

Good news and bad news at the dawn of petrocollapse

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Culture Change Letter #109

There is good news and bad news at the dawn of petrocollapse:

To the rescue!

- Bike stations and Library Bikes as victors over oil!

However...

- Inevitable: New Orleans as victim of oil!

There is more than a double whammy at play in the U.S. Gulf as to the energy supply picture. Besides the devastation of the general infrastructure, Katrina has inflicted two acute shortage situations as never before experienced simultaneously: oil (and refined products), and natural gas.

Gas was already in very tight supply, as has been oil. Today's sudden and heightened supply tightness can feed on itself, as history has shown. To say the least, this country is going to have a recession that could be rather dark by winter.

A national and global economy that is not built for conservation and efficiency cannot accept "Stop! no more" from Mother Nature. Hence, the possible onset of general petrocollapse and the toll on consumers, even though for now consumerism still rides high everywhere in the U.S. except in the areas directly disabled by Katrina. But according to airportbusiness.com,

"Airlines and oil companies are working on plans to supply jet fuel to at least ten U.S. airports that could be shut down due to a lack of jet fuel caused by refinery and pipeline shutdowns from hurricane Katrina." The report from Aug. 31st makes clear these are not Gulf area airports hit by Katrina, and they include Atlanta and Washington Dulles. "This may be the biggest oil-supply shock since the 1970s. We are now in the days of reckoning," said Cambridge Energy Research's Daniel Yergin after Katrina hit the petroleum sector. As a reader of the Lundberg Letter in the late 1970s, Yergin knows that our forecast of a 9% shortfall of gasoline in 1979 -- that we accurately predicted would trigger "days of lines and hoses" -- can apply today.

I hesitate to say that based on a possible 20% shortfall from Katrina that the U.S. will positively and immediately enter into its third (and last) major oil shock, because the rest of the world does not have the same shortage. But that could change due in large part to the wounded colossus trying to suck up ever more petroleum for its wasteful applications. Unfortunately, being in the pay of the petroleum industry, Yergin is acting as the main nay-sayer of the growing consensus that the world is now or very shortly will be at peak extraction of oil. As this column has repeatedly explained, the other side of the peak does not look anything like a gradual reverse-growth scenario. The market will act as its own executioner by running up prices and creating shortage, regardless of geological reserves of oil and fancy consultants' assurances.

It may already be happening now: stockpiling and hoarding mean that tremendous "tertiary storage" (two hundred million cars' gas tanks) is topped off, ultimately creating paralyzing shortage. Katrina may teach wasteful U.S. petroguzzlers far beyond the Gulf that nature bats last and that the unnatural works of man -- including the vast, vulnerable petroleum infrastructure -- are short sighted.

If this is the dawn of petrocollapse, so be it. If the dawn has not yet come, it is nevertheless close. The lesson of Katrina should be less sensationalism and more reckoning of our unsustainable lifestyles and foreign policy. Were it that Daniel Yergin's "reckoning" is such.

Michael Ruppert told Culture Change on Aug. 31, "I think (Katrina's impact is) about a 20-25% hit on US (oil) supply for as long as 3-4 months maybe longer. The economy may not recover."

Truthout.org's Kelpie Wilson wrote on Aug. 31, "If we had a president who was a leader, he or she would start by asking us to do our part by staying home and not driving our gas guzzlers this weekend. They are going to need lots of fuel down in New Orleans because once they get those levees rebuilt they have to pump all that water out of there. It's sure not going anywhere by itself - most of the city is six feet below sea level."

J.H. Crawford, author of the book *CarFree Cities*, writes:

"If New Orleans... must be relocated to higher ground... we should make the point that a new, carfree city to house the refugees would cost less to build and emit fewer greenhouse gases than any other alternative that might be considered.

"Whatever happens, we should be prepared to address the fact that, should New Orleans be destroyed, the event is largely the responsibility of the United States for releasing staggering quantities of greenhouse gasses during the past 150 years and for failing to even address the need for reductions. This event could be the wake-up call for America. It could turn out to be a disaster that far overshadows September 11th in terms of both loss of life and property damage.

"This disaster has been inevitable for a long time, but it seems likely that people are simply going to rebuild the city in harm's way, again. The interval to the next disaster will likely be a lot shorter than the last interval."

Where Mr. Crawford may be wrong is that if Mike Ruppert is correct and petrocollapse has begun, there will be no rebuilding as commonly supposed.

How about "New Orleans: victim of Big Oil"? Suffice to say that it's in our face that our petroleum lifestyle has immense drawbacks such as irreparable toxic spills and global-warming-charged hurricanes. Yes, the oil giants exercise extraordinary power. But they are not in control when it is the people who may or may not give them their money. Yes, oil prices go up. Due to subsidizing petroleum in a dying culture that guzzles poison hooch like a drunkard, we are actually

paying many times the price that's recorded (over \$10 per gallon).

If this is the point in our history when one may say in the future in retrospect that Katrina touched off petrocollapse and the transition to sustainability, will our behavior start to show some collective intelligence before Katrina's big sister -- total petrocollapse and climate distortion to the max -- visits us?

The suffering in the Katrina-hit Gulf Coast ecosystem includes millions of people who did not ask for this disaster. That they unwittingly helped bring it on -- via unsustainable land, air and water practices -- is an unkind thing to suggest at this tragic time. There are lessons, however: the SUV photographed in the flood and crushed by nature reminds us that no one species is all-special. Our new cars are not invincible, nor are we. And nature is slamming the motor vehicles to remind the universe who is boss -- errant children in the guise of modern society are running amok with machines and energy on the way to and after achieving overpopulation. Hurricanes in a changing climate

Sir David King, the British Government's chief scientific adviser, in an interview on August 30, 2005, said it is "easy to conclude that the increased intensity of hurricanes is associated with global warming."

A paper published last month in the journal *Nature* by meteorologist Kerry Emanuel of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is part of an emerging body of research challenging the prevailing view that more-severe storms are not necessarily part of climate change.

The new paper concluded that "the destructive power of hurricanes had increased 50% over the last half a century, and that a rise in surface temperatures linked to global warming was at least partly responsible."

Finally some good news

The Bike Station, at downtown Berkeley, California's subway station, had a record number of bikes valet-parked there on the last day of August. Chalk the 50% increase up to not just higher gasoline prices but the onset of classes for the new academic year at University of California. The University and Berkeley High School could do something responsible in consideration of the devastating loss of life in the wake of Katrina: ban automobile parking for almost all student/staff school-commuting. This would result in more bike stations as well as more of the following:

Library Bikes, a community "institution" in Arcata, northern California, is fresh out of bicycles. The university town has too many savvy students wanting to save money on gas that's often over \$3.00 a gallon. Library Bikes is eight years old and has gotten countless cars off the road. The nonprofit group is trying to have the whole state subsidize library bikes in every community via legislation. Other communities and regions: take heed and set up your local library bikes -- it's not hard to do, and plenty of bikes are donated requiring only minor repair.

More good news in redwood country: the Pepper Spray 8 are entitled to legal fees. The federal judge in this torture-the-protesters case okayed in mid August plaintiffs' attorney fees (to be determined and ruled upon). She also denied the police agencies/defendants' motions to dismiss and to get a new trial. Now, the constitutional ratification of the principle of not torturing protesters has been bolstered by making the deforestation-loving perpetrators pay 'til it hurts.

I think it's bad news that down here in Berkeley -- former redwood country -- the redwoods are stressed. I have never seen so many redwoods with dead leaves/needles. An orange cast to the trees may be beyond Berkeley, but this effect is not so true in remaining redwood forests where there is still moisture and the trees are protecting each other in large groves from wind and sun. This is the time of year that the older growth dies and is blown down by the first autumn wind, so my worrying is lessened.

Captain Moore and Crew Return from the North Central Pacific Gyre

In the early hours of Monday, August 15, 2005 Captain Charles Moore piloted the Algalita Marine Research Foundation's (AMRF) research catamaran back into its Long Beach Port. It was the 4th voyage of the Algalita to the middle of the Pacific to search for plastic debris and the affected sea life. Here's a very brief glimpse at AMRF's findings which include samples collected and taken to their laboratory:

From crew eyewitness reports it appears that plastic -- ranging in size from large fishing floats and nets to tiny, colorful fragments of plastic resembling confetti in the water -- was visible everywhere. According to Austin Brown, who also crewed on the 2002 voyage, "I would have to say the plastic plague is getting worse... It seemed that the plastic fragments were denser everywhere."

Large pieces of plastic debris were tagged for satellite tracking in the northern Pacific, thanks to our intrepid sailors and their captain Charles. Another major anti-plastics voyage is set for 2007. One wonders if it will ever be "Water World" out there, like the film of that name, at the rate we are going in our fouling our planetary nest.

Culture Change is combatting plastics, such as working to get plastic bags have a fee placed on them at supermarket checkout stands. Maharashtra State in India is banning the "dam" bags so they won't clog up the sewers anymore.

Bombay's slum dwellers need permanent relief from added, unnecessary misery. (Story courtesy Daily Grist online)

Of course the petroleum-bag makers objected to the ban and tried to pass the buck. Interestingly, passing the buck can be informative for society, such as when the need for restoration of the mangrove forests to lessen flooding is revealed. Or, angry loggers defend their practice of clearcutting to Earth First! protesters: "It's the cars causing the bigger problem!"

In conclusion:

We see good news on the subject of the global fight against plastics. But we must say loudly, Hey USA, Canada, and other countries: Wake Up! Ban the plastic culprits and can the car! Smell not just the coffee but also the roses:

Upon peak oil's passing and petrocollapse, people can bicycle and walk in safety, without threat of motor vehicle death-collisions and without the deadly exhaust -- both combining to kill about 100,000 people in the U.S.A. alone each year. Die-hard drivers want to think they have made the only possible choice but to pollute and potentially kill. We will all be better off than living with "no end" of petroleum. Oil and petrochemical gadgets are killing the Earth and our bodies.

Nowadays, despite the mounting evidence of peak oil and the growing stress we suffer under out-of-balance economics and ecology, only a small minority of people consciously curtail energy use and resources that end up in the land fills.

However, we can picture some fossil energy designated for intelligent use for creating renewable-energy systems wherever sensible, if they would truly be sustainable or crucial to a transition to sustainability. "Intelligent Design," anyone?

Peace, Jan

Correction:

In our release on the New York Petrocollapse conference, we accidentally confused people: We said "Dishonest reporting by OPEC countries and even major oil companies have contributed to the illusion that there is sufficient time before we 'run out of oil' to transition to a solution, whether it be coal, nuclear, cold fusion, hydrogen, other renewables or some combination of the above. "

We did not mean to say those technologies are valid solutions, necessarily. The way I read this sentence, "written by a committee," they were covered by the term illusion. Quotes around "solution" does the trick. Thanks to Plan B Project's Jason Meggs for catching this oversight. As to "even major oil companies," that was partly tongue in cheek. So the new paragraph reads on www.petrocollapse.org

Dishonest reporting by OPEC countries and major oil companies have contributed to the illusion that there is sufficient time before we 'run out of oil' to transition to a "solution," whether it be coal, nuclear, cold fusion, hydrogen, other renewables or some combination of the above.

PS: Please register now if you wish to attend the Petrocollapse Conference in New York City. The earlier that any money is raised via ticket sales to special supporters (who get extra networking opportunities and special materials gratis), the better the conference will be. Visit <http://www.petrocollapse.org> - JL - JL - JL

- JL Announcement: the Culture Change website has a forum/bulletin board. Log in at Home page or Forum page and join the discussion.

Links and further reading:

Interview on San Francisco rock station: "Jan Lundberg talks about peak oil & gas prices" broadcast Aug. 21 on Live 105 with Harry O. Listen or read at <http://www.globalpublicmedia.com/interviews/470>

Library Bikes in Arcata: <http://www.culturechange.org/library-bikes.html>

J.H. Crawford's work: <http://www.carfree.com>

Michael Ruppert in From the Wilderness Publications: <http://www.fromthewilderness.com/>

Plastics articles: <http://www.deliciouslivingmag.com/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=article&issueID=68&articleID=1527>

Culture Change report: War on Plastic:

<http://culturechange.org/e-letter-plastics.html>

Captain Charles Moore and Algalita: <http://www.algalita.org>

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