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## **Learning to live within our dwindling means**

by Walter Patterson, Editor, *Your Environment*

Britain is a small island. As small islands go we have done passably well for resources; but we know what it means to have them run out. Our hardwood forests are virtually gone. Accessible metal ores are in short supply. We have developed agriculture to impressive productivity, but we can fulfil at best only one-half our own food requirements, and our soil may be paying the price.

These signs, and others of like implication, have not gone unnoticed. Attitudes are changing – from school onwards. For instance, for the past year the Forestry Commission has been providing free trees for planting by school-children. With 1973 declared the Year of the Tree, the programme ought to flourish.

More motorway is no longer unquestioningly accepted as a fair exchange for the loss of trees and hedges, for farmland or scenic beauty irretrievably scarred and entombed. The recent disclosure of a confidential Government study proposing further rail cutbacks drew an outraged protest; people are clearly growing reluctant to sacrifice unnecessarily Britain's dwindling acreage of open landscape. The call is being sounded for a national transport policy – and it must incorporate efficient use of land. Plans to build an airport at Foulness are getting sceptical scrutiny. Do we really need the airport, at the expense of irreplaceable productive acres?

Where motorways are to be built, a welcome tendency is toward the use of pit spoil as fill-material, as was done on part of the M62. Clearance and prevention of land dereliction is now more than just pious murmur, on the part of enlightened local authorities like Lancashire County Council and industries like the National Coal Board. But theirs is an uphill battle. Sufficient funds will not be available until general acceptance of the principle that new industry should build where industry has already left its mark. And that extraction industries should take as a primary responsibility the restoration of landscape after – indeed during – the working of pits. Certainly this will add to costs; that is, it will make costs previously hidden appear to view, which is the only avenue toward rational resource-use.

The mounting confrontation over mining and drilling in National Parks, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – as with Rio Tinto-Zinc in Snowdonia and Berkeley Petroleum in Dorset – is forcing us to look hard at our priorities. The grade of copper under the grandeur of Snowdonia is comparable to the copper content of discarded cars and television sets; should we dig out the former while continuing to throw away the latter?

The recently-discovered oil and gas fields in the North Sea represent an unexpected bonanza. But this should not be the signal for profligate wastage. The oil and gas are, like so many valuable resources, 'non-renewable'. Once we have used them, they will not be replaced. It is important to remember that they are feedstocks for many industrial production processes, as well as sources of energy.

More than any other resource, energy is going to be the key factor in future developments. A welcome – and, in Britain, long-overdue – indication of the more far-sighted approach to resource-

use has been the trend toward more efficient domestic heating. Cutting down energy-loss [and costs] by adequate insulation is an obvious demonstration of thrifty budgeting. Even so, present official recommendations call for insulation of pigsties to be twice as good as insulation of human dwellings.

Still, we are learning. By 'doing more with less' we can improve not just the through-put but the quality of our lives. If our small island can learn to live well while living within its means, we may present a vital example to the whole of our small island planet.

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