My Soylent Green

Contributed by Chris Perks
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The dramatic increases in motor fuel prices, gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel, and the devastating effect they are having on our cheap fuel based economy was entirely predictable. But politicians of every stripe are now fully engaged in the blame game, running down a list of evil doers: gas station owners, greedy oil company executives, commodities market speculators, selfish Arabs, growth obsessed Chinese, etc.

The simple fact is that global supply cannot keep up with demand, and there are no alternatives that can be developed rapidly enough to correct this imbalance. Soon the paradigm will shift and instead of desperate attempts to increase supply, attention will turn to reducing demand. That's when we will all start to realize that there are simply too many humans on this planet. There are now 6.7 billion humans competing for the planet's limited resources, which can only sustainably support less than a quarter of that number. Thomas Robert Malthus was right.

So, how can we reduce population? The first idea might be birth control. Limit each couple's family to two children. Provide societal incentives for some couples to have only one child and you might gradually bring down the global population. But it's too late for that. The 6.7 billion are already here, and a large percentage of them are under the age of 18. The effects of birth control will not be realized for several generations. Unfortunately, there is not enough available energy to make it through that period.

As the amount of available fossil energy becomes insufficient to support the total population, the four horsemen will ride again: famine and starvation, pestilence and disease, and the most efficient of all, wars, primarily over resources.

Realizing the predicament, some altruistic individuals might volunteer to make an early departure. (There's the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement.) Most however, will begin in earnest to play for keeps in a planetary game similar to the TV show "Survivor." They will become obsessed with deciding and then justifying who should get voted off the island. It will become us against them, and there will be countless criteria for distinguishing between the two.

My college history professor had two posters on his office wall. One of the Nazi swastika, and one of a month's supply of birth control pills. He believed that a very significant concept of the twentieth century was development of the institutions and technology whereby certain individuals could decide who would live and who should not. Although the technologies might be new, genocide and birth control are as old as what we call civilization, maybe older.

Homo sapiens sapiens emerged in Africa and then migrated across the globe some 60-80,000 years ago. It's the only survivor of a number of other hominid species who didn't make it. Perhaps the reason why is that ours was just better skilled at genocide.

So where does that leave us? There is no doubt in Dick Cheney's mind. The "final" prize is still in the Middle East where five countries (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, and UAE), contain over 60% of remaining petroleum supplies. As long as we choose to attempt to continue to live as the world's most decadent energy consumers (25% of consumption by 5% of population), we absolutely must maintain our military control of the Persian Gulf region. This simple fact explains the nature of our relationships with every country there, from Israel, to Saudi Arabia, to Iraq, to Iran, who Mr. Cheney is working hard to provoke into an open conflict. ("Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on … Won't get fooled again.")

But controlling the supply of oil in the Middle East is only one part of the equation. We must also curb the insatiable demand from China and India. Their combined population is 8 times larger than the United States! If they are to continue improving their lifestyles based on our model of private automobile ownership and total electrification, there will simply not be enough fossil fuel for us as well. This was the underlying logic of the US refusal to adopt the Kyoto Protocols. Sure, we'll become more efficient and try to cut back, but don't you developing nations think that you're going

to ever get to live like us!

Mr. Cheney is probably thinking beyond the time when he will have occupied Iran and secured the oil riches of the Middle East through military force. The next logical step in a survival strategy for the US would be to assist China to reduce its population by means of a pre-emptive nuclear strike on its major cities. That is after all the essence of the “Bush Doctrine,” a pre-emptive attack on an unthreatening sovereign nation in the name of self defense.

Fortunately, there is not enough time left for Mr. Cheney to complete his project. The unraveling of our energy-consumptive, technological civilization as we know it is going to happen too fast. Forget about gasoline prices, layoffs, mortgage foreclosures, credit crises, debt crises, and bank failures. Read the papers looking for food shortages. It’s already happening in many other countries. World grain stockpiles have been diminishing for a decade and are now practically gone. Modern industrial agriculture is based on petroleum for the farm equipment, transportation, and pesticides; natural gas for the manufacture of nitrate fertilizers, and electricity for irrigation. As oil prices skyrocket and shortages occur, it will reflect in the food supply. The concept of mandatory ethanol production in this situation is reminiscent of the final scene in the movie “Thelma and Louise.” Let’s stomp on the gas pedal as we go off the cliff (holding hands of course).

In five to ten years it will all become clear. There are too many people and not enough food. And what’s the simple solution? You guessed it, cannibalism. Once we can somehow get over our cultural taboos for eating our fellows, our problems will be solved.

We're already fattened by high fructose corn syrup, and we taste like chicken! We can then forget about birth control, and makin' bacon will take on a whole new meaning.

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Editor's note: Soylent Green is a film made in the early 1970s starring Charles Heston and Edward G. Robinson. Set in the future greenhouse world, food is produced industrially from soy, algae and ultimately from a predictable source in an overpopulated world, to produce a new brand: Soylent Green, which contains (STOP READING THIS IF YOU'RE GOING TO RENT THE MOVIE!...) the secret ingredient of... human corpses.

Further reading:
Voluntary Human Extinction Movement:

vhemt.org