



The Coming Politics of Peak Oil?

Posted by [Prof. Goose](#) on April 28, 2005 - 10:23am

In my opinion, the issue of peak oil precludes many, if not all, other issues. Why?

Because, in a petroleum-starved depression-laden economy, people will look to government for assistance, and be willing to give up freedoms and rights for security and food much like people did with the New Deal.

However, with the scenarios floating around, the poor and even middle class of our country will not have ANY wherewithal to care about giving up liberties and rights as much as they will be worrying about jobs, food, and energy. That means people will be willing to tolerate larger government, more redistribution of income, and concomitantly higher taxes. But to what end?

One of the things that most concerns me when I think this through is a drastic change to democracy as we know it.

For most of the readers of this blog, a transition to larger government going to the left, where a relatively benevolent and empowered government is consolidated and grown to assure equality of redistributed resources and outcomes, or socialism, is not a scary prospect. I have seen many calls from us "greenies" for government to solve these problems anyway (in fact, many of us believe that the only real way to [govern the commons is for a central authority to step in and make sure no one takes more than they need...but](#), remember that, either way, larger government does take away freedoms...).

I think of what is coming as a move from the bottom of a circle (the "circle of democracy" I call it in my classes), where government is small and democracy great, to a move up the outside of the circle, either to the left or the right. What I described above is a transition of larger government to the left. At it's logical end is pure communism (which meets up with and looks a lot like pure fascism, sadly...it's a circle, and at the top of the circle, governments rule the day either way).

However, there's also another way that we can move up the outside of the circle away from small government, and that's to the right, towards fascism. A fascist government is organized primarily to maintain order, usually organized around some principle (such as the "Reich," etc.). (NB: I think we can agree that this has been how the US has been moving since 9-11 (though I do not mean to insinuate that we are at full-blown fascism yet) toward a government set up to maintain order. Say "Department of Homeland Security" three times.)

In many of the scenarios I have seen discussed in peak oil blogistan, the dystopias are so bad that order will need to be maintained somehow. (Add in the threat of terrorism to this, one nuclear explosion ends our Constitution folks...martial law, etc., etc.) That means a government organized around the principle of order could also be the result of what's coming.

Sound paranoid? It's not meant to. It's a logical conclusion of a world with limited petroleum and a

We're not there yet, and we don't have to get there. But this is what we're moving towards if we don't get the government off its ass and dedicate resources to solving the problem by coordinating the many alternatives and scaling them into the economy for something other than a profit motive.

There's an [interesting piece today at the Energy Bulletin](#) by Roland Watson that summarizes the Peak Oil conference in Scotland. Most notably, Watson discusses his run in with a politician from a hard right party in Britain at this conference of lefties.

Here's some money quotes:

"Peak Oil is a paradigm shift. People will be forced to look at their lifestyles and the way they conduct their day to day living. Indeed, as many predict, this shift may well be from that of somewhere above abundance to that of somewhere above subsistence. I personally do not think that is such a bad thing if it weans us off materialism but still provides us with a living where legitimate needs are still adequately met.

However, it is the transition to this more simple lifestyle that worries me. It is how human nature reacts to his fellow man when resources become scarcer and the blame game begins. The BNP are no doubt familiar with Adolf Hitler. Indeed, many in their ranks idolise him and regard the Holocaust as a lie. What the BNP are aware of is that economic paradigm shifts lead to political paradigm shifts. Thanks to the short-sightedness of the Versailles Treaty after the First World War, Germany was put under such duress for reparations that hyperinflation and economic collapse ensued and drove desperate people to desperate measures. They had a choice between the two extremes of socialism - the Communists or the Nazis (National Socialists). Hitler won and rose to power as the paradigm shift of hyperinflation had its devastating way."

Read this and think folks. The US leans to the right as of right now, not the left...which way do you want to go?

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