

FRIENEMIES OF THE EARTH

A STUDY INTO ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATION 'FRIENDS OF THE EARTH' AND HOW THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE GENERAL POPULATION UNDOES THE GOOD WORK OF GROUPS SUCH AS THIS

The End of the World as We Know it

With the rate of global warming rising three times faster now than before 1982 and the ten warmest years in historical record having occurred since 2013, it's evident to any onlooker that we are in dire need of change - quickly.

But why is this? How is it that the human race has caused such damage so quickly? And why does it seem as though very little has been done to stop it?

One of the main causes of climate change is identified as the generation of power, due to the burning of fossil fuels. While there are renewable alternatives to this - such as water and wind, fossil fuels are still burnt to generate energy 75% of the time.

Another cause of climate change is the manufacture of goods, which is linked closely with the generation of power. This can include anything from the creation of cement and steel, to plastic and clothes.

Deforestation is also said to contribute to climate change. This can be due to needing space for housing, or in order to provide areas for farms or pasture. The reduction of trees in the world means that less carbon dioxide is being absorbed, limiting the ability of greenery to keep this out of the atmosphere. Fortunately, there are organisations such as Friends of the Earth, which aim to protect our planet and reverse the effects of climate change. They have declared that their missions include ensuring environmental and social justice, human dignity, and respect for human rights to ensure sustainable societies. Today, I aim to discuss the causes that undermine the missions and work of Friends of the Earth.

Friends of the Earth

Friends of the Earth were a powerful instrument in securing the UK Climate change Act, which means that the country must commit to a significant reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. As well as this, they had a large involvement in the Paris Climate Agreement, and brought action against the French Government for their inadequate climate plans.

They also support the work of others who campaign in the fight against global warming, such as in celebrating the closure of the UK's final coal-fired power station, and working with other organisations like the No Gas Caverns campaign group, who worked against the mining of gas storage caves below loughs, namely Larne Lough.

Some of the factors that undermine their work includes financial pressures - as Friends of the Earth gain most of their funding from donations and from fundraising - and the actions of Governments that weaken the protection of the environment. This may include leniency in enforcing emissions standards, or a lack of protection of endangered and vulnerable habitats.

If the current negative impacts on the environment continue then planet Earth is at risk of more frequent and extreme weather conditions. Also, rising sea levels, which will not only destroy the habitats of many animals, but also cities such as Miami and Shanghai.

THE EFFECT ON THE PEOPLE

Besides a lack of funding, another threat to the missions of Friends of the Earth is the unravelling of safeguards made by the EU. This is because many of the most important laws protecting people and nature were put into practice by the EU, and when the Retained EU Law (REUL) was passed in June 2023, hundreds of laws were revoked by the end of the year, and putting even more at risk of being weakened or made defunct.

The Retained EU Law allows British ministers to have complete power over which legal protections are to be kept, adjusted or revoked. Friends of the Earth states that proper parliamentary scrutiny of any changes made by politicians will be limited. While the campaigning by the organisation meant that thousands of laws were kept in place, British ministers still have the power to revoke more laws before 2026.

This will allow developers and politicians who have complained that the laws protecting nature stand in the way of economic growth, to change the necessary assessments for planning projects to take place. This also puts the countryside at risk of being industrialised and making it more difficult for people to access nature and healthy environments, which is already an issue in many areas. For example, coastal towns are now awash with sewage, and rural areas are recovering from the effects of industrial agriculture and large usage of fossil fuels.

The latter of these areas are already facing a crisis in terms of mental illnesses, such as depression. It is known that nature plays a role in the improvement of mental health, and so by concreting these areas, the public is likely to suffer further.

THE EFFECT ON THE LAW

Another threat to the work of Friends of the Earth is the uncertainty around changes to agriculture, as a majority of farming in the United Kingdom is intensive, harmful to nature, and causes pollution to enter our water. During her time serving as Prime Minister, Theresa May vowed to set out plans for a farming policy which would aid farmers and other food producers, while also being considerate of making improvements to the environment. The plan was for payments to no longer be made according to the size of the land, but for the public goods provided, such as support for wildlife and reductions in carbon dioxide.

The Rule of Law means that there should be complete separation of powers when it comes to the creation and enforcement of laws - for example, the government, judiciary, and parliament should remain independent of one another. The Government is putting this at risk by proposing National Development Management Policies and limiting how much input communities can say about large infrastructure projects taking place in their local area. In the past, organisations like Friends of the Earth have been able to challenge decisions such as time, typically through the use of precedent and case law, but the aforementioned REUL bill has the ability to make this far more difficult, and therefore standing in the way of how accessible it will be for the public as well as campaign groups to stand up for nature. One instance where this has taken place is where Friends of the Earth challenged the Net Zero Strategy as they believed it failed to meet the requirements cited by the Climate Change Act, and were successful. They also challenged the National Adaptation programme due to its lacking of objectives that would effectively address the risks of climate change.

While the organisation has been successful in endeavours such as this, it is also important to note that there are countries which have taken further steps than the UK in fighting climate change. For example, Sweden aims to have net-zero emissions by the year 1945.

At the moment, misinformation is being spread by climate change deniers, which is why it's so important that groups such as Friends of the Earth are able to keep working on their mission and spreading awareness about the declining state of the Earth. In fact, the Guardian found that around one third of British teenagers believe that the effects of climate change are actually greatly exaggerated. This BBC also reported on this after interviewing Sarah Ott, who was lead to believe that climate change was a lie after being influenced by friends in the Southern states of America and listening to right-wing radio hosts. What is concerning, even scary, about this is that Ott studied Zoology, and yet only came to terms with the reality of climate change in later life. This demonstrates the terrifying reality of how misinformation in the media can affect even those who have studied this area can believe the opinions of others above their own knowledge.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

One common question amongst those who care for the environment is what we can do on a smaller scale - whether it be environmentally friendly activities amongst friends and families, saving energy, or just more efficient modes of transport to get to and from work.

Firstly, reducing consumption can cut down on the amount of fossil fuels burnt when producing new products. This can be done through reusing certain items, such as using metal straws rather than one-use plastic ones. Additionally, buying second hand or, at least, avoiding fast fashion companies, can lower your carbon footprint. Shopping locally can also make a positive impact, as it means that the products have not been transported over long distances. Another advantage of shopping locally is that it can support local farmers and businesses, which directly strengthens the economy in your area.

In Wales, businesses can often get free recycling bins, as well as homes, which separate our waste and rubbish into different categories, allowing for them to be reused and remade into new products. As I mentioned before: transport is one way in which we can reduce our carbon footprints and contribute to helping our environment. This can be done through sharing lifts with others, using public transportation like buses or trains instead of cars, or through cycling, which also contributes to the improvement of personal health.

Energy can also be conserved at home by turning off lights and electronic devices that are unnecessary or not being used.

A plant based diet carries a significantly lower environmental impact than meat production, as livestock farming uses large amounts of land and water, contributing to deforestation in order to make space for the animals.

Another way in which you can help is by supporting Green party candidates. At the moment, the UK only has four Green party Members of Parliament, which reside in Bristol Central, Waveney Valley, North Herefordshire and Brighton Pavillion.

A SUMMARY OF FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

To conclude, Friends of the Earth has persevered throughout these times of financial troubles, setbacks on account of governmental legislation, and uncertainty regarding the policies that protect wildlife.

Factors that undermine the work of Friends of the Earth are:

- Financial pressures: the organisation gains their funding from fundraisers and donations
- The Actions of Governments weakening the protection of the environment: including leniency in enforcing emissions standards, or a lack of protection of habitats.
- Unravelling of safeguards made by the EU
- A difficulty for the public to access nature
- Intensive farming
- The REUL making it more difficult for Friends of the Earth to challenge bad decisions made by the courts

What will happen if we don't act quickly?

- Rising sea levels: this can and will destroy many major cities along the coast globally
- The destruction of habitats
- More extreme fluctuations in weather conditions

What can you do?

- Recycle using the correct bins
- Buy second hand
- Sell or donate your clothes
- Carpool, use public transport, walk, or cycle
- Buy reusable products instead of single use ones
- Buy from local business
- Consider a plant based diet, or reduce consumption of animal products
- Turn off lights and devices that are not in use