

Vermont Environmental Report

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Richard Brett reviews Barry Commoner:

SERIES ON ENERGY

The Vermont Environmental Report is pleased to be able to print here a review of the Barry Commoner series on "ENERGY" in the *New Yorker Magazine*, written by Richard M. Brett of Woodstock.

Richard Brett is a conservationist who needs little introduction in Vermont. He is a graduate of Williams College. He holds an M.S. degree in Ecology from Yale University. He was a Trustee of the Conservation Society of Southern Vermont and was the first Chairman of the Vermont Natural Resources Council. Mr. Brett will soon be honored with the 1975 Annual Governor's Award from the Conservation Society of Southern Vermont. Governor Salmon will present that award in mid-April. The Conservation Society award is made each year to "that person or organization that is judged to have made an outstanding contribution toward the preservation of Vermont's environmental quality."

The *New Yorker* series by Barry Commoner on "ENERGY" will be brought out in May, 1976 in book form by Alfred Knopf under the title of *The Poverty of Power*.

The *New Yorker Magazine*, starting with the February 2nd issue, has published a three-part series on "Energy" in its ongoing department entitled, "A Reporter At Large." In this instance, the reporter is Barry Commoner.

Like real estate gems, this series must be seen to be appreciated. It is a cogent, detailed, lengthy discussion of why the economy of the United States is the way it is.

The clue to Commoner's thinking on energy lies in his detailed analysis of the first and second laws of thermodynamics. This is the First Law of Thermodynamics: that energy can neither be created nor destroyed. And this is the Second,

the notion that over time, there is in the universe, a shift from order to disorder, from organization to disorganization. Thus a barn, or a mountain, or a stick of wood is, over time, continuously decaying.

What Commoner is pointing to here is a lesson that is both simple and powerful. We have become obsessed, argues Commoner, with the First Law of Thermodynamics, with measuring and counting our stocks of coal and barrels of oil. And we have forgotten the Second Law, the tendency of things to shift from order to disorder. We have forgotten to concentrate our attentions on the available work that can be obtained from a quantity of energy. We are not losing stores of