Book Reviews

The Worldwatch Institute has put out two superb reports this year. Number 81 on renewable energy by Cynthia Pollock Shea and number 82 on energy efficiency by Cristopher Flavin and Alan Dunning.

The 1st report covers the worldwide status of hydropower, biomass, solar and wind. It is an excellant oversite on what the world's governments are currently doing and what they're not. The report reaffirms the dangerous state of alternatives under Reagan in the U.S., but also shows that many parts of the world are picking up where we have failed. The following state of alternatives came out in the report:

1.The total loss of tax incentives for windpower has stopped the growth of windpower, with nearly all U.S companies now out of business and the primary builder, Denmark having a 50% reduction in sales to the U.S. in the last two years.. In fact, one new revolutionary windmill design was unable to find a source of money to go into production and as a result was sold outright to China.

2.The passive solar business which held one of the strongest potentials of creating inexpensive heating for water and homes has lost 28,000 of the 30,000 jobs that existed since 1984.

3.Popular insulation programs in California have been decimated within the PG&E area with literally all businesses gone or shifting to other work.

4.PG&E has nearly stopped co-generation dead in its area in the last 3 years (note:#3 & #4 come from our own sources).

5.Photovoltaic sales in the U.S. has dropped 30% since its peak in 1983.

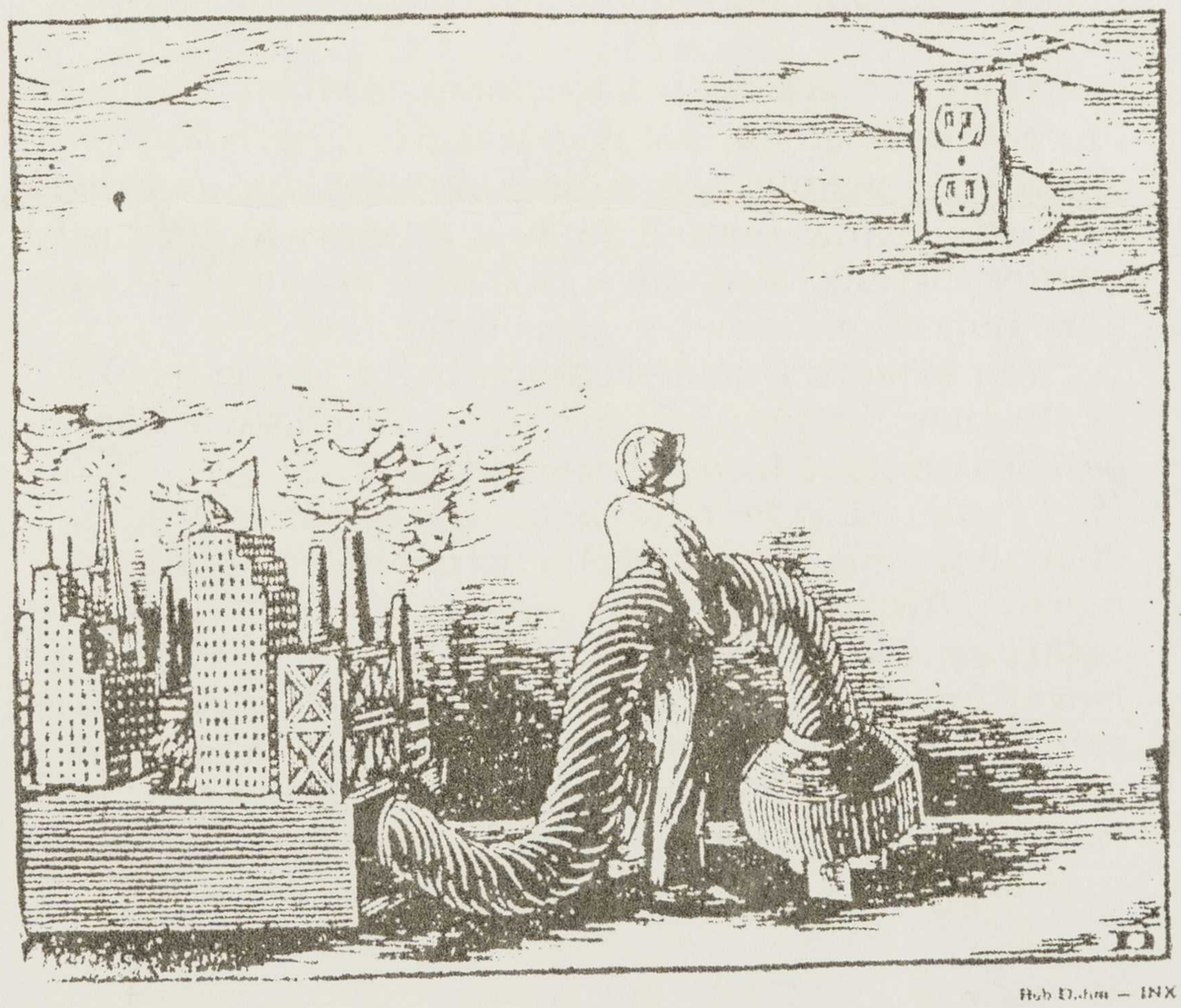
Although the U.S. is still the leading country in spending for alternatives, it is 90% below what it was prior to Reagan's entry. Our percentage of alternative energy usage compared to total use is only 7.4% compared to Brazil's 59% or Norway's 61.1%. Other countries have definately taken a very strong interest in alternatives, especially Japan, Sweden, India, Brazil, China and most of western Europe. The U.S.S.R. and its satellites are by far the worst industrial countries in the world. This is true even after Chernobyl primarily due to the large quantity of available fossil fuels and state rigidity.

In report #82, the big picture of energy and the primary controlling factor, OIL is looked at. The use of energy efficiency worldwide has displaced $250 billion worth of oil, gas or nuclear power annually. The U.S. has saved 30% on our total energy needs since 1973. Yet this glowing report card of the past is merely a first step in the crisis we our rapidly approaching.

Without a 1 Mi/Gal increase/year in efficiency of cars for the rest of the century, we will not be able to offset the worst of the coming global warming crisis. U.S. car efficiency has increased 92% since 1973 for new cars. Yet we still lag way behind the efficiency increases of all other major car builders in the world. Amory Lovins has suggested giving new V.W. Rabbits to old car users for free, which would in turn save vast amounts of oil.

The U.S.'s oil use policy has depleted domestic supplies, whcih in turn has been used to push further offshore oil drilling. This policy which created the oil glut and lowered gas prices has also dramatically pushed up the use of oil here resulting in a rapid increase in oil imports. This increased demand will continue to make the middle-east a hot spot even if and when the Iraqui-Iran and PLO/Israeli conflicts end. In fact new reports just out have indicated that the real cost of oil from the mid-east when including the military defense expenditures, that reached $47 billion in 1986 place the real cost of Arab oil at $150/barrel, far above the current $15/barrel cost.

This push to bring back the hard-path is clearly a move by republican/energy elites to force another crisis upon the U.S. with the goal of bringing back a second wave of reactors. The report does not make this claim, yet the implications of the trend towards expanded oil use, and government actions that are laid out in #82 clearly point to the crisis as it rapidly approaches.



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