

Freedom Matters

A Weekly Newsletter

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We are a free people in a republic, under a constitution which limits the powers of government to those necessary to secure the unalienable rights of each person to their life, liberty and property. Yet, when a legislature is in session, no one's life, liberty or property is safe. It's the curse of a democracy. That's why we have a republic instead. *Freedom Matters* dedicates itself to the fight to restore our republic. Most of the press and courts fail to do so. They've forgotten that freedom matters.

Bogey Men Under the Bed

by Bob Bowman

To our readers concerned about big events looming over them, we dedicate the following.

For 12 issues (#14-#25), *Freedom Matters* dealt with the concept of "Sustainable Development," from a germinal concept of it in the book *The Limits to Growth*, to its enshrinement in international politics, via the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations, and to its intrusion into U. S. politics where it was renamed "Smart Growth." This movement was driven by fears, and still is, although other factors have entered in. For example, it has been made into a vehicle for the socialist/communist movement, defined as the idea that a righteous elite must plan the lives of all the rest of us, to bring about that perverse form of "fairness" which Thomas Sowell has termed "cosmic justice." FM will address the latter in a future issue. In this issue, it is the fears that drive "smart growth" that are the concern.

The initial fear, in *The Limits to Growth*, was that civilization would exhaust the natural resources that support it (a Malthusian theory). The bogeymen of the neo-Malthusians of the 1970s and 1980s were the fears that we would exhaust our supplies of food, metals and energy. Not only did that not happen, data suggests it never will. Nevertheless, the fear that it will happen is being used to frighten people, in order to stampede them into the clutches of collectivism.

Thus, dire predictions by Paul Ehrlich et al. that the 1970 and 1980s would see mass starvations proved unfounded. To the contrary, food then and now is so plentiful and cheap that its economy is bankrupting farmers. Equally dire predictions that we would exhaust our mineral wealth likewise proved to be fantasies. There is no indication that we can ever exhaust the mineral wealth of the earth. Like food, metals have become cheaper to produce.

Energy is a more complex issue. The main source for the industrial world are "fossil fuels": coal, gas, oil.

The accepted theory is, these are the detritus of past organic matter, and hence, are finite enough to be used up. Hubbert, in the 1950s, developed a numerical model that related the extraction rate of oil to the fraction left in the field. This yielded a bell-shaped curve, similar to the curve of the rate of discovery of new oil fields. By this, Hubbert predicted in the 1950s that the U. S. lower 48 would hit peak oil production in 1970. It did, at about 9 billion barrels a year, and has since declined to about 3 billion a year. The success of that prediction (which in hindsight was as much luck as not) and of one other prediction, gave Hubbert's model credence with people who ignore that his model missed on its other predictions.

Now, via Hubbert modeling plus "creaming curves" (the cumulative rate of discovery vs the cumulative rate of wildcat wells), proponents predict that world-wide oil production will peak anywhere from 2010 to 2060. Go to "peak oil" via Google on the internet, to get papers on these predictions.

Varying degrees of alarm are expressed about this peak production. That's because, after it, world-wide production of oil will decline to ever-lower levels over the succeeding decades, in the face of ever-increasing demand. For perspective, the ultimate recoverable resource (URR) for oil is variously estimated to be about 2-3 trillion barrels world-wide, of which we have so far pumped just under 1 trillion.

Is peak oil the end of the line? No. It's the end of the *cheapest* hydrocarbon fuel. Heavy oils, oil sands, and oil shales can be mined far into the future. The California Energy Commission, March 2002, cites

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Three property rights web sites:

<http://www.fairnessinlaw.org/>
<http://www.takebackwisconsin.com/>
www.cwlp.org

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estimates of 2 trillion barrels of oil in oil sands, and over twice that much in oil shales. The supplies of natural gas are at least as large, and likely larger, provided the environmentalists let us tap them.

In other words, oil in one form or another will be produced at least throughout the expected life times of all of us alive today. However, it will likely be in shorter supply and at a higher price.

The above is based on a fossil (biotic) theory of the origin of oil and gas. A competing theory exists, that presumes an abiotic origin for petroleum and related hydrocarbons. As noted, the "fossil fuel" theory, based on a biotic origin, projects a limited and nonrenewable supply of oil. The abiotic theory suggests possibly limitless supplies.

No matter if oil derives biotically or abiotically, what is the **original** source of its hydrocarbons? The most abundant elements in the universe are hydrogen, helium, oxygen and carbon. The combination of two of these (i.e., hydrocarbons), are likewise abundant. The planets Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune and Uranus, the "gas giants," are predominantly composed of hydrocarbons. Asteroids and interplanetary dust grains also contain hydrocarbons. In a word, there is no cosmic shortage of hydrocarbons.

The dominant scientific theory is that our solar planets, including earth, formed by accretion from a primordial dust disc around the early sun. The growing earth would thus have incorporated large quantities of hydrocarbons, water ice and rocky particles that together comprised the disc. Earth must have accumulated thereby a large store of hydrocarbons that arose from cosmic chemistry and not from organic life, in which these hydrocarbons were dispersed throughout the earth's mantle.

Russian scientists have long appealed to this accretion of hydrocarbons as a **direct** source of petroleum. More recently, a western astrophysicist, Thomas Gold, published a similar theory, postulating that bacteria dwelling many kilometers deep into earth's mantle have feasted on these hydrocarbons, converting them into petroleum. He did not cite the Russian history of such an abiotic theory, so some Russians accused him of plagiarism (see Krayushkin, internet). Gold has since cited the Russian work.

Why is the abiotic theory important? Because, if it is true, there may be **limitless** supplies of petroleum and gas in the earth. Such abiotic fuels are hypothesized to exist deep in the basement rocks of the earth and percolate up, and may accumulate in

commercially extractable fields in fractured crystalline rock, where the fractures allow the petroleum to migrate to a wellhead. In fact, petroleum and hydrocarbon gases are found in crystalline rock, including some commercial fields, listed by Batchelor et al. of Geosciences Ltd (see internet). Still, most such fields appear to be biotic oil. Very limited data do indicate that some oil fields may be refilled from deeper pools of oil, suggestive of deep abiotic oil. So, overall, the evidence is iffy for commercial deposits of abiotic oil; if they exist, they are likely deeper than biotic oil.

Thus, predictions of an impending peak and decline in oil production are based on the biotic (fossil fuel) theory of the origin of oil, and hence, on finite and exhaustible supplies. Even in that theory, there is disagreement. Two Europeans (Campbell and Laherrere) are Hubbert-curve\creaming-curve enthusiasts, who pessimistically claim that we are about at peak oil production now. Their view is disputed, with merit, by M C. Lynch ("Debunking the Hubbert Model (and the Hubbert Modelers).") See the web. Thus, a middle view puts peak oil at about 2030.

Conclusions. What can we expect vis-a-vis energy availability in the near and far future? In truth, no one knows for sure. Matthew Simmons, energy banker and Bush administration adviser cited in previous issues of *Freedom Matters*, personally thinks we are near peak oil, but says that our data are so uncertain that we will only know if we have reached peak oil **after** it has happened. Even Colin Campbell, the pessimist cited above, claims not to be an alarmist; i.e., he believes that we will cope after peak oil.

When Einstein was asked how to choose which cosmological model to believe, he replied "Esthetics." In other words, believe the "prettiest" one.

So it is with the energy outlook. I believe that we will diversify our energy sources even as we continue to have and rely on oil and gas for years; that thorium doping to prevent the production of weapons-grade radioactive products will let us use nuclear fission for energy; that solar and wind energy, etc. will supply part of our energy; and that by mid-century, we will develop fusion as an essentially inexhaustible energy source. I believe that the touted hydrogen economy, which is an energy medium, not an energy source, will gradually replace oil and minimize pollution as we continue to rely on automobiles for transportation.

Our more serious problem, I believe, is not the natural environment, but the human political environment. The true threat is that false fears will be used to trick us into giving up our American freedoms.