

FRIENDS of the Earth (FOE), the conservation organisation, is widening its area of concern. True to its ecological calling – Everything is Connected – it is moving into politics and economics.

“Until recently, we were content to work for our usual constituency: life in its miraculous diversity of forms,” proclaimed David Brower (FOE founder and Chairman) and Rafe Pomerance (President) in a full-page advertisement in the New York Times, last August.

“But the nuclear war contemplated by the U.S. and Russia . . . qualifies as the major ecological issue of our time.”

That advertisement launched a new addition to FOE’s activist repertoire – a campaign against the arms race. But it was seen only as an operation to clear the decks: “We need to attend to other problems – poverty and the coming breakdown of the planet’s life support systems.”

With this new concern for the *whole* behaviour of nations, it is not surprising that national economic policies should come under scrutiny. An FOE International Conference on unemployment has just been held in Paris.

IN BRITAIN, FOE’s thinking on economics is being led by two divergent groups centred on Edinburgh and Birmingham.

FOE (Scotland), which represents 16 groups, is quite clear that it cannot continue to wage its campaigns in an economic and philosophical fog. At its quarterly gathering of the clans, in Edinburgh in January, it passed the following resolutions:

- FOE recognises that economic forces, propelled by human greed and envy, are at the root of environmental problems, and that it should therefore develop an attitude towards national economic policy, based on justice.

- FOE recognises that the ideas of Henry George provide the basis for a more environmentally beneficial economic system, and therefore favours the full collection of land rents for government revenue in place of all taxation.

These resolutions had been the subject of a Land Workshop in Crieff two months earlier, but mis-

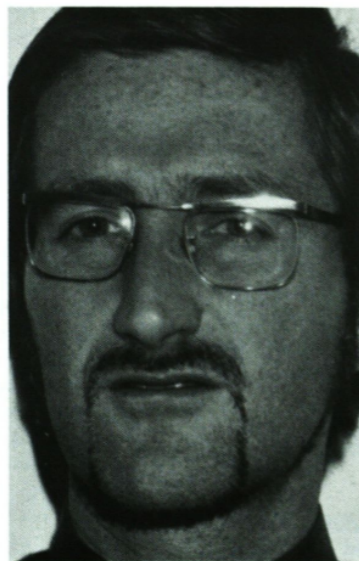
Friends of the Earth embrace land tax

Report by
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conceptions concerning the second remained. Characteristically, the subject raised more dust than did more familiar items such as acid rain, recycling, PWRs and the decline of the railways.

Ian Sesnan (co-ordinator) stressed that the resolution was only the first step in a learning process, not a campaign, and that the step was not irrevocable.

Both resolutions were proposed and argued by FOE Secretary George Morton, whose “vague socialism” had been shattered by Shirley-Anne Hardy’s booklet *The Land Question*, and swept away



● George Morton – could not tolerate political naivety

by A. J. Nock’s *Our Enemy the State*.

Observing afresh the suburbs of Edinburgh sprawling across the new Forth Road Bridge on to the farmlands of Fife, and the corresponding empty spaces in the city which generates them, he could not tolerate the political naivety which was able to attribute the latter to “natural causes” such as lack of funds, or The Depression.

A typical case of the cart before the horse, he pointed out.

MEANWHILE FOE (Birmingham) has come up with an entirely different analysis in a discussion paper entitled “Unemployment”.

It quotes Jack Munday of the Green Ban Union, Australia, who demands “socialism with a human face and an ecological heart.” The paper then adds: “Our analysis is not original; it’s frightening to think that reformers 100 years ago were saying just the same.”

The Birmingham analysis approvingly quotes Ruskin to the effect that “private affluence amidst public squalor” is the inevitable outcome of the free market.

But Ruskin was no economist. Perhaps he overlooked some pertinent facts? For instance, what he saw was not the operation of a free market but the absence of a free market, which can be harnessed to solve environmental problems.

The capacity of a stream to absorb pollution is a resource that can be marketed through the issue of a fixed quantity of pollution rights. The reclamation of derelict land (or any public works) is an activity which can be self-financed out of free market earnings – the resulting rise in land rents throughout the vicinity need only be collected.

The fact that these market operations have never been used to rectify man’s spoilage of the environment is not an argument against the free market, as is commonly supposed, but an argument in its favour.

That FOE (Scotland) has discovered this message – through the works of Henry George, the foremost advocate of freedom – augurs well for the integrity of the Green Movement.