



Jill Stapleton

by Tom Bender

*Last issue featured articles by Ianto Evans and Winona LaDuke on foreign and domestic colonialism of energy resources, and a related article by Ivan Illich. Here Tom Bender takes us another step, exploring the connections between U.S. exploitation of underdeveloped nations and corporate/government attempts to control solar energy development in this country. In his article Tom makes reference to two books: Noam Chomsky and Edward Hermans's *The Washington Connection* and Third World Fascism and Ray Reece's *The Sun Betrayed* (reviewed and excerpted in RAIN Jan. '80). Both books were published last year and are available for \$5.50 each from South End Press, Box 68 Astor Station, Boston, MA 02123.—MR*

It is perhaps ironic that the contemporary American economic empire must rely on terrorism and brutal suppression more than did the old and openly colonial empires. To keep the trappings of democracy at home and to prevent overwhelming reaction to U.S. practices abroad, information on those practices must be kept from seeping out. Excessive repression is the only means to stop that information. Even if we condone the use of such practices elsewhere at the fringes of the empire, the dark truth is that such excesses come home to roost. We are finding out the foreshadow of that truth in the beating of anti-war demonstrators, murders of Black

Panther and Native American activists, infiltration of dissident organizations, FBI complicity in political assassinations, Korean bribing of U.S. government leaders, the Letelier-Moffitt assassinations on the doorsteps of our own Capitol, and the growing ruthlessness of Big Business practices within the U.S.

All this is so at odds with what we've been led to believe that I found it nearly essential to read the whole extensively documented story in *The Washington Connection* for it not to seem the demented ravings of some radical zealot. My old image of the world, though long strained, was one of a basically honest, sometimes naive, misguided, or frustrated U.S. government that generally tried to do good. What I gained to replace that image was one of a government virtually indistinguishable from corporate America and coldly and calculatedly using and supporting murder and torture on a worldwide basis to further the aims of that corporate world. I learned the details of a "Free Press" that wraps a blanket of silence around these nefarious events while inciting us to condemn the non-existent or blown-up evils of other nations not within our power. I discovered the ease with which we in the heart of this empire turn a deaf ear to its operation and effects. And most thankfully, I learned that those who wield this vast power are deeply frightened and threatened, and that behind their facade of invincibility lies a difficult but open path to return our country to the humane and lofty values upon which it was founded. As the dust settled inside my head, I felt drained, but also more deeply encouraged than I have ever been. A crack had become visible that offered a very real ray of hope. . . .

Similar collusion exists between government and big business to support the faltering nuclear power industry. They also attempt to belittle and retard the development of solar energy and to distort its development to bring it under the control of the oil companies, the utilities, and other large corporations. This has been well documented in Ray Reece's *The Sun Betrayed* and elsewhere. But in light of U.S. activities in the Third World, it is obvious that the government's actions are part of a consistent policy to retain the power and control which government and corporate leaders hold in our society and to prevent people from regaining control over their own lives.

There is, however, a particular undertone to the often irrational and contradictory government and corporate responses to events such as Three Mile Island and to successful challenges to nuclear power by community and environmental groups. The government/corporate world is frightened, deeply frightened, by the sun.

The government/corporate world fears the sun because it makes them vulnerable. In spite of governmental ridicule of individual efforts, grassroots energy conservation and conversion to solar energy have already created a far-reaching threat. We have reduced our energy use so much, causing so much excess capacity to exist in our electrical systems, that it is possible today to shut down all except four nuclear power plants in the country without eliminating needed reserve capacity. Solar energy at its best is a decentralized technology, one which can and is being implemented rapidly at community levels in spite of government attempts to retard its development. It is a technology that is teaching people that there are viable alternatives to the present perverted control and use of our economic system—alternatives that don't need big business or big government, nor the effects of their control on the economy. It is a technology that is reminding people at the grassroots level across the country that *we* can call the shots, not just corporate America, and we would be better off to do so. It is threatening the basic authority of the corporate/government world—the authority of being needed.

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Grassroots anti-war activism during Vietnam has left both an unfinished legacy and a warning to today's soft energy path advocates and anti-nuclear activists. The legacy is the yet-in-process empowerment of people against a power structure whose vision has died and whose strength has turned to abuse. The lesson is that we must not only deal with nuclear or solar power, but with their roots in and implications for our individual and collective values, strengths and weaknesses, and organizational structures. The implications of a technological change go far beyond the technology itself. As centralizing and decentralizing forces work toward their divergent goals within our energy adjustments, the goals, implications, and capabilities of each are becoming clearly visible, and a vast shift in credibility, confidence, support and accomplishment is taking place. The future is taking form in our every act.

In an important way, understanding the depths of the corporate/government efforts to exploit us at home and abroad makes it easier to deal with specific social problems. The failures of government efforts to solve urban, energy, housing or agricultural problems no longer gives a sense of frustration, of impotence, or of the labyrinthine complexity of the problems. As we realize that there was never any intention to solve them, we realize that the "solutions"—from urban renewal to low-income housing to deregula-

tion of oil to "bailouts" of the finances of New York City, Cleveland or Chicago, are all frauds set up to exploit further the situations behind a facade of solving them. Once we understand that, it also becomes obvious that where we've been looking is not where the problems are. And we now know where to look for them—in the financing, tax, regulatory, credit, and legal rackets that have been set up to assist the corpo-rape of America. Already some real answers are emerging.

To realize that both domestic and foreign problems stem from a deep and pervasive abuse of our political and economic system is ironically reassuring. For any system can be corrupted, and most every system goes through cycles of integrity and decay. At the zenith of their power and seeming invincibility, all things carry the seed of their own destruction and the seed of what will replace them. One looks powerful, the other frail. But one is waxing and the other waning. It is appropriate that at the moment corporate America seems most victorious and unassailable, and when our will to counter it is weakest, that the opportunity to do so opens its way. The process will not be easy—power once obtained is seldom relinquished willingly. But we can be thankful that our democratic tradition allows us to expect better than what we have, and hope that it will be strong enough to allow a relatively non-violent return of power to the people and restoration of our institutions to humane and life-enhancing operation. ●

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