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technical schools rather than college.

Politics is one possible outlet for the ambitious "working middle class": One out of three, as opposed to fewer than 10 percent of other workers, belongs to the Communist Party. But there is little opportunity for such activists beyond the grassroots level. Indeed, notes Pravda, the frustrated hopes of the new "working middle class" lead to discontent. Unofficial opinion surveys, for example, suggest that highly trained technical workers were stronger supporters of Poland's Solidarity trade-union movement than were other Soviet workers. So far, the new blue-collar elites seem more interested in advancing their own interests than in pushing for reform. Even so, concludes Pravda, if "any challenge to the myth of the Soviet 'working class'" ever arises, it will come from this group.

### *Creating Hunger In Honduras*

"The Cattle are Eating the Forest" by Billie R. DeWalt, in *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Jan. 1983), 5801 South Kenwood, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

In 1976, Honduras joined a growing list of Third World nations that must import corn, rice, and other basic foods. Many of its people go hungry. Yet, at the same time, the Hondurans have stepped up their production and export of beef.

Between 1961 and 1980, such exports rose more than 500 percent, while domestic beef consumption dropped. In the rich tropical southern highlands, the amount of land in pasture increased from 42 percent of the total in 1952 to 61 percent in 1974. If its population continues to grow at today's high 3.3 percent annual rate, Honduras will have to import 41 percent of its grain by 1990. Even now, perhaps 58 percent of Honduran children under age five suffer from malnutrition.

Behind the change is a peculiar dynamic that encourages the conversion of cropland and forests to pasture, says DeWalt, a University of Kentucky anthropologist. Landowners are shifting into livestock production because corn and rice yield low profits (thanks partly to official price controls), and because the export prices for coffee, bananas, and sugar are highly unpredictable. The Tegucigalpa government, with an eye on the lucrative U.S. markets that absorb 90 percent of Central American beef exports, contributed by offering low-interest loans to cattle producers. (Ironically, DeWalt adds, a modest government land reform program during the early 1970s helped speed the process: Landowners now fear "unused" timberland will be taken from them.)

The nation's tenant farmers also gain, but only in the short run. Landowners give them wooded or fallow land at low annual rents (about \$8 per *manzana* or 1.7 acres), but the peasants must clear it, share any timber, and eventually begin sowing grass between the rows of their grain crops for the owners' cattle to graze on after the harvest.

Even as cattle occupy more of Honduras's farmland and compete with humans for grains, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and other Central

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American countries are experiencing the same unhealthy transition. It is a process, DeWalt concludes, in which "some people are devouring the cattle, while the cattle [in effect] are devouring some people."

### Japan's Geisha

"The Art of the Geisha" by Liza Crihfield Dalby, in *Natural History* (Feb. 1983), Box 4300, Bergenfield, N.J. 07621.

To Westerners, Japan's "geisha girls," with their powdered faces and traditional garb, seem exotic and slightly sinful. Most Japanese, reports anthropologist Dalby, have the same reaction.

Yet the geisha are not prostitutes. The first geisha were male entertainers in 17th-century Japanese brothels. No women entered the profession until 1751, but by 1800 they had claimed the profession for themselves.

At first, geisha were Japan's fashion trend-setters. But as the Japanese began following Western styles during the 1920s, the geisha became instead informal "curators" of traditional Japanese culture. Today, geisha (literally, "artists") provide witty conversation and classical Japanese dance and music for wealthy male connoisseurs at exclusive teahouses, mostly in Tokyo or the old imperial capital of Kyoto.

Geisha enjoy private lives unique among Japanese women. They take lovers rather than husbands, and a few have wealthy "patrons." But they are "ladies of the evening" only, not "ladies of the night." "Men who imagine they will find a geisha for a one-night stand," says Dalby, "will be disappointed."

"Most Japanese," she notes, "have probably never met a geisha." In fact, there are only some 17,000 geisha in Japan today; their median age is 40. Tradition once demanded that a geisha's daughter follow in her mother's footsteps, but no longer. And the profession's peculiar status in Japanese society makes recruiting difficult.

On the one hand, because of their role as preservers of tradition, geisha are respected and considered "more Japanese" than any other group, says Dalby. (Few young Japanese women are willing to accept the stern discipline and artistic training required to enter the profession.) Yet, because geisha challenge the notion that marriage is the only proper path for Japanese women, there is more than a hint of disrepute in their image.

Thus, while "prominent Japanese will proudly present an evening of geisha entertainment to the visiting queen of England," Dalby observes, most would be aghast should their daughter enter the profession.

