

# "There's No Future In F.O.E."

This is the first article in a series which will critically probe FOE philosophy and strategy. Its author, PETER HAYES, was one of the founder members of FOE Australia in 1974. He returned home earlier this year after working during 1975/76 at the Environment Liaison Centre, Nairobi, with the United Nations

## Environment Program.

All State FOE groups in Australia have been asked to send in to CR their views on what FOE is, where it is going. Some replies have already been received and will be published in the next issue. We hope other groups, and any friend of the earth interested, will also send in contributions.

## Earthfacts

The burden of grief carried on this planet is intolerable. Each day, 25 000 human beings die of water-borne disease. Each year, 25 000 whales are cruelly killed for catfood and replaceable oil. Each day, about \$700 million is spent on military equipment. 30 000 megatons (million tons of TNT equivalent) of atomic weapons — about 3 million times the bomb that vapourized Hiroshima — are primed for immediate use. Such earthfacts are not easy to grasp, being too vast, abstract or distant.

It seems to me that they are the result of two positions to which Friends of the Earth are fundamentally opposed. The first is that if something is possible we should do it — an extension of the Baconian notion that we should effect "all things possible". The second is a willingness to take and to inflict incredible risks, replacing a healthy respect for nature with a breathtaking human arrogance.

For we do not want or need to do everything that is possible. We do not know everything that must be known to justify the risks that are being taken. This absolute knowledge is unobtainable in principle. A wise person said: *"No problem has a single cause. No problem has a sole solution. No partial solutions will be admitted by nature"*.

Almost all the Friends of the Earth groups that I have visited work to stop the atomic and whaling industries. Why on earth are these the common factors? How do they fit into the planetary scene unfolding in the late twentieth century? The answer is that these two issues exemplify the basics to which we are

*"Become one with the knot  
itself  
til it dissolves away.  
— sweep the garden.  
— any size."  
— wise person*

opposed: the infliction of risk and the loss of respect.

## Overdevelopment and Underdevelopment

Overdevelopment constructs atomic weapons and results in underdevelopment. Atomic power is the linchpin of the social machine which generates overdevelopment and underdevelopment. Overdevelopment is grounded in the appropriation of human needs by those who control the market. It is the ever-increasing centralisation of the transformation of raw materials drawn from the environment. The result is pollution from the wastes, noise from the application of energy to machinery, and the loss of a benign environment.

Underdevelopment is the neglect of human needs by those who control the market. This exploitation has left a billion people beset by poverty — dirt, disease and malnutrition.

The overdeveloped patterns of investment in production and conspicuous consumption (military, moonshots, missiles, monoliths and motor cars) are linked to underdevelopment. Both frustrate the development potential of people and their capacity to care for each other and the environment.

International trade in capital goods and raw materials (such as uranium) sustains the equation.

We work to halt the atomic industry and thereby to reduce the

most immediate hazard to life and the environment. An atomic cataclysm would snap the twig of human civilization which has been bent in many other ways into a grotesque and unrecognisable form.

## The Struggle against Uranium

Let's look a little closer at how atomic power contributes to underdevelopment and how the pro-uranium forces are fighting back. Now that uranium has become a political issue, each political grouping is seeking information in order to rationalise a position on uranium which best accords with the remainder of that group's position. The uranium issue is now determined primarily by pre-existing political alignments and in accordance with 'fundamental' political positions rather than by consideration of uranium itself. The issue is therefore being defused. This has given rise to pro-uranium rhetorical arguments such as Japan's 'need' or that of the starving 'third-world' (funny we never heard of the Third World before from miners!) for Australian uranium. As *Chain Reaction* has disposed of the Japan myth before (CR Vol. 3 No. 1, 1977), let's look at the reality of the *social distribution of energy use* in third-world countries with atomic power plans.

Thailand is a country with a dense village settlement pattern in the rural areas and with one massive city, Bangkok. Of the total population of 42 391 446 people, 12.8% (5 417 000) live in the urban areas and 87.2% (36 974 000) live in the rural areas (which are taken to include other cities and towns outside Bangkok, in addition to the strictly rural areas).



In Thailand, 70% of the commercial energy is used in the urban areas (with 12.8% of the people) and 30% in the rural areas (with 87.2% of the people). The inequality in the social distribution of energy use is even worse for electricity. The table shows the urban-rural breakdown for electricity consumption by end-use.

In India, villages of about 500 people comprise over half of the country's population and only 11% of such villages are electrified. In a typical village of 100 families (500 people), usually only about 15 families (the rich ones) can afford to connect up for household use. The rest are too poor. As the rich control the land, the electricity used in irrigation and for agricultural processing strengthens their social position.

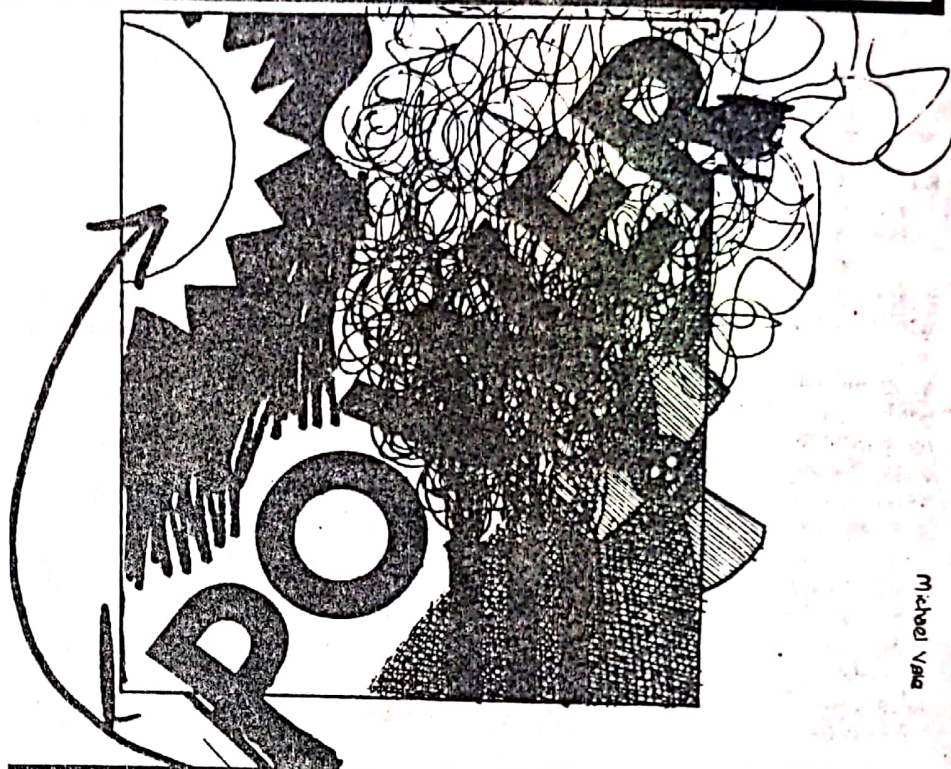
The landless poor, on the other hand, rely on charcoal, wood and dung (the 'non-commercial' fuels). They require much labour-time to collect. The additional labour-time required to collect water and for wage-labour leaves a family with no option but to find the labour within the family — and thus a family must have at least 4 children in order to survive. (The total labour time required to maintain a landless labourer in India is 18-22 hours per day — and the people are often sick with dysentery etc.). The burning of the dung results in depletion of soil nutrients such as nitrogen. The burning of wood results in deforestation, soil erosion, flooding and siltation of dams. The poor in India require a revolution in land-tenure and use, not electricity from centralised facilities such as atomic power which increases inequality and worsens environmental damage. (Figures kindly supplied by Professor Amulya Reddy, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, India).

The reason that we are seeing such a resistance to the anti-uranium movement and the emergence of spurious pro-uranium arguments is because we are making transparent the real power structures. We are engaging people in concrete analysis and authentic acts of consciousness about their own situation. This is forcing the state to use ever-more coercive measures to ensure continued compliance with the desires of international capital.

For uranium is about who controls

**Table 1 Energy Use in Thailand, 1975. From this table it can be seen that agriculture accounts for only seven ten thousandths of the electricity consumption. (Figures kindly supplied by the National Energy Administration, Thailand).**

End-use	% of electricity used by sector	Urban	Rural
Industrial	64.15%	68.13%	31.87%
Commercial	14.66%	65.81%	34.19%
Domestic	19.95%	57.15%	42.85%
Street Lighting	0.62%	70.24%	29.76%
Agriculture	0.07%	—	100.00%
Off-peak sales	0.54%	100.00%	—



Michael Vago

and determines the exploitation of Australia. Lang Hancock's anxiety to export *everything now* is a childish inability to delay gratification (aside from being selfish and obscene). Let's ask ourselves: what are the principles which would underly an ecologically sound, humane and sustainable export sector? Wouldn't sustainability imply a radical reduction in the rate of extraction of high-grade mineral ores, and a reorientation of the surplus gained from the export of non-renewable minerals away from repatriation of profits overseas or investment in current Australian urban manufacturing for wasteful tall buildings, cars, freeways, etc?

### Stopping the Whale Slaughter

We work to stop the whale slaughter to reintroduce respect for nature. Whales are social mammals

whose only cupidity is trust of human beings who kill them. The social structure of the whale has accommodated complexity and conflict without spilling over into violence. In the human transition to a sustainable society, we have much to learn from these animals.

The whale issue also shows that environmental management is really only control over human behavior and is not the management of the environment itself. The whales and the ecology have managed to evolve themselves rather beautifully for millions of years without any help from human beings. As we are now learning, environmental disruption is really a conflict between humans. An assailant imposes damage on a victim through the intermediary of the biophysical environment. What is new is that we are realising that humans are not the only victims.



In the anti-whaling movement, we are asserting that there is something beyond "the machine in the garden threat", the atomic industry. We assert respect for other dimensions of the total ecology to which we are bonded by our animality as well as by virtue of our consciousness.

### Time to be Outrageous!

Conflict clarifies reality. Friends of the Earth has become known for its militant engagement and willingness to confront institutions which are leverage points on the rest of society or reflect all the broader problems. Our tactic has been to dig out information in order to raise the questions which no-one every thinks of. This increases uncertainty and demonstrates the ignorance of our rulers. It stalls their action for a while (for example, the Fox Inquiry).

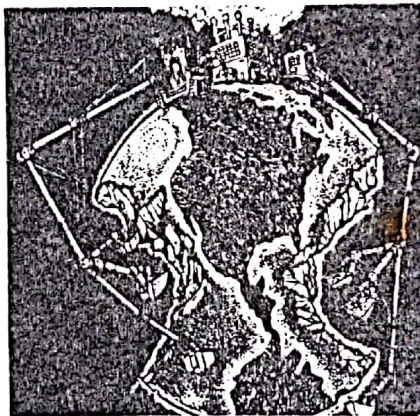
It is time to begin to extend our analysis from the initial reaction to environmental problems and fending off future destruction, to prevention and innovation. To date we have been outraged — by the values revealed by the actions of the uranium miners, by the French military at Mururoa Atoll, by the continued genocidal practices against the Aboriginal people by the miners, by the fraudulent inducement of cheap migrant labour into Australian factories with promises of sun, women and security. We should be as outrageous as possible, unashamedly promoting and building alternative structures to achieve the basics of self-reliance: food, shelter, access and information. In so doing, we must avoid the hip capitalist "consumption of lifestyles" approach.

Alternative projections of the future and "blueprints" for change are likely to be appropriated by the lonely, confused, hierarchically-organised and powerful ruling groups. Instead, we continually invent new ways of thinking and sharing these as widely as possible. We should be arming people with the conceptual tools they need to analyse their own situations. This challenge reduces the effectiveness of centralized directives and makes it increasingly unlikely that the values of the ruling groups will be translated into reality. We have to avoid the equal and opposite dangers of ignorance and expertism.

For example: uranium is found in

Australia. We run out of oil in the 1980s. We will then need to import oil which will increase our need to export to offset the imports. Conclusion: mine and export uranium. *But*, a different conclusion can be reached by the exercise of a little imagination, a faculty for which government is not renowned. If we leave uranium in the ground, the corollary would be to restructure our cities, get out of cars, into public transport and onto bicycles (free taxis for people with children), cluster recreational facilities outside of the cities and provide access by public transport, reduce accidents and hospital bills . . .

The engagement of people in interaction with the power structures at all levels is therefore of prime importance in laying bare those structures for all to see. Friends of the Earth cannot attain consciousness



for other people. A correct analysis is totally useless if it is not an authentic act of consciousness on the part of people. In the endeavour to evoke this awareness, there is a danger of over-reliance on the press. The mass media still inflicts its structures and marketing requirements on FOE. Whilst not suggesting that we neglect the press, the development of a self-organizing network of local-action groups is primary. The feeding of anxiety and questions into society by thousands of concerned people is far more effective than reaching the occasional convert through the mass media.

In light of the above, it is paradoxical to state that Friends of the Earth does not exist, or rather, that it exists only in people's minds. Because Friends of the Earth is a state of mind and not an organisation to which one 'belongs'. Friends of the

Earth can be everywhere because people are everywhere. The network can extend as far as people need it and sustain it. An important aim of Friends of the Earth is to do away with the necessity for our existence as fast as possible. Unless we are to become a thriving subculture totally separated from the majority of Australians and even protected by the dominant institutions and thus neutralised, we must strive to see ecological perspectives adopted throughout society and not maintained as a separate problem. We want people who are *not* Friends of the Earth arguing our case for us.

There is a danger that FOE will become more than its purpose and a communications switchboard to ensure the unity and effectiveness of action. There is an ominous trend whereby one can now 'join' Friends of the Earth as a token 'member'. Formerly one registered with FOE and contributed in whatever capacity one could. The reality hasn't changed much yet. But with the efforts to restructure the FOE groups to accommodate the vast influx of active and angry people there is a trend towards ossification. FOE must be able to evolve rapidly to surround problems. There is also the need for structure to get information to where it is needed most instead of merely into the hands of those who already have it. Decentralised structure, as Paul Goodman pointed out long ago, does not mean lack of coordination — it means a different kind of coordination, a response elicited by those most in need of whatever a social structure such as FOE is capable of providing. We should not perpetuate environment as a distinct issue and a separate ecology movement is not a viable long-term strategy. There is no future in Friends of the Earth.

Friends of the Earth can be a looking-glass for society. We flirt with current value systems and institutions with good humour so that people can better recognise themselves and current trends as dead ends. Friends of the Earth should be like a sharp knife pressed against the future, but grounded in current social and ecological realities. Otherwise we run the risk of being extremely active but sadly irrelevant.

**Peter Hayes**