

The Oil Drum: Campfire

Discussions about Energy and Our Future

What do we do about unemployment?

Posted by [Gail the Actuary](#) on July 31, 2010 - 5:13pm in [The Oil Drum: Campfire](#)

Topic: [Economics/Finance](#)

In much of the US, we have been living through a time of high unemployment. Among those working, many are taking part time jobs, when they really want full-time jobs. Some are in school (yet again), hoping that with retraining, they may find a new job. Lack of suitable jobs are a problem in many other parts of the world, as well.

If recession goes with peak oil, then unemployment is likely a symptom we will see more and more of. Theoretically, it is only a temporary situation--if the world transitions to another energy source, then there may well be jobs. If renewables somehow generate enough net energy to replace what we have lost from oil and natural gas, then with the new infrastructure, there may be enough jobs to go around (although with their record so far, this transition looks at best like a long, very rocky one). Or if we go back to life more like it was before fossil fuels, manual labor will be in great demand, especially for growing food, obtaining water, and making clothing. If we build factories that can be operated without fossil fuels, people will also be needed to operate them.

But how can we handle the transition, if it leads to more and more unemployment?

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Some questions:

1. Is it possible to start a transition to a world that uses less scarce raw materials and more labor? If so, how can we do this in a way that provides more work opportunities for the unemployed?
2. How do we connect up potential workers with the raw materials that they need? It doesn't help if there are 1 million would-be farmers, but they all live in apartments in the city, and have no access to land. Land is expensive, and the unemployed are mostly poor.

3. Should we be doing more to share with the unemployed -- making certain that unemployment insurance and health care is available to them even if it means higher taxes, helping them with education and job placement, and perhaps taking them into our homes?

4. Are there things governments can do to ease the transition?

5. Are there things the unemployed can do to help themselves and other unemployed people?



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