



## DrumBeat: July 15, 2009

Posted by [Leanan](#) on July 15, 2009 - 10:02am

Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

### [A Costly and Unnecessary New Electricity Grid](#)

Energy experts generally agree that the electrical grid in the United States needs to be upgraded if the country is to increase its use of renewable-energy sources like wind power and significantly reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. But plans to string new high-voltage lines to bring wind power from the midsection of the country to the coasts, where most of the demand is, could be expensive and unnecessary, and a distraction from more urgent needs, some experts say.

A new national grid, which has been likened to the Interstate Highway System constructed in the 1950s, has been proposed by groups such as the Center for American Progress, a Washington-based think tank, and AEP, a large utility; elements of the plans have been included in recent federal legislation. According to this vision, new high-voltage transmission lines costing billions of dollars would be built across the country, augmenting the existing patchwork of transmission lines much as the Interstate Highway System laid down high-speed roadways over an existing network of highways. But such a plan is "only a dream," says Paul Joskow, president of the Sloan Foundation and a professor of economics at MIT. "It's expensive. It's politically contentious. In the end, I think you're better off spending the money on other things."

### [Robert Rodriguez's Energy Portfolio](#)

In the case of supply, within the next five years, three countries may reach a peak in oil production: Mexico, China and Russia. Several analysts estimated that Mexican oil production would likely peak around 3.4 million barrels per day and that this event would occur in 2004. Mexico's largest oilfield, Cantarell, appears to have peaked and if this is the case, so has Mexican oil production, since six of every ten barrels produced by Mexico comes from this one field. Earlier this year, a 3% decline rate was forecast for Cantarell's production. This has proved incorrect since it is now estimated that the decline rate is 8%. Obviously, this is likely to be of some concern to Mexico. Should this forecast of peak oil production for these three countries be correct, an additional 35% of non-OPEC oil production will have peaked, and together with the 41% from eleven major countries and others that have experienced a peak in production rates, 76% of non-OPEC oil production might have peaked by 2012. If this occurs, it will give the middle-eastern countries even more clout in the setting of oil prices. This is not a pleasant thought.

### [From here to there: The evolution of healthcare](#)

Many respected mainstream researchers and even senior members of the financial community agree that the end of cheap, readily available oil is at hand, probably before the end of the next decade. Health care, as it exists now, cannot function without cheap oil. As one submission to an Australian senate committee states: "Rather than looking forward breathlessly to ... how stem cells will be curing all sorts of ailments ... we should really be asking ... How will we be able maintain ... childhood immunization in 2030 ..."

A bit apocalyptic, but even the rosiest of forecasters do not have a ready rebuttal.

### [Sheriff's deputies investigate well vandalism](#)

FLORA VISTA, N.M. — The San Juan County Sheriff's Office is investigating several cases of vandalism at wells near Flora Vista owned by Conoco-Phillips.

Undersheriff Mark McCloskey said the vandalism happened last weekend and was reported to authorities on Monday. The vandals smashed electrical panels and gauges, damaged wiring, drained fuel tanks and did other damage.

### [Lufkin profits take a dive](#)

Oilfield equipment manufacturer Lufkin Industries posted a 79% slump in second-quarter profit as it was hurt by a drop in bookings at its oilfield and power transmission units.

Lufkin warned that uncertain energy markets and economy posed a short to mid-term risk to its operations, but remained optimistic about an improvement in the second half of this year.

### [US DOE takes step forward on FutureGen coal project](#)

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) took another step forward on the coal-fueled 275-megawatt FutureGen carbon capture and sequestration power project in Illinois, the DOE said in a release late Tuesday.

Specifically, the DOE said it issued a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Record of Decision.

"This step forward demonstrates the (Obama) Administration's commitment to developing clean energy technologies, creating jobs and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases," Energy Secretary Steven Chu said in the release.

### [Monbiot: Energy bill rises to tackle climate change are tiny](#)

Compared with wildly fluctuating wholesale gas and electricity prices, the cost of cutting emissions will scarcely be detectable on future energy bills.

### [Governments trying to reel in 'ocean sprawl'](#)

(CNN) -- We all know what happens when urban sprawl gets out of control: Commutes back up, smog thickens, and concrete suburbs gobble up green spaces.

But what about "ocean sprawl"?

Until recently, no one gave that idea much thought. But the oceans, like the land, have gotten crowded, and now scientists and policy makers are looking for ways to plan ocean development -- with the aim of preventing our public-owned seas from turning into sprawling, watery versions of Houston, Texas, or Atlanta, Georgia.

### [Toxins May Have Doomed Ancient Forests](#)

The same noxious compounds released from burning coal and crude oil may have devastated forests and the early dinosaurs that lived in them 200 million years ago.

### [Bill McKibben - Environment: race against time](#)

At last month's G8 summit, western leaders including Barack Obama and Gordon Brown pledged to forge a deal that would hold the increase in global temperatures to 2 degrees Celsius and the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide to 450 parts per million.

Two years ago that would have been an unthinkable progressive stance. Then, the American president wanted to do essentially nothing at all about global warming. And because two years ago it seemed like those numbers might be good enough to tackle the problem.

But two years ago, almost to the week, scientists noticed that the Arctic was losing ice at an almost unbelievable pace, outstripping the climate models by decades. Clearly we'd passed a threshold, and global warming had gone from future threat to present crisis. It wasn't just Arctic ice; at about the same time methane levels in the atmosphere began to spike, apparently as a result of thawing permafrost. Surveys of high altitude glaciers showed they were uniformly melting, and much faster than expected. Oceanographers reported -- incredulously -- that we'd managed to make the oceans 30% more acidic.

### [Pemex aims for 48 percent Cantarell oil recovery rate](#)

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's state oil company Pemex plans to reach a recovery rate of 48 percent at its Cantarell field in the northeast marine basin, CEO Jesús Reyes Heróles said in a speech, according to BNAmericas.

Comparable fields in other parts of the world have an average 36 percent recovery rate, Reyes Heróles said, according to a transcript.

### [Nigeria's Main Rebel Group Threatens to Call off Ceasefire](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Nigeria's main rebel group threatened to call off a 60-day cease-fire announced overnight following reports that the military is planning to raid one of its camps in the oil-rich Delta region.

The cease-fire will be suspended "with immediate effect" should reports of an attack prove true, Jomo Gbomo, a spokesman for the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, said in an e-mailed statement today.

### [PetroChina First-Half Refining Profit Rises to Record](#)

(Bloomberg) -- PetroChina Co., the world's largest company by market value, increased its refining profit to a record in the first half after the government's revised fuel pricing system allowed refiners to pass on rising costs.

PetroChina's refining subsidiary achieved a "remarkable performance" in the first half even as processing volumes and operating rates were cut by the financial crisis, parent China National Petroleum Corp. said in a statement today. The refining profit was PetroChina's highest since its Hong Kong listing in 2000, it said, without giving any figures.

### [Zimbabwe State Oil Company Back in Charge & Fuel Shortages Return](#)

Fuel shortages have become widespread again in Zimbabwe amid official moves to pull back on issuance of import licenses to new operators, leaving the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe with an effective monopoly again in the sector, sources said.

VOA was unable to reach Energy Minister Elias Mudzuri of the Movement for Democratic Change formation or Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai for comment.

### [The Philippines: Lawmaker calls for boycott of 'Big 3' oil firms](#)

Sen. Francis Pangilinan called on Wednesday for a boycott of Shell, Caltex and Petron unless they follow the lead of Unioil and reduce the prices of their oil products.

He said that Unioil's decision to cut the price of their gasoline and diesel by as much as P4.75 a liter showed that there was still room for the Big 3 of the local oil industry to reduce their prices also.

"If Unioil can reduce its prices, then the Big 3 could afford to reduce theirs also because they have a deeper pocket," he said.

### [Medvedev goes to Germany to defend key projects](#)

MOSCOW (Reuters) - President Dmitry Medvedev will defend a Russia-backed deal to buy German car maker Opel and seek more support for the Nord Stream gas pipeline project when he visits Munich on Thursday, a top Kremlin aide said.

Sergei Prikhodko, the Kremlin's chief foreign policy aide, told reporters that top-level intergovernment consultations in southern Germany would be dominated by efforts to keep afloat bilateral trade and economic ties hit by the global crisis.

### [Cameroon, Total Sign Oil Exploration Deal for Southwest Region](#)

Total-E&P Cameroon and the government-run National Hydrocarbons Corp., or SNH, signed a deal Tuesday permitting oil exploration in the West African nation's southwestern locality of Rio del Ray, SNH said.

The agreement authorizes Total-E&P to explore for oil and gas within the 83 square kilometer Longahe block "for two years, renewable once, for an estimated cost of \$10 million."

### [Australian oil warning](#)

Professor Laurie Sparke, a leading Australian automotive engineering expert, has warned of an energy crunch that could make the 1970s oil crises seem small-time. He says that in coming years Australia may not be able to buy oil, at any price.

The solution he says is gas, and he's making the case that all Australians should consider converting their petrol driven cars to LPG.

### [Natural gas could brighten America's energy future](#)

It's plausible to argue that oil, the world's most important commodity, will contribute to another U.S. recession, as it did in 1973-74, 1979-80, and 2008-09. So you have to ask if there is another fossil-based energy source that can weaken, if not break, oil's grip on the U.S. economy? Natural gas has a chance, if the right factors line-up.

### [Our exploding population is the gravest threat Britain faces today](#)

For most of my professional life, I have derided the population alarmists. Those who spent the past few decades warning that there were far too many people in Britain and the wider world had always struck me as shrill, their arguments flawed at best and downright racist at worst.

Back in the Seventies, it was received wisdom that, by the early 21st century, the West would be groaning under the weight of its billions, with famine stalking the land and supermarket shelves empty.

This didn't happen. Instead we face an obesity epidemic, and, in the rich world, ageing populations which - we are told - have to be shored up by mass immigration.

So why have I changed my mind? Why do I now agree that excessive human population is not one of Britain's biggest problems but, arguably, *the* greatest single threat to health, wealth and well-being we see in the world today?

### [Welcome to the Middle East, 2030](#)

**2026:** Crude oil production in the Middle East falls below 20m barrels a day for the first time this century as climate change policies across the world cut fossil fuel demand and reserves in smaller producers run out. The total labour force, though, in MEC countries has doubled since the turn of the century to 200 million, 60 million of whom are unemployed – 7.5m of those in Saudi Arabia alone. Former US President Barack Obama accepts an honorary doctorate in law from the University of Tehran. A woman driving a car is arrested in Riyadh.

### [Carter's Speech Therapy](#)

IN the summer of 1979, as millions of Americans idled in creeping gas lines, President Jimmy Carter was preoccupied with matters abroad: first he was in Vienna completing SALT II with Leonid Brezhnev, next pleading for it before Congress, then away in Japan and Korea, hoping to rest in Hawaii afterward.

Instead, a White House reeling from approval numbers lower than Nixon's urged Mr. Carter to get back home fast and do something. In other words, make a speech that would silence the mobs and revive his presidency. The networks cleared their schedules for July 5, 1979.

### [L.A.'s Coal Ban Leads to Another Abandoned Power Plant](#)

The Sierra Club enjoyed a victory last week when a Utah-based utility announced it would walk away from plans to build a coal-fired generating unit in the state.

According to the environmental group's tally, 100 coal plants have been foiled or abandoned since 2001, the beginning of an era it dubbed the "Coal Rush."

### ['Water Hog' Label Haunts Dallas](#)

DALLAS -- A reputation as a wasteful "water hog" is complicating Dallas's efforts to siphon water from nearby communities.

Local officials, who say they need to nearly double their water supply in coming decades to keep up with a fast-growing population, want to build new reservoirs and buy water from nearby Oklahoma. But these efforts are entangled in federal lawsuits as Dallas's neighbors see the city's love for emerald-green lawns and lush golf courses as rampant waste.

"It's not that they need the water to survive," said Michael Banks, an East Texas dentist who lives near a river Dallas wants to dam. "What they want is to destroy our wildlife so they'll have enough water for their grass."

[Craig's twist: http://www.economist.com/sciencetechnology/displayStory.cfm?story\\_id=14029874](#)

Dr Venter reckons that even with existing technology, it should be possible to turn out ten times more fuel per hectare than can be garnered from maize. That is not a completely fair comparison, of course, as growing algae is far more capital intensive, and requires the plants to be force-fed with CO<sub>2</sub>. But it can be done on land that is unsuitable for agriculture, as long as a source of CO<sub>2</sub> is available.

In the end, that might be the limiting factor, for not all power stations, oil refineries and so on are suitably located for biomanufacturing of this sort. That said, if the process really can be made to work, CO<sub>2</sub> would go from being a polluting waste product to a valuable raw material, and it might even become worthwhile building systems to capture it and pipelines to ship it around. That really would be ironic.

### [Monbiot: The rich can relax. We just need the poor world to cut emissions. By 125%](#)

Well, at least that clears up the mystery. Over the past year I've been fretting over an

intractable contradiction. The government has promised spectacular cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. It is also pushing through new roads and runways, approving coal-burning power stations, bailing out car manufacturers and ditching regulations for low-carbon homes. How can these policies be reconciled?

### [Arctic glacier to lose Manhattan-sized 'tongue'](#)

The biggest glacier in the Arctic is on the verge of losing a chunk of ice the size of Manhattan. A group of scientists and climate change activists who are closely monitoring the Petermann glacier's ice tongue believe the rapid flow of ice is in part due to warm ocean currents moving up along the coast of Greenland, fuelled by global warming.

### [Michael T. Klare: Will Iraq Be a Global Gas Pump?](#)

Has it all come to this? The wars and invasions, the death and destruction, the exile and torture, the resistance and collapse? In a world of shrinking energy reserves, is Iraq finally fated to become what it was going to be anyway, even before the chaos and catastrophe set in: a giant gas pump for an energy-starved planet? Will it all end not with a bang but with a gusher? The latest oil news out of that country offers at least a hint of Iraq's fate.

For modern Iraq, oil has always been at the heart of everything. Its very existence as a unified state is largely the product of oil.

...Iraq is, of course, one of the world's great hydrocarbon preserves. According to oil giant BP, it harbors proven oil reserves of 115 billion barrels--more than any country except Saudi Arabia (with 264 billion barrels) and Iran (with 138 billion). Many analysts, however, believe that Iraq has been inadequately explored, and that the utilization of modern search technologies will yield additional reserves in the range of 45 to 100 billion barrels. If all its reserves, known and suspected, were developed to their full potential, Iraq could add as much as 6 to 8 million barrels per day to international output, postponing the inevitable arrival of peak oil and a contraction in global energy supplies.

### [Oil industry profits expected to fall sharply](#)

HOUSTON - Big Oil is set for another big flop.

For the second straight quarter, Exxon Mobil, Royal Dutch Shell and most of the world's largest oil companies are poised to report quarterly earnings that pale in comparison to a year ago, when results were buoyed by crude prices that topped out near \$150 a barrel.

## [Oil Rises, Snapping Three Days of Decline, on Stock Market Gain](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Crude oil rose, snapping three days of declines, as share markets advanced and an industry report showed a drop in gasoline stockpiles in the U.S., the world's largest energy consumer.

Oil climbed from an eight-week low after the industry-funded American Petroleum Institute yesterday said gasoline inventories fell 69,000 barrels last week. Asian stocks gained for a second day after U.S. stocks advanced on stronger-than-estimated retail sales, bolstering hopes a recovering economy will increase fuel demand.

## [U.S. CPI seen up in June by most since July 2008](#)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – Higher costs for oil and gasoline likely pushed U.S. consumer prices up in June by the most for any single month since oil prices peaked last summer, according to a poll of economists.

The Consumer Price Index, the most broadly used gauge of U.S. inflation, will likely help further dissipate fears over the potential for deflation, a broad-based pattern of declining prices, and could spur inflation jitters.

## [Venezuela tells oil workers: join socialist groups](#)

CARACAS (Reuters) – Venezuela's oil workers will be suspected of conspiring against President Hugo Chavez's socialist revolution if they do not join socialist workplace groups in the OPEC nation, the oil minister said on Tuesday.

Ramirez, who told oil workers to support Chavez ahead of his 2006 reelection, has long headed the president's drive to bring politics into Venezuela's main industry.

## [Nigerian rebels halt offensive, seek peace talks](#)

ABUJA (Reuters) – Nigeria's most prominent militant group on Wednesday declared a 60-day ceasefire in its offensive against Africa's biggest oil industry to provide a chance for peace talks with the government.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), responsible for attacks that have cut around 300,000 barrels per day of Nigeria's oil output since May, said its decision was also a goodwill gesture for the release of rebel leader Henry Okah on Monday.

"Hopefully, the ceasefire period will create an enabling environment for progressive dialogue," MEND said in a statement.

### [Rosneft, Lukoil Face Profit Squeeze on Higher Export Duties](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Russian oil producers including OAO Rosneft and OAO Lukoil are likely to have their profit margins squeezed as the country prepares to raise export duties for the fourth straight month even as prices fall.

The export duty for crude may be increased to \$222 a metric ton, or \$30.29 a barrel, on Aug. 1 from \$212.60 a ton in July, Alexander Sakovich, deputy head of the Finance Ministry's Customs Payments Department, said by phone today. The figures aren't final and have to be approved by the government.

### [Total Says European Refining Margins Slump on Demand](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Total SA said refining margins in Europe slumped 69 percent in the second quarter compared with a year earlier, amid weak demand for gasoline and diesel.

Profits from turning a barrel of crude oil into fuels plummeted to \$12.40 a metric ton, or \$1.69 a barrel, from \$40.20 a ton last year, Europe's biggest refiner said on its Web site today. That's also down from \$34.70 a ton in the first quarter, according to the Paris-based company.

### [Morgan Stanley Wins Bid to Supply LNG to Argentina, Clarin Says](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Morgan Stanley won a bid to supply Argentina with three liquefied natural gas shipments, beating a more costly offer from Repsol YPF SA, newspaper Clarin reported, without saying where it obtained the information.

### [UK targets stemming gas imports](#)

The British government wants to ensure that gas imports do not rise between 2010 and 2020, it said today.

UK gas imports are widely expected to rise over the next few years as Britain's own gas output declines but Energy and Climate Change Secretary Ed Miliband told parliament today that imports should not climb beyond 2010, wrote Reuters.

### [Origin, Conoco May Delay Australia LNG Venture, Merrill Says](#)

(Bloomberg) -- ConocoPhillips and Origin Energy Ltd. may have to delay their A\$35 billion (\$28 billion) liquefied natural gas project because the venture hasn't signed up

fuel buyers, Bank of America Corp.'s Merrill Lynch & Co. unit said.

"With global forecast demand continuing to soften, Origin will struggle to get a contract for its January 2014 target," the Merrill Lynch analysts wrote in a note dated yesterday. The project remains "on track" for that date, said Lina Melero, a Sydney-based spokeswoman for Origin.

### [TIMELINE - Key dates in Ambani brothers' feud](#)

MUMBAI (Reuters) – A dispute between the billionaire Ambani brothers over the supply and pricing of natural gas comes as a test of India's governance standards and could discourage investment in India's energy sector as the country scrambles to shore up its energy security.

Following is a timeline of key dates in the Ambani rift.

### [Tullow to Make Ghana Top 50 Oil Producer With Jubilee](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Tullow Oil Plc said Ghana will become one of the world's top 50 oil producers after the government approved a plan to pump crude from the Jubilee field in the second half of 2010.

The deposit, to be developed with a floating production, storage and offloading vessel, or FPSO, will reach a plateau rate of 120,000 barrels of oil a day, the London-based company said today in a statement. Ghana also approved an agreement between the project partners to rearrange their holdings.

### [Yanbu National Starts Output at Petrochemical Complex](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Yanbu National Petrochemical Co., a unit of Saudi Basic Industries Corp., started production from its 4 million ton-a-year complex in Yanbu Industrial City as the world's largest oil supplier expands its chemical output.

The plant has the capacity to produce 1.3 million tons of ethylene and 800,000 tons of polyethylene, the company said today in a statement on the Saudi bourse Web site. Ethylene is a basic chemical used in glues and plastics, such as car dashboards. Propylene and polypropylene will also be produced at the complex.

### [Entergy pushes to get spinoff of reactors done](#)

NEW ORLEANS – Entergy Corp. has filed a proposal with utility regulators in New York

state in a push to get approval of its long-running plan to spin off some of its nuclear power plants into a separate company.

Under a plan announced in late 2007, Entergy would spin off six nuclear reactors involved in the wholesale power business into a separate publicly traded company called Enexus Energy Corp.

### [U.K. to Invest \\$330 Million in Green Technology Industries](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Business Secretary Peter Mandelson said the U.K. government will invest more than 200 million pounds (\$330 million) in new environmental technology as part of an effort to cut the country's greenhouse gas emissions.

Mandelson's Low Carbon Industrial Strategy, published today, says jobs can be created in areas including renewable power generation, such as wind and tidal power, in building new nuclear power stations, and in developing energy-efficient buildings and vehicles. It pledges to intervene to provide finance and infrastructure for these projects.

### [Tackling climate change will require 'comprehensive changes' in the UK's economy and society: Miliband](#)

Tackling climate change will require "comprehensive changes" in the UK's economy and society, energy secretary Ed Miliband said today as he unveiled plans to slash emissions from power, transport, agriculture and industry.

Laying out how the UK would meet its legally binding targets to cut emissions by 34% by 2020, he said 40% of electricity would come from low carbon sources including renewables, nuclear and clean coal by the end of the next decade.

### [US, China announce clean energy research center](#)

BEIJING – The United States and China, the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitters, announced plans for a joint clean energy research center Wednesday as the American commerce secretary appealed to Beijing to avoid imposing trade barriers on green technology.

The research center is an effort at compromise between the two governments, which disagree on whether China should join richer nations in adopting binding emissions-reduction targets to stave off environmental devastation from climate change.

### [Experts hail Sahara-Europe solar plan](#)

FRANKFURT (AFP) – Far-sighted plans to energise Europe by tapping solar power from the sweltering Sahara desert offer bright prospects but must not overshadow renewable sources closer to home, experts say.

### [Turbine rules may foil wind ventures](#)

A majority of "construction ready" wind projects in Ontario won't go forward if the province passes regulations that keep wind turbines a minimum distance from residences, roads and railway lines, warns Canada's wind energy association.

Association president Robert Hornung, in a lengthy letter to Environment Minister John Gerretsen, said more than three-quarters of 103 advanced-stage wind projects will likely be affected if the new rules are enacted.

### [Green My Ride](#)

"About the most disgusting thing in the world," Mike Brown says conversationally, "is to be parked in traffic, and have one of those Dodge Ram trucks with a huge exhaust pipe sticking in your window. Most of them don't even have enough class to use biodiesel."

Given Brown's distaste for the stink of fuel, he's in the right business. He and his wife Shari Prange have been selling kits to convert gas cars to electric vehicles for 30 years at their Bonny Doon shop, Electro Automotive. On a recent sunny afternoon, he took me out for a spin in two different electric cars, a black Volkswagen and a zippy little orange Porsche. Along the way he talked about charge and volts and mileage, and I focused on keeping my lunch where it belonged. Electric cars, contrary to popular belief, go plenty fast. We got up to 50 mph on the dizzying hairpin turns and hills of Bonny Doon, and he says many electric vehicles will reach 75 mph on a flat road.

### [5 Reasons to Fear Inflation](#)

The ongoing recession / depression has been a boon to those who have long scoffed at the whole notion of Peak Oil - that cheap energy, fossil fuel that comes gushing up from out of the ground with little or no effort and has served as the very foundation of the world economy over the last 80 years or so, will soon be a thing of the past.

Of course, the fact that economic growth is now declining for the first time since the Great Depression puts a whole new spin on things, albeit, just a temporary one.

That is, unless what we've seen over the last nine months is what we'll be seeing for years and years and years.

Since changes in global energy consumption are inextricably tied to changes in economic growth, the only way that peak oil is *not* going to be a problem in the years ahead is if the global economy grows at a *much* slower pace. Slow growth means less jobs which

mean lots of people have lots of idle time on their hands and governments don't generally like that.

### [We Can Produce Less and Consume More](#)

A major gulf between environmental and social justice activists is "stuff." Environmentalists (or at least serious ones) say "less." Social justice organizers have the habit of saying "more."

This divisive question cuts to the edge of the sort of society we want to build. Deep greens envision a world with much less stuff. A great outline is Annie Leonard's *The Story of Stuff*. An excess of human-produced objects destroys species habitat, poisons communities with toxins, depletes oil and intensifies climate change.

Social justice activists, however, have devoted centuries to denouncing capitalism as placing fetters on the expansion of production. Whether the struggle is against racism, for labor rights, or resistance to imperialism, the cry is for the oppressed to have a much bigger piece of the pie.

### [A Son of Portland, Ore., Tries to Puncture the Myth of 'Smart Growth'](#)

Randal O'Toole thinks riding the train damages the climate more than driving an SUV. And he thinks his numbers prove it.

### [The World Food Crisis in Historical Perspective](#)

The "agflation" that brought this crisis to the world's attention at the turn of 2008 saw the doubling of maize prices, wheat prices rising by 50 percent, and rice increasing by as much as 70 percent, bringing the world to a "post-food-surplus era." In an article in the *Economist* titled "The End of Cheap Food," the editors noted that, by the end of 2007, the magazine's food-price index reached its highest point since originating in 1845. Food prices had risen 75 percent since 2005, and world grain reserves were at their lowest, at fifty-four days. According to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), agflation from rising agrofuels production "would lead to decreases in food availability and calorie consumption in all regions of the world, with Sub-Saharan Africa suffering the most."

The current conjuncture is associated with the intensification of energy and food demand in an age of peak oil. A rising class of one billion new consumers is emerging in twenty "middle-income" countries "with an aggregate spending capacity, in purchasing power parity terms, to match that of the U.S." This group includes new members of the OECD - South Korea, Mexico, Turkey, and Poland, in addition to China and India (with 40 percent of this total) - and the symbols of their affluence are car ownership and meat consumption. These two commodities combine - through rising demand for agrofuels and feed crops - to exacerbate food price inflation, as their mutual competition for land

has the perverse effect of rendering each crop more lucrative, at the same time as they displace land used for food crops.

### [Transition Communities discussed at Natural Sciences](#)

"Cuba hit peak oil overnight," said Bill Mettler, one-half of the brotherly duet Quiet Riot. The occasion was a presentation on Transition Communities at the Academy of Natural Sciences, July 9.

Transition communities are communities that take active steps to prepare for peak oil and climate change. Although the issue of climate change will be familiar to many people thanks to its prominence in the news, the concept of peak oil may require some explanation.

Peak oil – for a country – is the point in time when the availability of petroleum begins to decline. Cuba had received a large portion of its oil from the Soviet Union. When that source ended, the Cuban government had to close factories, reduce agricultural fertilization, and cut back on gasoline for private transportation. The government proceeded to buy thousands of bicycles from China and invent new forms of public transit. And at the neighborhood level, the government was forced to tolerate private gardening on state property.

### [Sen. Barrasso Makes a Name for Himself Fighting EPA, Climate Bill](#)

Earlier this year Barrasso used his ability to delay nominations to temporarily block Obama's nominee to lead EPA's air office over concerns about the administration's climate policies. He has criticized the administration for using the threat of the endangerment finding as a cudgel used to spur support for more flexible legislative efforts.

"There is an effort to force Congress to pass something under threat of action by the Environmental Protection Agency," Barrasso said in an interview. "And I think that should be a decision for Congress to make, not for the Environmental Protection Agency. If you take a look at who, when they wrote that initial bill, there was no conception that something like that would be used to regulate carbon."

### [Britain may go back on its promise not to buy 'permits to pollute' from poor nations](#)

Britain's plan to cut its carbon dioxide emissions by more than a third by 2022 could be achieved by buying "permits to pollute" from poor countries rather than genuine reductions in domestic emissions, according to documents seen by *The Times*.

A draft copy of the Government's energy strategy, due to be published today, reveals that ministers have considered scrapping a commitment made three months ago

intended to prevent the UK from buying so-called "carbon offsets" from developing nations. It states that while genuine cuts would be preferable, carbon offsets — where one country is paid to make reductions in emissions on another's behalf — should be reserved as an "insurance option".

### [Chilly reminder of potential disaster](#)

A former mining sector executive who has been warning about the advent of peak oil for nearly a decade, Mr Dunlop said he became aware of the potential effects of greenhouse gases nearly 50 years ago.

"During the 60s, I was working in London for Shell doing scenario planning around the impact of atmospheric carbon dioxide on the environment," Mr Dunlop said.

"Over the years, the climate change evidence has been building up and we really need to start looking at how we can stop it. We need to rethink how we do things."

### [Carbon Tariffs A Veil For Protectionism: China](#)

BEIJING (AFP)--China said Wednesday it was against proposals to impose "carbon tariffs" on goods manufactured in the developing world, saying such moves were a pretext for trade protectionism.

Any such laws, which have been mooted in the U.S. and France, would breach World Trade Organisation rules, said Yao Jian, a Chinese commerce ministry spokesman.

"Behind such a policy, there is an attempt to impose trade protectionism under the name of environmental and resource protection," Yao told reporters.

### [Gore urges Australia to lead global warming fight](#)

SYDNEY (AFP) – Climate campaigner Al Gore has challenged Australia to lead the fight against global warming, saying it was well placed to find alternative energy sources.

The former US vice president met Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in Sydney to discuss progress on cutting greenhouse gas emissions and reaching renewable energy targets ahead of a UN climate conference in Copenhagen in December.

### [Swapping technologies fails to address the root causes of climate change](#)

Technology is part of the solution to climate change. But only part. Techno-fixes like some of those in the Guardian's Manchester Report simply cannot deliver the carbon

cuts science demands of us without being accompanied by drastic reductions in our consumption. That means radical economic and social transformation. Merely swapping technologies fails to address the root causes of climate change.

We need to choose the solutions that are the cheapest, the swiftest, the most effective and least likely to incur dire side effects. On all counts, there's a simple answer – stop burning the stuff in the first place. Consume less.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/).