

VERMONT ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

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Eric Schumacher

SCHUMACHER ADDRESSES OCTOBER 25TH CSSV CONFERENCE IN PUTNEY

Eric Schumacher, the German-born, British economist, addressed a conference on Saturday, October 25th, in Putney, sponsored by the Conservation Society of Southern Vermont (CSSV).

Schumacher was one of four speakers drawn together to explore this subject, "Environmental Behavior and Social Institutions," a weighty theme, a theme that boiled down to a consideration of the present condition of man and his chances for survival in this century.

Over 300 people from all over New England attended the CSSV event. They were not disappointed.

Schumacher was a Rhodes Scholar, an economic advisor to the British Control Commission in postwar Germany, and for twenty years prior to 1971, the top economist and head of planning at the British Coal Board. His credentials are impeccable, but he is no ordinary economist.

Schumacher has written a book entitled *SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL: Economics as if People Mattered*. It was published in 1973. It is a widely-quoted, seminal volume and it is being passed from hand to hand as a new gospel.

This is what Schumacher told his audience in Putney.

"We have given up our two great teachers," declared Schumacher. "These teachers are living nature and human values."

Schumacher's economic ideas are based, (in the tradition of Tolstoy, Gandhi, Lewis Mumford and others) on a religious view of man. Schumacher spoke about men and women as "the sons and daughters of God." "Man," said Schumacher, "was a moral being in relationship with God, a social being in relationship to his neighbors, and an individual confronting his own identity."

The problem with our present world, according to Schumacher, is the absence of "joyful, constructive labor." Schumacher is not talking solely about unemployment. He is talking about the lack of meaningful human relationships and the corresponding lack of meaningful work. The size of our institutions, he believes, is frustrating our moral impulses and destroying our humanity.

Schumacher is non-declamatory. He clothes his ideas in parables.

He told the story of a housing development in Britain that was built on agricultural land. The result was not expected. The families who occupied the new housing project took up intensive gardening. There was a five-fold increase in the amount of food produced. "We cannot afford agriculture," concludes Schumacher, "we can only afford horticulture" with a heavy dose of 'TLC' (tender, loving care) thrown in for good measure.

Schumacher looks at the spectacle of America in the 1970's. "Here is a country numbering less than 6% of the world's population and using more than one-third of the world's resources. If we could afford one USA," observes Schumacher, "we could not afford two of them. And you haven't abolished poverty."

Schumacher explains the root of our problems, questions of scale. We have built here and in England vast industrial conurbations. In this country, an urban megalopolis stretching from Boston to Washington and from San Francisco to San Diego. Schumacher explains why these conurbations exist. They exist because of in-