

Drunk with power

If people minded their own business, said the Duchess, the world would go round a great deal faster than it does. The Conference has applied her advice to energy policy.

Committee 2 has passed recommendation 196, calling for monitoring, research, and information exchange on energy-use, but the more substantive recommendations 189 - 195 seem to have sunk without trace. They include not only such important proposals as separating the promotional and regulatory roles of energy agencies (such as the USAEC and IAEA), setting up accident control centres, and forming national energy and transport policies, but also the more fundamental and schizophrenic recommendation 190: "Those governments with high per capita energy use should consider the opportunities for reducing the growth of energy consumption as one of the alternatives in minimizing all of the costs - direct, environmental and cultural - from economic development". One can only hope that today's report stage of Committee 2 will resurrect the seven lost proposals - among the most important on its agenda.

The NGOs' generally admirable statement in Monday's plenary session also failed to suggest that we do more with less energy. They want the same friendly people who gave us fission reactors to be encouraged to give us "clean" energy sources (presumably a reference to fusion or to very-large-scale direct solar conversion) - a process not without its own risks, and perhaps even a way to help us discover global heat limits empirically (*Eco*, 12 June, page 5). Certainly a technical advance that encouraged further endless and mindless growth would not teach us a much-needed discipline.

The NGOs also want the development of fission power to "proceed with the utmost caution and safeguards" - but should it proceed at all, in view of unsolved safety and waste problems (*Eco*, 7 June, pages 1, 8)? As Prof. Alfvén points out (*Eco*, 9 June, pages 1, 5), "The reactor constructors claim that they have devoted more effort to safety problems than any other technologists have. This is true. From the beginning they have paid much attention to safety and they have been remarkably clever in devising safety precautions. This is perhaps pathetic, but it is not relevant. If a problem is too difficult to solve, one cannot claim that it is solved by pointing to all the efforts made to solve it."

So universal is the assumption that we should always increase energy supply, rather than reduce energy demand to a level more commensurate with need, that few now ask where energy-mania and promotional electric rates are taking us. Some USAEC planners want it to take us in a few generations to 50 times present world energy-use - with 4000 seaside fission "parks", each producing 40000 MW (million watts) of electricity, twice as much heat, and nearly 200 million curies per year of long-lived radioactivity. The tonnage of granite mined to supply the uranium and thorium for the fast breeder reactors would equal twice the present world consumption of coal!

Another way to guess the prognosis of a world with acute energitis is to ask how much energy it would take to apply energy-intensive technologies on a large scale. A few examples:

- Under very optimistic assumptions, just desalinating enough seawater to grow enough protein-rich crops to feed an average vegetarian man would need twice as much energy as he now uses for all purposes.

- Making a gram of nitrogen fertilizer needs the energy of five grams of coal. In three decades we are likely to use for this single purpose more than a tenth as much energy as we now use for all purposes.

- Many US food crops now yield less energy as food than was put into them as chemicals; thus our potatoes, as Howard Odum says, are made not of soil but of oil. Modern intensive methods are so energy-hungry that raising, say a chicken in a battery takes a thousand times as much energy as the old way.

continued on page 6

don't take your environment for granted . . .

For in-depth reports and analyses, reviews, features, and an eight-page running chronology of world-wide environmental news,

take

the independent British quarterly
(founded 1969)

your environment

Annual subscription £2.00 (UK); \$6.00 (US);
£2.50 (elsewhere)

10 Roderick Road, London NW3 2NL.
Tel. 01-267 1094

The Blueprint for Survival

team talks about Stockholm.

Read the June issue of

The Ecologist

for a complete critique of the
Conference papers.

On sale now.



FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

an EARTHWIDE
environmental
movement.

Independent sister groups for
the preservation, restoration,
and rational use of the earth:

- action programs in conservation, legislation, litigation.
- complementing the work of existing groups.
- seeking help in your country.

aware of the limits to growth.
During the Conference, contact
Jordens Vänner/Friends of the
Earth. Visit us at the Environ-
ment Forum. Afterwards, write
to Edwin Matthews, 52 Ave. des
Champs-Élysées, Paris 8e.

continued from page 5

- Just to make the aluminium in one beer-can takes about a kilowatt-hour of electricity.

- There is a new building in New York City that is wired for 80 MW. An average square meter of Manhattan Island now receives about 630 watts from man, 93 (net) from the sun. Without winds, Manhattan would fry. Most big cities now make their own climates.

It appears that if desalination, intensive farming, mining of ordinary rock, etc., were done on a global scale, we would need of order a hundred times as much energy as we now use - almost certainly a climatic impossibility. The sensible and workable alternative, to reduce our extravagant use of energy, is so simple as to be unthinkable.

The US, which now uses a third of the world's energy, could well lead the way. Even the youngest US conservationists can remember a decade back, when US energy-use was only about half of today's, and when life was tolerable - indeed, perhaps even more sensible than today's. US residents who can remember 30 years ago can look back to a per capita energy use about one-fifth of today's - and better air, purer water, more open space, cleaner cities, healthier oceans, and more beautiful countryside. Their life was by no means as brutish as it is now getting to be.

Certainly the most efficient of man's recent international efforts has been the petrochemical cartel. Its parts are not clear but its goal is: sell energy crisis as justification for the mad dash for the last oil, gas, coal, shale, etc.

The consistently missing parts: what does it cost the future and the earth? What if we simply didn't do it?

Think again, Third World

In the debate that has raged at the Stockholm Environment Conference between the representatives of the Third World and the wealthy nations, a central process common to all these nations has been virtually ignored: the environmental imports of the international industrial state. It is now widely recognised that the 20% of the earth's population living in the rich industrial countries of the temperate zone is consuming about 80% of the world's annual resource production. Much of this consumption in the rich nations is in the form of wasteful, unnecessary, high-pollution products.

It is less widely recognized that the drive for development in many poor nations is aimed at creating the same industrial system typical of the "overdeveloped" countries, a system characterized by high consumption of a rich elite minority, elimination or subjugation of poor minority groups, overpopulation, importation of standardized products, accelerating rates of energy and materials resource consumption, and skyrocketing pollution levels.

It is important to realize that the rich nations dominated by corporate enterprise are not the only ones at fault. Socialist nations such as the USSR have triggered massive problems of pollution, suppressed minority groups and views, pushed rapid industrialization and creation of centralized, weighty bureaucracies to run industry and government, and favored short-run economics instead of quality environments under stable, ecologically - sound economic systems. In the third world, power politics replaces dollar politics for the super-power socialist countries. As a result, their goals, and their destructive environmental and social imports, are remarkably similar to those of the nations dominated by corporate enterprise.

A basic factor in this drive for achieving over-development in the third world is the operation of the international industrial state. Multi-national corporations are major supporters of allocating public funds in the rich nations to development aid in the third world. In turn, the development priorities of The World Bank, UNDP, AID, etc. are geared to those development projects supporting marketing of multi-national corporate products. Most Third World political and economic systems are dominated by a rich minority who own a large share of the multi-national industry in their own nation.

The result of this international industrial state configuration is a coöperative enterprise between LDC political leaders and industrial elite, the bi- and the multi-lateral aid organizations, and the multi-national industrial concerns aimed at producing overconsumption by the rich elite of the Third World at the expense of the poor majority. In addition, this system tends to prevent the creation and utilization of alternative technologies better-suited to the social and environmental needs of the Third World. There is little place for participation by the poor majority in planning for development along lines that they decide.

(continued on page 7)



THE STOCKHOLM CONFERENCE: ONLY ONE EARTH

'The book of the Conference' has been written by Britain's leading activist conservationist group, Friends of the Earth, in conjunction with the Conference Secretariat.

The Stockholm Conference: Only One Earth graphically describes the problems the delegates and the world are facing - and must face, and outlines some of the solutions.

Read the book in English, in which it was conceived and written. 'Simple, succinct, unforgettable, this book will continue in importance long after the Conference is over'.

On sale throughout Stockholm.
Published by Earth Island Limited.