean it was a full-time activity of mine to be active in resistance. We thought of what we were doing as being resistance to the nuclear development, the whole nuclear war development at that time, the arms race.

S What sort of things were you doing besides building boats to go into the nuclear

testing zone?

[laughter]

B Well...

[break in tape]

S Bob, it seems that a lot of your connections in the social and economic reform came from contacts you made in the peace movement, and you were telling us about your activities in 1961, with the Community for Non-Violent Action. Can you tell us about the sort of specific things you were doing at that stage?

B Well, I mentioned that John Papworth and I met in the early 1960s which is the connection back to England, *Resurgence* magazine, and Schumacher. But John at that time was mostly involved with the peace movement in England as I was mostly involved in the peace movement in the United States. What we were doing in the Committee for Non-Violent Action was to organize numbers of protest movements and protest actions, most specifically in the New London area, we were organizing demonstrations against the Polaris submarines. And in fact, one of those, at one of those demonstrations, where a couple of our activists went out into the river when they were about to launch a submarine, tried to get right in front of the submarine where they were going to launch it, and were arrested for that, and I, too, was arrested as one of the co-conspirators, and spent three months in jail as a result of that, another three months in jail.

S Again.

B Yes, well, that was the type of activity that we were involved in there. Another, one of the major projects we sponsored was a very long walk starting in San Francisco and walking all the way across the United States and then over to Europe, walking all the way across Europe, and into Russia, and got all the way to Moscow, an average of about thirty people walking, all the time, on that walk. It was the first major break-through in the East-West relationships. The *New York Times*, in fact, wrote an article at the time saying that it was the first breakthrough of any kind in the Cold War with the Russians. And that was one of the more significant...then there was another project we organized, a long walk from Quebec down through the South and in fact it was in that walk that the contacts were made in the South with many people, particularly black people in the South, because it was a black and white walk, and at that time, it was illegal for blacks and whites to go through, or to be seen walking together, in fact, in a city like Albany in Georgia. It was a contact that I made at that time with people in Albany, Georgia, that later led to the development of the new communities—community land trusts—in Georgia, the first community land trust in this country. So that's the, there's a very strong connection with all of this work and the...

S And nearly all your contacts and inspiration for social and economic reform came out of your pacifist interests, your non-violence interests.

B Yes.

S ...got you to prison, got you to read and empower you, made your connections with Papworth and the English, and Schumacher, and with the land trust movement.

B Yes. Well for me, I've always felt myself to be a Gandhian, basically. Gandhian in the sense that I believe in non-violent action which, as I see it, has two—and this is what Gandhi said—it has two aspects to it. One aspect is the resistance aspect, the refusal to go along with evil or with what seems to be wrong, in society. And the other one is what he called constructive program. That means building a new society, developing a whole different society, as Gandhi tried to do in India and as I see the Schumacher Society doing here in the United States. What Gandhi said was that the, he believed that people should put in about 90% of their time on constructive programs and about 10% of their time on resistance. Well, I felt that I had put in enough of my time on resistance by 1965 or '66, and it was time for me to put the rest of my time and my life in on constructive action, so that's why I've been putting more of my time and more interest in this, the kind of work that we're doing in the Schumacher Society.

S Well, that gives me quite a new insight on your life's mission, Bob. Thank you very much.

[laughter]