



APEAKOLYPSE NOW

Peak Oil is the greatest story never told. Even though Peak Oil is the central fact driving the wars and economic crises of our time, it is seldom mentioned in the mainstream corporate news.

Peak Oil (also known as the Big Rollover or the Long Emergency) is when demand for oil outstrips supply because the halfway point of the planet's oil deposits has been passed. 'Halfway' is a misleading word in this context. Most of the oil that's still left in the ground will be staying there, because it takes more oil energy to get it out of the ground than it yields. The oil and natural gas is no longer worth the drilling or pumping. Petroleum geologists reckon that the world oil peak will be sometime between 2005-2010. The majority of non-OPEC producers such as the United States, Britain, Norway, and Mexico, who satisfy 60 percent of world oil demand, are already in a production plateau or decline. A leading guru, Colin Campbell (ex of Shell and Total Fina Elf) reckons 2007. Are we preparing for it? Are we readying ourselves to radically change our lifestyles and energy consumption? Of course not.

The bottom line is this: humankind is entering a whole new era. One in which every year from, say, 2007, there will be less and less net energy available to us no matter what we do (Alternative energy sources are nowhere near developed enough, or invested in, to compensate). The last time anything like this happened was the collapse of the ancient civilizations. The Maya, the Romans, the Greeks; these civilisations ended when their strategies for energy capture - be it slaves, coal or topsoil - became subject to the law of diminishing returns.

Industrial society is the name given to the world that built itself first on coal and then on oil. When oil becomes scarce and then runs out it will be the collapse of industrial society. Massive social change is coming.

In 'The Party's Over - Oil, War and the Fate Of Industrial Societies,' Richard Heinberg refers to the present epoch as the Petroleum Interval or the Petrol Bubble. The Stone Age lasted for millennia, the Bronze Age nearly a couple of thousand years, but the epoch in which humans discover oil then totally reshape society around oil, and then run out of the stuff will be about 200 years.

The implications in terms of food are pretty terrifying. Since the 1960s it has been true to say that food equals oil. In 1944 the average US farm produced 2.3 thousand calories of food for every calorie of fossil fuel inputs. In 1974 the ratio became 1:1, in our own time there are no reliable statistics but it may be as much as 1000 calories of oil-energy to produce as each calorie of food energy, given that nitrogen fertilizers are made from natural gas, (itself

a by-product of oil); pesticides and insecticides are synthesised from oil, tractors and combines run on diesel, and then there's plastic packaging, refrigeration and four-figure food miles. As Heinberg says, "in terms of energy return on energy invested, industrial agriculture is the least efficient food distribution system the world has ever known." Hoe and scythe the classes anyone?

So the days of the out-of-town Tescos and Wal-Marts are numbered. But the bad news is that survival on planet earth could get a lot more difficult for about two-thirds of its inhabitants. The population boom at the beginning of the 20th century, boosting humans from 1.7 billion to 6 billion was the result of cheap abundant energy supplies helping to underpin massive expansion of agricultural production. With oil about to become a rare as arctic carp, the earth's carrying capacity - ie the total population it can support - will plunge back down to pre-industrial levels... or maybe lower still since we no longer know how to farm, and have thoughtfully covered most of the Grade 1 arable land with UGC multiplex cinemas.

CRUDE TALK

So why aren't we hearing more about this story then? On the quiet, Governments and Energy corporations admit the basic truths of the situation - Exxon Mobil's recent report, "The Outlook for Energy: A 2030 View", forecasts a peak in just five years - but nobody's shouting about it. Simply put, it's because it's in all the major players' interests to lie about it. The oil companies (publicly at least) downplay the problem because oil-producing countries will hike the price if they know they have BP and Exxon over a barrel. The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) lie about their reserves, claiming they are larger than they really are, because OPEC members agree to produce only a certain percentage of their reserves per year, and each money-hungry member wants to cheat by producing more - thus leading to the over 'generous' estimates. Governments of oil-producing countries also want inflated reserves so as to boost investment and help each oligarchy to shore up its power base, not too mention getting US/UK arms and military training for free. Other governments lie about Peak Oil because they don't want to appear powerless, or provoke public panic.

Oil Check?

Try dipping your stick into:
www.powerswitch.org.uk
www.peakoil.net
www.wolfatthedoor.org.uk

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For nicking a policeman!!!

One daring SchNEWS reader was nicked for stealing a life-size cardboard cut - out of a cop! The theft took place in a branch of Morrisons, Newcastle-under-Lyme. SchNEWS wonders what the accused had planned for the Card-board Cop when he stole it...answers on a postcard to the usual address.

There is also the psychology of denial. Protecting the status quo is so much easier for politicians looking ahead all of three or four years. Not wanting to face social change, governments instead want to believe in the 'techno-fix'. Hydrogen, nuclear and zinc are all hailed as the saviours of industrial capitalism. But there are no hydrogen reservoirs. Hydrogen fuel-cells are made using fossil-fuels. You use as much fossil fuel energy to create each hydrogen fuel cell as you get from it. Hydrogen can be used to store wind and wave energy, but it is a carrier of energy (like electricity) not a source of energy. The nuclear energy cycle not only produces too much carbon in its mining, milling, processing, storage and decommissioning, but needs vast fossil fuel inputs as only 0.7% of natural uranium mined is the fissile U-235 needed. Zinc-air fuel cells have yet to attract enough attention or big-time investment.

But there's one other reason for the big Peak Oil omerta*, which unites all of the above liars and the news networks. The potential collapse of the banking system. In the windfall energy years of the Petrol Bubble, more and more energy has been available each and every year. This has led to an economic system built on the assumption of growth. Large scale energy shortages would soon put a stop to that.

Societies will have to junk the preset debt-and-interest monetary system for a matter-and-energy accounting system, or some other kind of ecological system which acknowledges the finite nature of resources. This may not be a bad thing of course, but you can tell those with power are going to find the most painful route to arrive at that conclusion.

Any road up, the present financial system cannot survive net-energy decline. Less and less available energy means less economic activity. In the present banking system most money is created by making loans. But if there is less and less economic activity then there are less and less loans and so there's no tidy wedge to pay interest on the old loans, nor anyone to pay the loan sharks to come round yer house, nor oil to make the resin to stop the baseball bat from cracking on yer skull. And without these two mainstays it's all over.

* SchNEWS VocabWatch: **OMERTA** - A rule or code that prohibits speaking or divulging information about certain activities, especially the activities of a criminal organization.

SHITTY WATER

Another botched water privatisation hit the headlines this week when the Tanzanian government booted City Water ("The World's Choice in Water Treatment") out of their country. The consortium of UK and German firms was supposed to be running a World Bank and UK funded programme to increase access to drinking water in the capital, Dar es Salaam. As a result of being shown the door, company bosses are now threatening to sue the Tanzanian government for breach of contract, even though they've failed to install any water pipes yet!

Over the past seven years the UK Department for International Development has bunged Margaret Thatcher's fave think tank - the Adam Smith Institute - £36m to come up with 'market' solutions to global poverty. £1/2m went their way for the Tanzania water privatisation plan. How did they spend £277,000 of this money? On a pro-privatisation pop video which sang "Our old industries are dry like crops and privatisation brings the rain!" Not that the song will be making the top 40 in a country where only one in a hundred people have got a video player...

As the World's 15th poorest country Tanzania has been forced to adopt the usual IMF/World Bank package of reforms-cutting government expenditure, food subsidies and privatising everything in sight. The country's debt is £4bn, but the government only has £750m to spend each year, including a mean £3m on education. So if the Tanzanians aren't winning who is? Not City Water. "We've only declared a 10% profit" says UK Chief Executive Cliff Stone, "we can't make super-profits here". Whether 10% profit is 'super' or not, SchNEWS wonders whether they'll be 'declaring' the whereabouts of the missing £2.5m they should have invested in Tanzania over the first two years of the project. 020 7737 6215 www.wdm.org.uk

KASH CONVERTERS

Repression continues in Orissa, India where the tribal people are fighting corporations and government who want to 'develop' the region. After a demonstration last week against a proposed steel refinery 25 people are in prison and 300 people have arrest warrants. This has forced 13 villages to flee to the hills and forests in terrible heat, leading to the death of two young children and two men who were injured in the police charge.

The threat of forced displacement without any alternative livelihoods and loss of ancestral lands have led to a strong resistance - as far back as in 1996, the local people successfully stopped the establishment of a plant by Steel Plant at the same site. Amidst police repression and growing tension in the region, tribal lands sit on some of the most valuable mineral deposits including iron ore, bauxite and coal. For the last six months, Kashipur has been turned into an armed camp of police working on the behalf of the Utkal Alumina Ltd (see SchNEWS 487). As one protestor put it "State repression is being unleashed upon them on behalf of the corporate sector which needs the land traditionally occupied by the tribals." www.saanet.org

* **Guerrero, Mexico:** An environmental campaigner's family was ambushed by troops working for local political bosses killing two of his teenage last week. Albertano Penalosa belongs to the anti-logging group 'The Peasant Ecologists of the Petatlan Sierra' - who are fighting for their land against the local leaders - 'caciques' - who run the stitch ups between the local military, police, courts and big business. www.commondreams.org/headlines05/0524-05.htm

Inside SchNEWS

Rachid Ramda is Britain's longest serving remand prisoner. The young Algerian has been held for eight years without charge or trial in Britain's 'Guantanamo' style gulag - HMP Belmarsh. He spent the first six of these in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day in what

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NO GO ROAD SHOW

"Building new roads offers at best temporary relief from traffic congestion. It is now accepted by almost everyone apart from the DoT that new roads generate new traffic... Widening existing roads will have much the same effect."

Who do you think said this? Was it a wide-eyed environmentalist being bundled from the site of a 90s road protest? Or was it the Labour Party, in its 1994 environment policy document 'In Trust For Tomorrow'?

Well done anybody who was able to remember this is what the Labour Party once had to say about road building - although 11 years, one fuel protest, a concerted backlash, and several thousand miles of tarmac later, you could be forgiven for forgetting.

Despite the incredible victory of trashing the 90s roads programme, a huge building programme is being quietly resurrected, fuelled largely by business lobbies and local councils, whose transport policy often amounts to little more than a wish list of new road schemes.

More than 90 road schemes have been approved as part of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) system since 2000 alone, and over 90 more trunk road and motorway widening projects. There are also loads of new roads being considered right now as part of the next 5 year LTPs. Many schemes may also be built through PFI in dodgy developer deals.

The government has almost abandoned any pretence at curbing traffic growth and is now predicting a 40 per cent increase in road transport by 2025 - more than ten million vehicles.

Does anybody in government, regional assemblies, quangos or local authorities worry about all this? At least one does, and, believe this, it's the Highways Agency. It recently disagreed with the draft East of England Plan, saying that even with the 60 road schemes planned for the region there would be gridlock in a few years time.

While bus and rail fares both rose by over 30% in real terms since 1980, the actual cost of motoring is still below the 1980 level

Rebecca Lush, of anti-roads alliance Road Block, told SchNEWS "After the protests of the 1990s, people power won. The Conservatives slashed their roads programme, while Labour distanced itself, talking about sustainable transport instead.

"However, there has been significant backsliding from the government.

We won the arguments, it is universally accepted by all transport planners, academics, the government itself, that road building is costly and futile. A lot of the roads are still in the planning stage, where they can be defeated more easily through radical, joined-up campaigning. Already there has been direct action at a Public Inquiry into a massive London motorway bridge, which led to the Inspector resigning.

"Road Block was set up to recreate the unity which existed in the 1990s, to supply groups with easy to use ammunition to fight road schemes, ideas on campaign tactics and to publicise this enormous U-turn by Labour and, crucially, to help to tackle carbon emissions."

Road Block is organising a national conference for those opposing roads, in Birmingham, on June 4. An ideal opportunity to meet people opposing road schemes all over the country, share ideas and compare strategies.

Roadblock - 01803 847649
www.roadblock.org.uk

SchNEWS in brief

Get clued up about the G8 with a Day School at Brighton Cowley Club this Saturday 11am onwards www.cowleyclub.org.uk ** Anti capitalist comedian **Rob Newman** will be performing at the East Oxford Community Centre as a benefit for anti G8 mobilisations. Saturday (28th) 7.30pm ** The anti G-8 clown army **Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination** are in London this weekend with training Saturday and Sunday at Boiler Room - back of People's Palace, Queen Mary University London, Mile End Road E1 4NS. To book a place email: trainings@labofii.net For all the tour dates www.labofii.net/tour05 ** The Colombia Solidarity Campaign will be protesting outside the **West Ham - Preston** Championship play offs at the Cardiff Millennium Stadium this Monday (30th). Not because they think the teams are shit but because of the sponsorship of the Championship by Coca-Cola and their complicity in the assassination of Colombian trade unionists. Meet 1.30 pm by the Nye Bevan Statue, Queen Street cardiff, troopsout@hotmail.com ** Vampire Lawyer **Timothy Lawson-Crutenden** was treated to a Samba Band demo outside his offices in Greys Inn Square, London. Crutenden specialises in using anti-stalker legislation against pressure groups and protesters, including SHAC and Smash EDO (see SchNEWS 492) ** There's a **Smash the Injunction** public meeting next Tuesday (31) 7pm Friends Meeting House, Brighton - speakers include Dave Morris from the McLibel Two www.smashedo.org.uk ** 'The Scum Fest' punk chaos five day festival' starts next Wednesday 1st June with bands, workshops and of course a scumbag Olympic games (Special Brew drinking championship?) raising cash for worthy causes www.eroding.org.uk/brixtonscum.htm ** There's a month long **Radical Mapping Festival** at 56a Infoshop, 56 Crampton St, London, SE17 Check out the programme www.mdx.org.uk/mapfestival.html ** New **SchMOVIE** on the site - "Auchtapalavar" SchNEWS took a trip to **Auchterarder**, the scottish village two miles from the Gleneagles Hotel where the G8 Summit is being held, to chat with the locals about what it's like to have the Glastonbury of global capitalism park itself on your doorstep. Download from www.schnews.co.uk/schmovies and screen as widely as possible.

...and finally...

A cheeky campaigner posing as a journalist, managed to smear carrot and orange cake all over Alistair Darling's face on Tuesday in the latest pie-in-the-face incident. The Transport Minister was at a launch meeting of the "Future Heathrow" group, a powerful alliance "who seek to convince people that it is possible to develop Heathrow in a way that allows it to retain its premier position and in a manner that is sensitive to environmental issues and the needs of the local population." How do they do this? Well by building more runways, destroying local villages, increasing traffic, and helping to cause climate change by encouraging more air travel of course!

The mainly elderly residents demonstrating outside the conference were delighted by the action. John Stewart, chair of HACAN ClearSkies, one of the groups organising the demonstration outside, said "This was one in the eye for Alistair Darling. It is quite inappropriate that any Secretary of State should so publicly align himself with any pressure group. It really calls into question his impartiality and his judgement." SchNEWS reckons the Darling of the climate change industries got his just desserts.
www.hacan.org.uk

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers although we may be crude and not too refined all our gas is natural... Honest!