



DrumBeat: October 12, 2008

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Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

[Michael Pollan: Farmer in Chief](#)

After cars, the food system uses more fossil fuel than any other sector of the economy — 19 percent. And while the experts disagree about the exact amount, the way we feed ourselves contributes more greenhouse gases to the atmosphere than anything else we do — as much as 37 percent, according to one study. Whenever farmers clear land for crops and till the soil, large quantities of carbon are released into the air. But the 20th-century industrialization of agriculture has increased the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by the food system by an order of magnitude; chemical fertilizers (made from natural gas), pesticides (made from petroleum), farm machinery, modern food processing and packaging and transportation have together transformed a system that in 1940 produced 2.3 calories of food energy for every calorie of fossil-fuel energy it used into one that now takes 10 calories of fossil-fuel energy to produce a single calorie of modern supermarket food. Put another way, when we eat from the industrial-food system, we are eating oil and spewing greenhouse gases. This state of affairs appears all the more absurd when you recall that every calorie we eat is ultimately the product of photosynthesis — a process based on making food energy from sunshine. There is hope and possibility in that simple fact.

[From the Subprime Crisis to the Financial Meltdown, Peak Oil the Hidden Responsible](#)

The current events that nobody saw coming, were already announced in as early as 2006 by Dr. Colin Campbell, a geologist, former Vice-President of Fina Oil Company and founder of the nowadays respected ASPO (Association for the Study of Peak Oil). On a video interview available on YouTube, he declared:

"Expansion becomes impossible without abundant cheap energy. So I think that the debt of the world is going bad. That speaks of a financial crisis, unseen, probably equalling the Great Depression of 1930; it's probable we face the Second Great Depression. It would be a chain reaction, one bank would fail, and another one would fail, industries will close..."

[Why hold a Con Con?: Because a Constitutional Convention could allow Hawaii to move from top-down rule to citizen-involved governance](#)

Most frightening, however, is the inability of the present arrangement of power to prepare islanders for the coming major crises caused by soaring oil prices (Peak Oil), and, by the next decade, the effects of global climate change on all facets of our lives.

[Australia: Ambitious cycling target for Coast](#)

The Suncoast Cycling Alliance wants at least 15% of all trips made across the Sunshine Coast to be by bicycle within the next three years.

The aggressive target is more than double the 2011 target of 8% – an additional 805,000 bike trips per day – set by the state government for the south-east Queensland region.

[Out Of Africa](#)

The U.S. military was content for years to keep half an eye on Africa's security, sharing oversight of the continent with Europe, but in recent years U.S. strategic interest in Africa has grown. Not only does Al Qaeda have a presence on the continent, but the value of Africa's oil has soared and China has grown more aggressive in courting African nations. That was the reasoning behind the creation of AFRICOM, the first American strategic military command with sole responsibility for the 53 nations on the African continent, which officially started operations last week.

Despite Africa's new strategic value, U.S. officials have scaled back AFRICOM's mission significantly. When the idea was first floated early in 2007, proponents of AFRICOM had hoped to combine a wide range of military and civilian programs under one roof, training and equipping cooperative African security forces but also promoting development and aid projects across the continent. U.S. officials had also hoped to find an African country willing to permanently host a much larger U.S. military contingent. Unable to find a country willing to host American forces, the Pentagon has had to keep AFRICOM's 1,300 soldiers in Stuttgart, Germany. And it has scrapped, at least for now, plans to make AFRICOM anything other than an umbrella organization for military and security training. AFRICOM will focus exclusively on training the military operations of African nations and leave development work to civilian agencies.

[Saudi Arabia, UAE Move to Protect Financial Systems](#)

DUBAI--The United Arab Emirates said it would guarantee domestic bank deposits and, along with Saudi Arabia, promised fresh financial support Sunday to domestic banks.

Officials from both nations have said their banking systems are adequately capitalized and relatively unexposed to plummeting foreign assets that have dragged down firms in the U.S. and Europe. But they and other Persian Gulf leaders have struggled to shore up investor confidence amid the ricocheting global financial crisis.

Since reopening after a long religious holiday earlier this month, Gulf bourses have fallen sharply, wiping away billions of dollars of wealth from the region's mostly retail investors.

[Venezuela's oil output slumps under Hugo Chavez](#)

Venezuela's daily oil production has fallen by a quarter since President Hugo Chavez won power, depriving his "Bolivarian Revolution" of much of the benefit of the global boom in oil prices.

[Iraq to begin first oil bid round in London](#)

BAGHDAD (AP) -- Iraq's oil minister will meet Monday in London with representatives of international oil companies for the first round of bidding for new contracts in the country since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, the minister's spokesman said.

Last April, Iraq chose 35 oil companies out of the 120 that applied to participate in the bidding round to develop six major oil fields and two gas fields.

[Oil protest](#)

ABOUT 80 protesters carrying a 12ft-high puppet of American vice-president Dick Cheney marched through central London yesterday to protest against plans to "sell off" Iraq's oil industry.

[2 Endorsements of Nuclear Power, but Sharp Differences on Details](#)

Contrary to what Democrats may think, there is more to John McCain's energy program than "drill, baby, drill." And contrary to what Mr. McCain has been saying on the campaign trail, where he proposes the construction of 45 nuclear plants by 2030, Barack Obama does not "oppose the use of nuclear power."

Both men endorse nuclear energy, although to differing degrees, as part of their strategy to wean the United States from its dependence on foreign oil.

[Biofuels and a dwindling water supply](#)

AT LAST, many of the world's political leaders have begun to realize that diverting land and food crops to produce biofuels leads to higher food prices. But an equally important consequence of this policy folly is being largely ignored in the public and political debate:

Producing biofuels will further deplete the world's already overtaxed water supply.

[Indian Tribes See Profit in Harnessing the Wind for Power](#)

ROSEBUD, S.D. — The wind blows incessantly here in the high plains; screen doors do not last. Wind is to South Dakota what forests are to Maine or beaches are to Florida: a natural bounty and a valuable inheritance.

Native American tribes like the Rosebud Sioux now seek to claim that inheritance. If they succeed in building turbine farms to harness some of the country's strongest and most reliable winds, tribal officials like Ken Haukaas believe, they could create a new economic underpinning for the 29,000 tribal members whose per capita annual income is about \$7,700, less than a third the national average.

[Maritime Organization Seeks to Cut Air Pollution From Oceangoing Ships](#)

The International Maritime Organization on Thursday adopted stringent new controls on airborne pollution from the world's 300,000 oceangoing vessels.

Emissions from ships steaming into ports from Rotterdam to Shanghai to Long Beach, are blamed for about 60,000 premature deaths around the world annually.

[Bicycle Commuter Tax Break Is a Bittersweet Victory for Measure's Sponsor](#)

PORTLAND, Ore. — People who pedal to work each day have long sought a kind of commuter equality: a federal tax break for biking similar to those given for parking or riding public transit. Last week, after years of rejection, the credit suddenly became law.

Scheduled to take effect in January, the credit was among a range of energy and tax provisions quickly added to the \$700 billion financial rescue.

Yet here in the district of the congressman who first pushed for the bicycle bill, Representative Earl Blumenauer, a Democrat who wears a bicycle lapel pin and founded the Congressional Bike Caucus, no party is being planned.

[Thomas Friedman: Hope for a hot, flat and crowded world](#)

In his new, bestselling book, *Hot, Flat and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution — and How It Can Renew America*, New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman describes a world in trouble. With climate change, globalization, and overpopulation, he argues, the central challenge to humanity has now become "to manage what is already unavoidable and avoid what will truly be unmanageable."

In an exclusive interview for Yale Environment 360, Friedman spoke with New Yorker staff writer Elizabeth Kolbert about the need for an energy technology revolution — a revolution he believes should be led by the United States. The three-time Pulitzer Prize winner told Kolbert that energy technology must be the next great global industry and that "the country that leads that industry is going to have the most national security, economic security, innovative companies and global respect."

[Experts: Low gasoline stocks won't lead to shortages; demand also has fallen](#)

The nation's gasoline inventory is lower than usual, but experts say the change has come alongside a drop in demand as gas prices have risen over time, so shortages should not result.

While shortages have struck the Southeast, experts attribute that not to low inventories but to hurricane-related disruptions of supplies, something they say would likely not affect the Northeast.

"The reason for this is that the region is supplied by mostly seaborne imports of gasoline brought in through such ports as Portsmouth, Portland, Providence, Boston, etc.," John Duff, survey manager for the federal Energy Information Administration's Weekly Petroleum Status Report, wrote in an email.

[Higher taxes and bans on drilling hurt everyone](#)

Politicians are fighting to levy additional tax burdens on U.S. oil and gas companies. There are, however, fundamental problems with specifically raising taxes for energy companies. To various degrees, we all depend on oil and natural gas, whether it's to heat our homes, to run our businesses, or to transport us and the goods we use every day. In the end, the real target of new taxes is consumers, who will pay every dime of taxes that government imposes on producers in the form of higher prices.

[Call for UAE to fund alternative energy](#)

The 15th edition of OGS 2008 will be held in Dubai from October 28 to 30, amid growing calls by business leaders for substantial investments towards alternative and renewable energy projects.

The Show seeks to embrace a spectrum of energy sources and strengthen its contribution to emerging sustainable development initiatives in the UAE and across the Middle East.

[Nepal: Cooking gas from waste](#)

Cooking gas plants that generate gas from bio-degradable household waste would be useful in addressing the current fuel crisis and waste disposal problem in the capital. But the technology has largely been ignored.

[A New Flexibility With Thin Solar Cells](#)

John A. Rogers of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and colleagues have come up with a novel method for creating extremely thin solar cells that can be combined in flexible, even partially transparent, arrays. Described in Nature Materials, it could be called the rubber-stamp approach.

[End of the world as we know it](#)

It is not as bad as you might imagine - it's worse, and before you bury your heads in the sands of collective denial, please consider how it is coming about. The truth will set you free, but first it will probably make you ill.

We have had it too easy with cheap energy for a century and the cheap part is going to disappear. Quickly. Energy is the ubiquitous part of everything we consume, and liquid fuel is getting scarce.

The easy part is to understand how we got to where we are. The difficult part is predicting how we can possibly manage to make our way out of this one. It will draw on our deepest resolve and wisdom, and probably require a "Copernican" shift in our thinking.

[Is Cheaper Oil A Good Thing?](#)

How far can it fall? People have been anxiously wondering as they watch the plunging stock market. But increasingly the same question is being asked about another crucial figure: the price of oil. It has plummeted nearly 40% in just three months, from about \$147 a barrel in July to below \$83 on Friday, with no obvious bottom in sight. If that sounds good, you are probably a driver who winces these days at filling your gas tank. But the downward spiral could mean trouble for oil-rich countries and for the environment.

Oil analysts admit that most of them failed to predict how fast oil prices would drop. Just a few months ago, some were saying oil might reach \$200 a barrel by year's end. "The analysts have been quite surprised by the pace and volatility of the decline," says David Fyfe, senior oil analyst for the International Energy Agency in Paris, which as a rule does not predict oil prices. "The volatility has been quite marked."

[OPEC wants tighter controls over speculative oil trades](#)

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The OPEC cartel called Saturday for tougher regulations to reduce the impact of speculative investment in the oil market which it blames for the huge volatility in crude prices.

..."The world oil market has been increasingly affected by financial market shocks from outside the physical oil market," OPEC spokesman Alipour-Jeddi told the International Monetary Fund meeting in Washington.

"The recent wild (price) swings demonstrate the need for concerted action to reduce the impact of financial markets which are damaging for the oil industry, as well as the global economy as a whole," he said.

"The existing regulatory framework has proved insufficient to properly contain the negative impact of speculative activity ... which highlights the need to consider further measures."

[Oil's Outlook Darkens](#)

Although oil prices have tumbled by almost half since approaching \$150 a barrel in July, it looks like black gold still has further to fall.

[Iran to study all factors before proposing oil cut](#)

DUBAI (Reuters) - Iran says the recent steep slide in oil prices and worsening global financial crisis will be studied carefully before it makes a proposal on output reductions for OPEC, the Islamic Republic's OPEC governor said on Sunday.

"It is not fair to say so early. That is why we should consider all factors carefully and look at the supply-demand balance," Muhammad Ali Khatibi told Reuters.

[Divisions could 'tear Opec apart'](#)

Divisions within Opec are being aired ahead of an emergency meeting the organisation has called for next month, signalling tense discussions to come as oil exporting nations struggle to balance their individual revenue needs with the world economy's need for more stable oil prices.

The divisions could "tear the organisation apart," a London oil analyst said.

[Credit's Crunch & Car Sales](#)

Was Peak Oil the reason for the unbelievable price of oil, or was it serious disruptions in the supply and demand equation? Nah. As I pointed out, it was just the massive amount of money thrown into oil by speculators in dark, unregulated futures markets. The media has since accepted my position; as the oil bubble burst, and as you may have noticed, they're now reporting that the speculators they refused to acknowledge just months ago are leaving the oil futures market en masse. And with the speculators' departure, the price of oil is collapsing.

[Keeping quality medical care](#)

IN SPITE of an alarming array of distracting global problems, including a financial meltdown, climate change, and peak oil, it is critically important not to ignore the immediate challenge we face locally to keep Marin General Hospital open. It is the only hospital in the county providing acute trauma, labor and delivery, and emergency psychiatric services.

[Ending Industrial Culture, Building Cultures of Resistance](#)

On October 1 Lierre Keith and Aric McBay spoke with Healing the Earth radio in Guelph, Ontario. Lierre Keith and Aric are both authors, small farmers, and activists, and over the last couple years have been organizing weekend-long conferences entitled Deep Green Resistance. They speak of a systemic analysis of what we're facing, including the environmental and social costs of industrial culture, tying together the problems of climate change, peak oil, the power of the right-wing/fascist elements, economic collapse, and our responses to this.

They talk about the inherent costs of the industrial system that render any kind of reform or energy alternatives to be simply more of the same, since these false solutions don't take into account the cost of the infrastructure or the embodied energy required to make 'green' consumer items, from smart cars to biofuel and low-energy light bulbs. From this critique of individualist and lifestyle-based solutions, they offer the option of collective, co-ordinated, resistance to the actual power structures.

Most importantly, they ask the crucial questions that not too many are asking: given the crises we face, what, really, are we going to do about it? Thinking with seriousness, long-term strategy, and courage, what can we as caring people do to save this planet? What are some essential elements of a culture of resistance that offers any hope of a securing a peaceful and sustainable future?

[The IoS Green List: Britain's top 100 environmentalists](#)

A host of famous figures – including Prince Philip, David Bellamy, Professor James Lovelock and Richard Branson – who might have expected to be high on the list, were judged not to make the grade at all. The judges set out to identify who is really making a difference in Britain, either directly or by altering public perceptions, rather than those

who make most noise. Unlike in some other lists, journalists were excluded from consideration.

[Financial crisis clouds EU's climate change plans](#)

BRUSSELS (AFP) - The financial crisis and slumping economic activity are threatening Europe's ambitious plans to slash greenhouse gas emissions, with governments eager to avoid saddling companies with additional burdens.

"The Germans are giving up and the Italians are getting ready to follow," said one European negotiator on condition of anonymity.



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