

The Coming Storm, Part Two: The Options Reviewed

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Black Lies, Green Lies

Among the lies created by various groups regarding Peak Oil is that petroleum products, primarily gasoline, is not really that expensive. As of this writing, gasoline in the United States stood at an all time average high of \$2.33 a gallon. While the thread-bear lie of comparing United States prices to European has been exposed repeatedly by a simple explanation of the differences in driving lifestyles (the United States has no mass transit system to speak of, and has built a culture around commuting), the lie of inflation is often cited in return. Here, the American consumer is told that compared to earlier prices adjusted for inflation, today's price of gasoline is far below the actual price of gas in March 1981 of \$3.03. Nice try, but in 1981 few people were paying as much for health insurance and day care as they were for their mortgage. Nor does it take into consideration the costs of military aid to, and involvement in, oil producing areas of the Middle East, South America, Africa, and Asia.

Green lies are just as sloppy, in that they pretend as we have seen, that somehow if we all just became subsistence farmers the world would be a better place. Such ideas are often spouted by people who have never subsistence farmed, drive their SUV's to Green Rallies, and sang too much *Kum Ba Ya* as a child. Nice try, but some of us are over 40 and would like to live past 65 given the opportunity. A dental plan would be nice as well. The fairy tale of the happy agrarian colony is just that, a story we tell children to cover over the harsh reality of life. Given the hours, struggles, compensation, and sheer physical labor involved, anyone who chooses to be a farmer – even with modern technology – is on the fast track to sainthood. Coupled with subsistence farming is the spoken or unspoken message of zero or negative population growth – however this somehow only works for the industrialized nations. Subsistence farming has done nothing to deduce population growth in the Third World, unless you consider starvation, or near starvation a viable means of population control.

So then, what options does this leave us with? How can we as individuals begin to take actions that will reduce the impact of transforming from a petroleum rich world into a post-petroleum planet while still retaining a progressive standard of living? Complete with easy transportation, health care, expanding life spans, and actual retirement.

Step One: On an individual level the easiest is to follow the environmental maxim of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. This is very important in reducing waste, and therefore consumption. If we don't do it Mother Nature will make us, and before that happens, a government agency (or worse, a non-governmental agency) will get involved. The International Energy Commission has plans for signatory nations to impose energy rationing. The United Kingdom (formerly known as Great Britain) has recently examined plans for imposing energy rationing.

http://www.iea.org/textbase/work/2005/oil_demand/FinalAgenPresentations.htm

<http://www.fcnp.com/519/peakoil.htm>

While it is a large step from planning to acting, it is not that large of one. Still, ask yourself this question, “Do you want your energy use monitored and kept track of in a central computer to make sure you don’t overstep you allotted carbon units?”

While it may sound too simplistic, the three Rs of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle are the base line of individual environmentalism. It is starting right where you are at and making a small, but incremental difference in the hope that others are doing it as well. In this manner, a tipping point will be reached where momentum carries the day towards inevitable success.

Step Two: Discussion of Peak Oil and its attendant topics needs to be made a front burner issue. In the words of Australian Congressman Andrew McNamara during parliamentary discussion of the *Australian Petroleum and Other Legislation Amendment Bill*,

“Peak oil represents the most serious and immediate challenge to our prosperity and security. It will impact on our lives more certainly than terrorism, global warming, nuclear war or bird flu. While it may not be a term with which members are familiar now, I predict it will come to dominate debate in this place over the next 10 years.”

Australia consumes considerably less oil than the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, France, Germany, or even Brazil and Mexico, not even placing it in the Top Ten List of consuming nations. If an apocalyptic vision is held ‘Down Under’ of potential issues arising from Peak Oil, how can they be any less severe for the Top Ten oil consuming nations? http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/topworldtables3_4.html.

Step Three: Educate yourself so that you are aware of the various arguments for and against Peak Oil, as well as the fallacy of the often-spouted solutions.

Remember, oil depletion is about oil depletion. Nuclear energy, wind power, solar power, hydroelectric, and coal cannot substitute for the oil in your cereal bowl, or the bag that holds it, or the fertilizer that was used to grow it, or the two dozen other areas of activity that were involved in getting that cereal to you to eat this morning. The same is true with your hamburger for lunch or dinner. In the United States, it is suggested by one agricultural industry analyst that domestic beef production uses two days worth of total US oil consumption. This does not include beef imported from South America or other foreign countries and the attendant cost of its production and shipping thousands of miles to US, European, and Asian markets.

http://www.ncga.com/research/pdfs/Energy_and_Oil_Consumption_in_Beef_Production.pdf

Alternative fuels are also tricky business in that some of them are also energy intensive to produce. Corn and soy based fuels and fuel additives still require the massive production of agribusiness style grain production and harvesting (petroleum intensive) to be manufactured. As a result, they may actually cost more to produce in term of actual energy, than they deliver.

A recent Associated Press article by Mark Johnson, *Study: Ethanol Not Worth The Energy*, reads:

“Supporters of ethanol and other biofuels contend they burn cleaner than fossil fuels, reduce U.S. dependence on oil... but researchers at Cornell University and the University of California-Berkeley say it takes 29 percent more fossil energy to turn corn into ethanol than the amount of fuel the process produces. For switch grass, a warm weather perennial grass found in the Great Plains and eastern North America United States, it takes 45 percent more energy and for wood, 57 percent.

It takes 27 percent more energy to turn soybeans into biodiesel fuel and more than double the energy produced is needed to do the same to sunflower plants, the study found.”

<http://aolsvc.news.aol.com/business/article.adp?id=20050719031209990017>

Or as it was stated in John Gray’s recent review of Matthew R. Simmons book, *Twilight in the Desert: The Coming Saudi Oil Shock and the World Economy*.

“The conjunction of peaking global oil production with quickening climate change poses fundamental challenges that no section of opinion has adequately confronted - including the Greens. The energy-intensive lifestyle which is now spreading throughout the world cannot be sustained with non-renewable and polluting fossil fuels, but it is sheer fantasy to imagine that a human population of between six and eight billion can be supported on a combination of windfarms, solar power and organic agriculture. As Simmons notes, we may be approaching the limits of growth that the Club of Rome identified more than 30 years ago, and we are no better prepared to adjust to them now than we were then.”

Step Four: The reality is, despite what the Nay Sayers and conspiracy people say, in the United States at least, politicians still are responsible to the voters. If you vote, and make your voice heard to your local, State, and Federal representatives, you are doing something. But if you chose to abdicate your responsibility and complain about how imperfect 'the system' or 'the world' is, then like the remaining 75% of eligible voters

who chose not to cast their vote, you have no right to complain, as you are part of the problem and not the solution. Yes, money, which the New Age is so quick to tell us is ‘a form of energy exchange’ and as we know, money also talks, so get involved with others and make your voice heard on this issue which is critical to the entire world.

Wal-Mart, the poster child corporation for consumption, depletion, and all that many consider wrong with the commercialized and de-spiritualized ‘American Way of Life’ has recognized that green is good for business. Not only in terms of public relations, but physical plant management. Wal-Mart recently unveiled its first energy efficient store, complete with windmill in the parking lot, and solar panels over the vestibule and greenhouse. While criticized as simply a showpiece by some, others see a sea change in corporate attitudes. Clearly Wal-Mart recognizes two important points: (1) environmental concerns are a front burner issue for an increasing number of their customers; (2) energy will only continue to increase in cost, and to save money in the long run, they are beginning the process of investing in energy efficient buildings.

http://www.renewableenergyaccess.com/rea/news/story.jsessionid=asY8VUO12L2_?id=34647

This last point is critical, as few people know how to ‘follow the money.’ Just as oil companies are not investing in new oil refineries as current ones become obsolete and in need of replacement, nor are they investing in large scale searches for new oil sources, we see companies slowly and quietly investing in alternative energy sources and infrastructure. This means that the decision makers have recognized that Peak Oil is here, or will be shortly, and they are preparing their organizations to survive, albeit imperfectly, but as best they know how. In the end though, it is about oil. Unless activities are undertaken to dramatically reduce oil consumption, alternative energy sources are little more than an energy band-aid.

Step Five: It is a hackneyed bumper sticker saying from the 1990’s, but it is true, especially when it comes to Peak Oil, and related energy depletion issues: Think Globally, Act Locally. Energy use has local and individual solutions. In addition to the Three Rs of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle, there are the following:

- Buy local produce at farmers markets and ask for it at your supermarket.
- Support local businesses over big-box chain stores, as local businesses have a greater stake in small town, community, and neighborhood issues.
- Become involved in local efforts to restore mass transit on a level where it is easily accessible and encourages wider use by the general population.
- Join your local Tree Shade Commission, and become involved in urban forestation movements, to plant trees in commercial and residential areas. Urban tree canopies make areas more beautiful to live in while reducing the use of fuels for heating and cooling. This is one area where funding is often easily available for communities, businesses, and individuals seeking to increase or maintain existing coverage.

- Join a local organization that is involved in community activities, such as the Rotary, Kiwanis, Free Masons, Lions, or similar organizations. It is here that people are met, communities built, and the ability to effect change is demonstrated.
- Talk to your employer or Human Resources person about possible company subsidies for employees who take public transportation rather than driving a car to work. This eases pollution as well as parking issues.
- Email this editorial to friends, post it on your website, or pass it along to an elist you are on so they can read it, as well as *Part One* at the following link. <http://www.hermeticinstitute.org/docs/comingstorm1.pdf>

It Is All Up To You

Finally, if you want to live in the Age of Aquarius then you, and this means YOU dear reader, must become the living example of Aquarian ideals, and these include: optimism, confidence, inventive, benevolence, and philanthropy. It is also important to participate in social activities where people must be met, cooperated with, and understood, and not just political activism and policy engagements. This last point is critical to keep from descending into the negative traits of Aquarius, which include extremism, aloofness, unruliness, dogmatic opinions, and dictatorship.

If you are convinced of your powerlessness, and the existence of a web of intrigue that keeps you from being more (or having more as is really the case), then you cannot live in the Aquarian future, because you have killed it here in the present. While the turning of Nature's Great Wheel will take us to the future, ready or not, how that future expresses itself is a matter of how each of us expresses ourselves now. Nature will only provide the context, the foundation, or lowest common denominator of possible supports for each cycle of human life. It is we, who like the alchemists of old, aid and assist Nature in turning that minimal possibility into something noble and greater.

The solutions that have been suggested here are small, and are not in and of themselves going to keep civilization from collapsing as oil production declines. They can however, slow the slide and buy us time, and that may be enough, for some form of alternative energy source to be developed and implemented on a large scale – but the scale of time we are talking here is decades. At least ten to twenty years is needed to progressively replace petroleum. The sooner each of us starts in our own small ways, the better.

In the final installment of *The Coming Storm, Part Three: A Call for Hermetic Renewal – The New Renaissance*, we will examine the impact of Peak Oil and energy issues on contemporary spirituality and esotericism; the need to build community resources as a means of weathering the storm; demonstrating that Hermeticism is truly a living and vital philosophy; and a look ahead at the meaning of Saturn and Uranus as planets of restriction and freedom, responsibility and privilege in the Age of Aquarius.

Part Three: A Call for Hermetic Renewal - The New Renaissance

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