



Drumbeat: March 24, 2010

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Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

[The solution both to the economic crisis and to climate change is sustainable economic degrowth](#)

Scholars from different fields seem to converge in the view that economic degrowth is not only desirable, but unavoidable, as physicist-economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen argued already in the 1970s. The economy cannot grow indefinitely in a finite planet. Financing and debts are used to hide this basic fact, but the underlying inability of the real economy to keep up with unrealistic expectations of growth, is revealed in times of crisis. The question then is how to manage smoothly and socially equitably the process of degrowth and the transition to a "steady-state", where the economy will neither shrink nor grow. Different proposals are put forward in this edited volume, ranging from theoretical explorations on reforms to the social security and pensioning systems and reduction of working hours, to more radical calls for changes in the structures of the economic and political systems and importantly, concrete proposals about low-consumption, shared housing schemes. Together the fifteen articles presented in this issue offer a complex picture of the rich scientific debate about the desirability and possibility of sustainable degrowth, and open a range of important research questions for the future.

[The Peak Oil Crisis: A Breakthrough?](#)

In the years since it became widely recognized that world oil production would likely go into irretrievable decline early in the 21st century, no national government has yet to officially recognize that a major paradigm shift is in the offing and begin planning for it.

Those governments that respond to questions on the subject usually pointed to International Energy Agency projections indicating that all would be well for many years. Even as the evidence mounted that another 40 years of increasing oil production and economic growth probably was not the cards, no major political leader has stepped up to face reality.

[CNOOC: \(Not-So\) Secretly Buying Up World's Oil Reserves](#)

Countries don't colonize anymore. Today, if the British Empire needs tea, tobacco or beaver pelts, it buys them for cash rather than sending the Royal Navy. If the French need rubber, ivory or timber, they import them rather than functionally enslaving the

Congo.

And if Red China needs oil, it doesn't send Chairman Mao's army (Proud motto: Every man a private), it sends a state-owned company.

That company is CNOOC. And it is on the march.

[Congo to open oil blocks on Lakes Tanganyika, Kivu](#)

KINSHASA (Reuters) - The Democratic Republic of Congo will open 10 blocks on Lake Tanganyika and six blocks on Lake Kivu for oil exploration, an energy ministry official said on Wednesday.

[Biofuel mandates would make corn shortfall costly, experts say](#)

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Grocery shoppers face hefty price increases if bad weather withers a U.S. corn crop that is now tethered to grain-intensive renewable fuel mandates, a new University of Illinois study warns.

A corn shortage, coupled with surging demand to meet government-ordered ethanol standards, could push cash prices to \$7 a bushel, the study found, squeezing livestock producers and driving up prices for meat, milk, eggs and other farm staples.

[Why are we so obsessed with stuff and more stuff?](#)

"In the United States, we work more hours than folks in almost any other industrialized country in the world, and two of our main activities in our scant leisure time are TV watching and shopping," she writes. "So we go to work, come home exhausted, and plop down in front of the TV; commercials tell us we need new stuff, so we go shopping, and in order to pay for it all, we have to work even more."

[GM unveils tiny, futuristic concept car for cities](#)

SHANGHAI - It's not quite as foldable as the space vehicle that cartoon figure George Jetson pops into his briefcase as he bops into the office.

But the EN-V concept car, GM's "automobile solution" for the future, just might fit into an apartment foyer.

[Controlled Burns Slash Greenhouse Gasses](#)

Widespread prescribed or "controlled" burns in the wilds of the western United States can lower wildfire emissions of carbon dioxide by 18 to 25 percent, and by as much as 60 percent in certain forests, according to a new study.

[Pemex Should Focus on Chicontepec Productivity, Commission Says](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Mexico's Hydrocarbons Commission will recommend that Petroleos Mexicanos, the state-owned oil company, focus on improving productivity in its \$11.1 billion Chicontepec project before drilling new wells, according to a commission member.

Pemex slowed down Chicontepec drilling this year "and we won't recommend any other cuts," Commission Member Edgar Rangel said yesterday in an interview in Mexico City.

The Mexico City-based oil company's board is reevaluating the Chicontepec project after it missed output targets and drilling delays last year. Mexico's National Hydrocarbons Commission may present as soon as this week its Chicontepec recommendations for Pemex, Rangel said.

[Steve LeVine: Alaska: Confronting the Prospect of 6 Billion Barrels of Stranded Gas](#)

Alaska -- and the so-called Sarah Palin pipeline -- are in the crosshairs of the abrupt surge of natural gas supplies in the continental United States. Leading the charge against a much-promoted pipeline to ship Alaskan natural gas into the currently glutted Lower 48 is former Sen. Ted Stevens. The locally influential Republican says the gas should be rerouted to Asia, and that if Alaska doesn't move fast, this fuel -- the equivalent of 6 billion barrels of oil -- could end up effectively stranded at home.

[As the Oil Age Ends, A Return of the Canal and Rail Age?](#)

As the Oil Age is now set to end, and as the world transitions back to Coal and other forms of electrical power generation, a key concept to think about is the matter of rolling resistance. Those CSX Railroad (CSX) commercials you may have seen on television (opens to wmv video file), for example, are essentially highlighting the greater efficiency trains have, over trucks. But of course, in the taxonomy of efficient conveyance, water transportation is close to the top. For a quick and general comparison, the standard mileage per gallon of gasoline *to move one ton of freight* is often cited as follows: Trucks: 155; Railroads: 413; Ships/Barges: 576.

[ConocoPhillips to half stake in LUKOIL](#)

NEW YORK (AFP) – US oil group ConocoPhillips said Wednesday it planned to sell halve its stake in Russian oil producer LUKOIL as part of its move to sell 10 billion dollars of assets.

The US company currently owns 20 percent of equity in Russia's second-biggest oil producer.

[China imports 300 times more Russian electricity in 2009 than in 2008](#)

The electricity China imported from Russia saw a surge in 2009, up more than 316 times than in 2008 to reach 738 million kilowatt-hours, according to the latest statistics from north China's Harbin Customs.

[Urban development author: 'Skyscrapers are over'](#)

Skyscrapers are old news, green spaces are useless and building parking lots is a waste of time – that was just part of a message the keynote speaker delivered to a roomful of businesspeople for Tuesday morning's release of the annual State of Downtown Baltimore report.

But urban development author James Howard Kunstler also said that Baltimore is one of the "lucky" cities poised to adapt to the urban future. That's good news for a crowd that had just finished flipping through a report commissioned by the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore showing that jobs, population and commercial real estate rentals and development were all down in 2009.

[Cities emerging as epicentres of sustainability](#)

It is no coincidence that RICS uses the concept of the 'city' as a vehicle for furthering the sustainability debate – just look around you. The Middle East is using the city as a way of housing growing populations and demonstrating growing economic influence in the world; China is doing the same, more aggressively, as it moves populations from the countryside into the city; and the west is using the city concept to test new ways of living, as San Francisco's sustainable and man-made Treasure Island shows.

[Building a denser world](#)

I imagine that as we see the price of fossil fuels continue to rise we will see more and more dense urban areas built out of necessity. It would be nice if we could work to reform zoning laws to anticipate this need, perhaps through a country-wide 'open-source new urbanism' project. Such a project would provide local communities with the sort of strong, minimalist zoning laws needed to build more densely while preserving a natural aesthetic (and not succumbing to the Disneyfication of neighborhoods which so many upper-crust new urbanism projects fall prey to – though this is often a result of over-zoning our new urban areas rather than the type of minimalist planning that an organic community requires).

[We will consider Pakistan's request for nuclear deal: Hillary](#)

In the clearest sign yet from Washington, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Tuesday said the U.S. would “consider” Pakistan's request for a civil nuclear deal as Islamabad sought atomic cooperation and military hardware to bring itself on par with India.

However, her remarks were tempered with the rider that the civil nuclear deal with India did not happen “easily or quickly” and was the result of “many, many” years of strategic dialogue.

[Nuclear power without radioactivity](#)

Radiation-free nuclear fusion could be possible in the future claim a team of international scientists. This could lead to development of clean and sustainable electricity production.

Despite the myriad of solutions to the energy crisis being developed, nuclear fusion remains the ultimate goal as it has the potential to provide vast quantities of sustainable and clean electricity. But nuclear energy currently comes with a serious environmental and health hazard side effect - radiation. For fusion to gain widespread acceptance, it must be able to produce radiation-free energy but the key to this has so far remained elusive, explains Heinrich Hora at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia.

[U.K. Failed to Secure Reactor Guarantee From EDF, Lawmakers Say](#)

(Bloomberg) -- The U.K. government, which last year divested its stake in British Energy when the utility was bought by Electricite de France SA, should have ensured the deal included guarantees on building nuclear plants, lawmakers said.

[Exclusive Excerpt: Hack the Planet](#)

The battle lines on geoengineering have begun to take shape. On one side are modern-day romantics, who consider geoengineering an a priori violation of humans’ role as planetary citizens to let nature be natural and take a humble place within it. Better to solve the climate problem by reducing our impact on the planet, they say. Prominent among their antecedents is American forestry ecologist and writer Aldo Leopold, who asserted in A Sand County Almanac in 1949 that environmental problems demanded that man change his role from “conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it.”

[Bees in more trouble than ever after bad winter](#)

(AP) -- The mysterious 4-year-old crisis of disappearing honeybees is deepening. A quick federal survey indicates a heavy bee die-off this winter, while a new study shows honeybees' pollen and hives laden with pesticides.

Two federal agencies along with regulators in California and Canada are scrambling to figure out what is behind this relatively recent threat, ordering new research on pesticides used in fields and orchards. Federal courts are even weighing in this month, ruling that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency overlooked a requirement when allowing a pesticide on the market.

[Disputed isle in Bay of Bengal disappears into sea](#)

(AP) -- For nearly 30 years, India and Bangladesh have argued over control of a tiny rock island in the Bay of Bengal. Now rising sea levels have resolved the dispute for them: the island's gone.

New Moore Island in the Sunderbans has been completely submerged, said oceanographer Sugata Hazra, a professor at Jadavpur University in Calcutta. Its disappearance has been confirmed by satellite imagery and sea patrols, he said.

"What these two countries could not achieve from years of talking, has been resolved by global warming," said Hazra.

[Housewives in China encouraged to live low-carbon life](#)

The event suggests citizens have 15 energy-saving habits, such as saving on water, using recyclable bags for shopping, and not drinking bottled drinks.

[Peter Foster: The church of Peak Oil](#)

The problem with Peak Oil the theory isn't that it's wrong in noting that industry depletes resources, and that oil may, sooner or later, reach a production plateau, it's that it sees those facts through a moralistically-charged and economically-challenged lens. It also embodies extraordinary faith in Big Government and grass roots activism.

PO Theorists fail — or more precisely refuse — to grasp that the best method of dealing with any form of commercial scarcity is market-based ingenuity, not some weird combination of Big Brother and Hippie co-ops.

[The United Kingdom's Energy Security Debate](#)

The ITPOES report is broad in scope but focuses on several issue areas that, if corrections are made, can have a positive impact on UK energy security. Among these issue areas are: transport and mobility, the impact of oil in the agricultural sector on food and food prices (and incidentally on water usage and clean water availability), and the changing nature of power generation and distribution. Their report's recommendations support a number of policy responses that will reduce the demand for oil in an attempt to bring demand into equilibrium with the physical rate at which oil can be extracted (as opposed to predicting a terminal decline in oil availability itself). The ITPOES report is pessimistic on this last point, given the long lead time it will take to move off an oil economy.

[Peak oil coming soon? Let's see what it might look like](#)

The words "peak oil" are being heard more often these days, and in increasingly exalted corridors, but what do they actually mean? Mere inconvenience and higher prices at the pump? Or TEOTWAWKI (for "the end of the world as we know it")?

Let's look at some of the scenarios various experts have have imagined:

[Oil Falls for First Time in Three Days on U.S. Supplies, Dollar](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Crude oil declined for the first time in three days after an industry report showed U.S. stockpiles at an eight-month high, indicating demand may be slow to recover in the world's biggest fuel market.

Oil pared yesterday's advance after the American Petroleum Institute reported that U.S. crude inventories increased by 7.51 million barrels to 351.5 million. An Energy Department report today may show supplies rose 1.65 million barrels, the eighth weekly gain, according to a Bloomberg News survey of analysts. The dollar jumped to a 10-month high against the euro, damping the investment appeal of commodities.

"Demand is improving in line with the gradual recovery of the economy, but it's still weak and behind more normal levels for this time of year," said Thina Saltvedt, a commodities analyst at Nordea Bank AB in Oslo.

['Kurdistan ready for oil exports'](#)

Iraq's Kurdistan region is ready to start exporting oil at a rate of 100,000 barrels per day as soon as a new Iraq government is formed, its Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami said today.

[Aramco, Total to Raise Refinery Financing in 'Months'](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Saudi Aramco, the world's largest state-owned oil company, and Total SA expect to raise \$8 billion in debt financing for a joint refinery and petrochemical project in the "coming months," the venture's chief said.

The 400,000 barrel-a-day refinery in Jubail on Saudi Arabia's Persian Gulf coast will cost more than \$12 billion, Salem Shaheen, chief executive officer of Saudi Aramco Total Refining and Petrochemical Co., said at a World Refining Association conference in Abu Dhabi today.

[China's oil-refining capacity to grow by 30 million tons](#)

Based on the 30 million tons added to the oil-refining capacity last year, China's petroleum sector will add an additional 30 million-ton oil refining capacity in 2010, reporters learned from the 15th China International LPG Seminar currently underway in Qingdao.

According to industry experts, China National Offshore Oil Corporation, Sinopec and China National Petroleum Corporation completed the construction of oil-refining facilities in Huizhou, Guangdong province, Fujian province and Dushanzi, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in 2009. This increased the oil refining capacity by 30 million tons.

[O'Malley, Undeterred by Refiners' Problems, Considers Buying](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Thomas O'Malley, the chairman of European refiner Petroplus Holdings AG, is on the hunt for U.S. refining assets as he seeks to take advantage of plants hurt by depressed prices and shrinking profits.

"I'm interested in refining assets across the U.S.," he said in an interview at the National Petrochemical and Refiners Association conference in Phoenix. He expects more companies will be putting plants up for sale as they wrestle with diminished demand for gasoline and diesel.

[BG Group, China Sign Australia's Biggest LNG Deal](#)

(Bloomberg) -- China National Offshore Oil Corp. will buy liquefied natural gas from BG Group Plc's Queensland Curtis venture in Australia's largest export deal for the fuel.

The companies signed an agreement in Beijing today to supply 3.6 million metric tons of LNG annually over 20 years starting 2014, Australian Energy Minister Martin Ferguson said in a statement. The value of the deal would fluctuate with the price of crude oil, and be \$40 billion at \$70 a barrel, BG Chief Executive Officer Frank Chapman said.

[Chevron unit says Russian law 'may impede' exploration](#)

Russia's law on foreign investment in strategic sectors "may impede" oil exploration because of the security procedure for license winners, the head of Chevron Corp.'s Russian unit said.

[Lukoil Swings to Fourth-Quarter Profit, Misses Estimates](#)

(Bloomberg) -- OAO Lukoil, Russia's second-largest oil company, posted a fourth-quarter profit following a loss a year earlier after crude prices rose.

[Russia's gas transit surges](#)

The volume of Russian gas transit through Ukraine to Europe rose 70.3% to 18.9 billion cubic metres in the first two months of the year, Ukraine's Fuel & Energy Ministry said today.

[BP Says Devon's Brazil Assets Will Yield 100,000 Barrels a Day](#)

(Bloomberg) -- BP Plc's Brazil assets, purchased from Devon Energy Corp. this month, will produce at least 100,000 barrels of oil a day by the end of the decade, said Doug Suttles, chief operating officer of exploration and production.

"The long-term view is that Brazil needs to be a multi- 100,000 barrel a day business," Suttles said in an interview in Utrecht, Netherlands yesterday. "If we didn't believe that that potential was there, we wouldn't have done the deal."

[Venezuela Asks Electricity Heads to Resign, Noticias24 Reports](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Venezuela's Electricity Minister Ali Rodriguez asked the heads of seven public energy companies to resign, Noticias24 reported, after President Hugo Chavez declared a national electricity crisis last month.

[NTPC Can't Sell Power at Market Rates, Economic Times Reports](#)

State-controlled NTPC should focus on generating power from wind and solar energy sources rather than making profit by selling power at market prices, the newspaper said citing Brahma.

[Pakistan to Increase Fuel, Electricity Prices Next Month: Dawn](#)

(Bloomberg) -- Pakistan's government will increase prices of domestic fuel and electricity from next month, the Dawn newspaper said, without saying where it got the information.

[Decision on wildflower protection expected soon](#)

DENVER — A federal judge said he'll decide quickly whether the government erred in not giving protection to a wildflower that grows only in one place in the world — oil shale outcroppings in northeast Utah and northwest Colorado.

[Peak Oil Investments I'm Putting My Money On: Part III, Natural Gas Vehicles](#)

To understand why we should not expect too much from NGVs, I find it useful to start with the reasons proponents expect that NGVs should be able to displace oil. T. Boone Pickens is the leading proponent of this strategy, so let's take the main points from his Pickens Plan.

[Norwegian Automaker Peddles Its Runabout](#)

With the Bay Area expected to be an early proving ground for the electric car economy, an executive from Think, the Norwegian automaker, rolled into town in the company's battery-powered City urban runabout.

Higher-profile electric vehicles like the Nissan Leaf and Chevrolet Volt will go on sale here later this year, and Think wants to make sure its car gets space in municipal and corporate garages.

[Shadow cast on 'free' energy saving light bulbs](#)

Energy suppliers with more than 50,000 customers (currently only the 'big six' of British Gas, EDF, Eon, Npower, Scottish & Southern, and Scottish Power) have to help their customers pay for energy efficiency measures, such as cavity wall insulation and loft insulation. According to the government's own figures, sending four free bulbs to 345 households (1,377 bulbs in total) saves 68.83 tonnes of CO₂ over the lifetime of the bulbs (provided they're used in high-use fittings), saves each household £14 a year, and costs the supplier £1,886.

For the same money, an energy supplier could make a 20% contribution (the amount the government assumes suppliers will put in) towards the cost of solid wall insulation for one of Britain's 6.6m old and poorly-insulated solid-wall properties. This would cut a

typical household's gas bill by £420 a year, and save the same amount of CO₂ as all those bulbs put together – assuming that all of them do actually get used.

[Energy-efficient homes make householders complacent](#)

SURVEYS of hundreds of UK households reveal that people who have made their houses more energy efficient are more likely to indulge in small excesses - turning up the heating, for example, or keeping it on for longer.

Small excesses add up to large costs. The results of the studies - seven of them in total - suggest that such energy creep could wipe out as much as half of the anticipated savings from making homes more energy efficient.

[Dry rivers cut power supply in south-west China](#)

Beijing - Low water levels at hydropower plants have caused electricity shortages in parts of south-western China, adding to the devastation brought by the worst drought for 60 years, state media said on Wednesday.

The drought 'paralyzed 90 per cent of hydropower stations' in the Guangxi region, which relies heavily on hydroelectric power, the China Daily newspaper reported.

The water level above Guangxi's key Baise dam had fallen to a record low of less than 190 metres, forcing officials to suspend outflow to the Pearl River in the neighbouring province of Guangdong, the newspaper said.

[Ships Can Cut Third From Emissions by Slowing, Lobby Group Says](#)

(Bloomberg) -- The global shipping industry can cut a third off its emissions by better utilizing an oversupply of vessels competing for cargoes, a lobby group said.

[How and Why the Northeastern US States' Cap and Trade is Working](#)

Around this time last year, as talks in Congress about how to curb carbon and give clean energy and jobs a boost were intensifying, I briefly exhorted Obama to take a gander at the cap and trade system already up and running in the United States. Called the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, it's a system enacted between 10 northeastern states to curb carbon via the familiar cap and trade mechanism. It's been up and running for six years now--and it's working.

[Senate climate bill details still unfinished](#)

(Reuters) - Senators negotiating a bill to address global warming fears and encourage the use of more alternative energy in the United States struggled over details on Tuesday as lawmakers approached a two-week break without a full legislative proposal yet in hand.

[E.P.A. to Seek More Data on Emissions](#)

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency has proposed adding the oil and gas sector and facilities that inject carbon dioxide into the ground to the greenhouse gas sources that are required to report their annual emissions to the government.

[Rising waters threaten Nile Delta](#)

As the sea on Egypt's coastline rises, (Hamza says by 20cm during the last century, a statistic that leading Egyptian government scientists concur with) salt-water infiltrates the Delta's soil from below, and destroys the farming land.

The consequences of this are very serious for Egypt, which relies on the Delta for food production.

Today, as Egypt's population continues to grow, and as it spends more and more money on food imports, the country cannot afford to lose any more productive land. Gesturing to the salty wastes around me, Hamza says: "It is a human disaster, an economic disaster, an agricultural disaster, and it will lead not only to poverty but also to hunger".

[Greenland ice sheet losing mass on northwest coast](#)

(PhysOrg.com) -- Ice loss from the Greenland ice sheet, which has been increasing during the past decade over its southern region, is now moving up its northwest coast, according to a new international study.

[Population growth should be curbed: conservationist Goodall](#)

LONDON (AFP) – Humans should have fewer babies to help the global battle against climate change, according to the renowned British primatologist and conservationist Jane Goodall.

Goodall, whose 1960s research on chimpanzees changed perceptions of relations between humans and animals, fears the controversial issue has slipped down the agenda in the debate about man's impact on the environment.

"It's very frustrating as people don't want to address this topic," said the 75-year-old English scientist. "It's our population growth that underlies just about every single one

of the problems that we've inflicted on the planet."



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