

viewpoints

May 1977

for the better understanding of utility issues

Published by Corporate Communications Department, Philadelphia Electric Company

ENERGY: A Minority View

by Bayard Rustin
President,
A. Philip Randolph Institute

Mr. Rustin, an eminent black spokesman and board member of Americans for Energy Independence, defends the need for growth against "naive idealists" whose "pastoral fantasies" would deny the social and economic benefits of technology not only to our racial minorities but to entire populations in the Third World.

It has become part of the conventional wisdom of certain segments of the intelligentsia that economic growth must be significantly reduced or halted altogether by the wealthier industrial countries. The advocates of the zero growth philosophy more often than not are passionate supporters of a more equitable social order, particularly for racial minorities here and for the darker-skinned peoples of the underdeveloped world.

That there is a glaring contradiction between their opposition to growth, on the one hand, and their avowed support for a more equal society on the other, seems not to have dawned on many of these people. In their naive idealism (and, in some cases, scarcely camouflaged elitism), they would deprive society of a key means for ending poverty and misery at the very moment that the most deprived groups are demanding a rightful share of the fruits of the modern industrial, technological, economic order.

However, not all anti-growth proponents are well-intentioned, but simplistic-minded, foes of development and technology. Nor are

they necessarily eccentric adherents of the environmental movement. There is, in fact, a growing movement comprised largely of scientists and economists who are actively engaged in the formulation of "alternative" models of economic and social life. They are drawing up a blueprint for a future society which would rely much less than the present one on technology, traditional sources of energy, and economic growth. And since the architects of these alternative societies look upon themselves as liberal, or even radical in political outlook, their schemes almost always contain formulas for creating a more egalitarian economic order.

Remedy Worse than Problem

Invariably, the authors of these plans for the future assure us that unless society mends its ways and views social problems from their own new and elevated level of consciousness, the world and its people are doomed to environmental chaos and racial conflict on a heretofore unimagined scale. In a sense, they are correct, since bold action will in fact be required to resolve the smoldering difficulties confronting