

REVIEWS

The Sun betrayed: a report on the corporate seizure of U.S. solar energy development by Ray Reece, South End Press, Boston, 1979. 234 pages, \$US5.50.

Solar energy technologies provide the promise of increased local self-sufficiency and self-management as well as the provision of energy with minimal environmental impact. But how is the promise to be realised? For those who still look towards big corporations or government for some help in moving towards a soft energy future, *The Sun betrayed* will dash any illusions. Reece analyses the approach of US corporations and government bodies to solar energy from the early 1970s to 1979. He shows how they have attempted to control the rate of commercialisation of solar energy so as to maximise fossil fuel profits, how they have emphasised solar technologies that are capital-intensive and suited for centralised control (such as solar power towers), how government solar funding has been channelled to large corporations, and how control over energy decisions has been centralised. Reece also shows how the energy multinationals are trying to co-opt solar energy as part of a wider strategy: "Not only, therefore, have Wall Street corporations thoroughly 'penetrated' the US solar market

through intracorporate diversification ('cross-subsidization'), extensive government subsidy, and the purchase of smaller firms, they have organised a solar industries association clearly devoted to building a solar market that will be compatible with the larger aims and 'hard-path' energy goals of the corporate elite in general." (pp. 186-7). With several years delay, similar developments may be expected in Australia.

The Sun betrayed is written in a readable, journalistic style packed with numerous thumbnail sketches of key individuals and descriptions of government studies and policies, corporate moves and frustrated innovators. Reece's conclusion is that small-scale applications of solar energy will only be implemented following local and regional initiatives, especially those which unite the poor, unemployed and oppressed in self-help efforts. All that

can be hoped for from the federal government is some facilitation or just tolerance of local efforts in promoting decentralised, democratic and maximally efficient applications of solar energy.

Brian Martin