



A Thought for Today: "Losing Faith in Peak Oil's Transformative Power"

Posted by [Prof. Goose](#) on September 17, 2006 - 4:16pm

Topic: [Sociology/Psychology](#)

Tags: [oil](#), [oil prices](#), [peak oil](#) [[list all tags](#)]

A [post at peakoil.com](#) by [moderator Ibon](#) that I thought TOD readers would like to discuss:

The power of peak oil as an external force, a geologically driven catalyst, to act as a wedge to force sustainability and conservation on a world hell bent on exponential growth and energy consumption is what caught my imagination and gave me a sense of hope several years ago when I first investigated this issue. Seeing how the ideologically driven environmental movement of the 70's and 80's fell to the wayside to be replaced by conspicuous consumption I even had illusions that peak oil was the beginning of what could break the status quo and eventually lead to a radical transformation of our cultural values and reign in an era of ecological sustainability imposed by the geologic reality of resource depletion.

(More under the fold.)

I have to confess that after years of at times obsessed immersion into this subject that lead me down investigative pathways of economics, geopolitics, religion, human group psychology etc. I have lost much of this initial hope that the transformative powers of peak oil, global warming or other environmental stresses are very likely to act on or threaten the status quo for a long time to come.

I have naively hoped that if the resource, energy, that drives the global culture of consumption starts depleting, then stresses will build up in the status quo to force political or economic change toward sustainability. I was looking for ruptures or the threat of collapse in our global infrastructure to force awareness and change. There have been so many threads on this website discussing the US dollar, our debt based economic system, the housing market, Katrina type climate events, political and religious conflicts in oil rich nations, population dynamics, geopolitical resource wars amongst world powers etc. We look for evidence in these topics that the status quo is under enough threat to allow policy makers and world leaders to question the underlying systemic causes in the hopes that there emerges the beginnings of intelligent ecological and sustainable responses.

There is the assumption that we have been going along mindless of the consequences of resource depletion and that we are collectively heading toward the cliff.

What I have underestimated is the resiliency and the level of cooperation that goes on at the highest levels of our global political and economic systems to maintain the status quo.

Central Banks and governments are far more aware of threats to their survival caused by peak oil and resource depletion than I thought they were. And they cooperate far more with each other than I assumed. Religious, economic and political institutions all have an aversion to social and economic chaos that could threaten revolution as this would be the greatest threat to their institutional survival. Even though on the surface it may seem that there is resource competition that could lead toward chaos, if we take a closer look at some examples we can see that the elite are far more cooperative than presumed. I don't mean this in the sense of a conspiracy theory but rather the rational response that these institutions take for their survival. China and the USA would both lose if they started an all out resource war. Central banks in leading economic powers cooperate more than presumed in directing the US dollars evolution away from being the only global currency. Does anyone really think that in 2007 when adjustable mortgages (ARMS) increase their rates that this will lead to a major housing collapse? Won't banks and government come up with more creative financial instruments as solutions to prevent collapse. You can take any example you want.

Instead of chaos and transformation I see the global elite preserving the status quo at all costs to prevent revolution. The real geological consequences of peak oil and related resource depletion and environmental stresses will only result in an increase of a two tiered class culture where the elites and wealthy will preserve their status and wealth and a growing underclass will be socialized to accept their decline and serve the interest of the elites. This will all occur in a backdrop of increasing environmental degradation as consumption levels will stay at the maximum level the available resources will allow.

I don't see revolution anywhere near the horizon. I would welcome any arguments to counter this rather dreary and pessimistic assessment.



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