

Transformation

Change your Consciousness

Sheet

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The lesson we must draw from energy depletion is the need for a change in lifestyle, not a change of energy supplier. That's a very personal process of how we re-arrange our homes, our work and our lives. It begins by working on your "head space", because you must be able to understand and commit to the process of change if you are going to achieve long-term changes in your life in the face of great difficulties. But it's also important to network with others, and in particular, to press the urgency for change within your own social networks.

Who can deliver change?

The world is heading for a crisis of its own making – but how do you apply the brakes when the driver of the "energy bus" doesn't think there's a problem ahead and still has his foot on the accelerator?

Energy depletion, and how it affects society, is a matter of physics. The *Laws of Thermodynamics* are rather cruel as they don't allow our hopes, wishes or delusions about our use of energy to influence their application. Dealing with energy depletion, and climate change, requires that we realign our desires and expectations within the boundaries of nature – not economic dogma or science fiction.

It's important to understand that the changes we need to undertake are not in themselves revolutionary, it's the time-scale that we have to carry them out in that makes them revolutionary. In terms of solutions we can begin with a process of elimination, looking at the main actors in the process to see what solutions they can deliver:

Politics can't magick a solution from the ether to make energy depletion disappear – the political debate is rooted in the realities of today's paradigm of consumption and energy excess, but more fundamentally, those whose position depends upon continuity in the system are unlikely to advocate revolution;

Technology (on its own) cannot help society to avoid or escape energy depletion whilst continuing the current trends of material consumption and energy growth – the future rate of energy depletion (as in the case of the North Sea), coupled with the need to maintain economic growth to preserve the status quo, will exceed the level of efficiency savings that technological improvements can deliver in the time available;

The market cannot deliver a solution to energy depletion because the operation of capital markets requires continual growth to keep them in operation – whilst markets will in all likelihood survive (markets existed before the development of modern capital markets, so they are likely to continue) the modern, global market is unlikely to survive in its current form, and its operation will be dictated by the level of energy and resources that are available in the future (not the other way around);

This leaves the one actor in the process who is able to effect change because they ultimately drive the en-

ergy economy... *the public*.

Individuals can, by changing their lifestyle and life choices, affect their relationship to energy depletion. It doesn't halt energy depletion, and it doesn't prevent the peaking of oil or gas production at some point in the future. Instead it redefines the individual's interaction with the process of energy depletion, hopefully making the effects on the individual less extreme. What's more, if enough individuals do this we can change the relationship of society to energy depletion.

The problem with changing our lifestyles is that, by effectively opting-out of the current conception of the *modern lifestyle*, we cut ourselves off from the activities and practices of our "former life" – changing energy relationships might affect your social relationships (e.g., what if you give-up your car, or flying, or your mobile phone, or you change your job?). This could be quite stressful, and it is why individuals must consciously make the choice to do this or it is unlikely they will succeed in the long term. It requires conviction – a belief that change is not only necessary, but that it is unavoidable in the longer-term. It also requires that you network with other like-minded people so that as you break your "old" social relationships you establish new ones.

Admit your addiction, and deal with it

Action has to begin with the individual. We can act out the desire to change, as perhaps many people do through the subscription membership of pressure groups, but unless we begin by changing ourselves how can we affect society? In the word of Gandhi, "*We must become the change we want to see.*"

In 2006 President Bush stated that the USA was, "*addicted to oil*" – but his solutions were not presented in the context of treating the addiction, but merely fueling the addiction by other means. Instead we have to understand the dependencies of the addiction process in order to consciously avoid them – how energy and resources interact with our lives, and the most effective means to adopt patterns of energy descent in order to minimise the socially engrained patterns of addictive, consuming behaviour.

The immediate barrier to "kicking the habit" is that our addiction to fossil fuels has created a comfortable lifestyle (in the developed world). So how can remov-

ing the energy-based “comfort blanket” in a completely pain free way? And yet people are encouraged to believe – by the current form of the debate on energy, climate change and the environment – that kicking our addiction can be free of discomfort. In reality, there are no quick, easy and discomfort-free solutions to a global economy that is 88% powered by fossil fuels. In this sense, biofuel-powered cars, large wind farms and doorstep recycling should be seen as a kind of methadone programme for the sufferers of fossil fuel addiction – it perpetuates the addiction rather than seeking alternatives to it.

In our daily addiction we “*take the soma*” (in the form of the fossil fuels and consumer goods that fossil fuels empower) to soothe the angst and anomie that stems from a world that is being structurally damaged by the large-scale use of energy and resources: we can understand the problems (they are thrown at us every day by the media – waste, pollution, climate change, health scares, etc.); we see the effects of these stresses on our world, in the urban and natural environment; but the comfort and (apparent) security that our high-energy lifestyle delivers makes change difficult to achieve because the true alternative – *less consumption* – seems unattainable.

The comfort that consumption brings also means that many people are easily diverted into quick and easy solutions. These present a veneer of change to give fulfilment, but underneath perpetuate the destructive, consuming economic relationships of the current system (for example “green consumerism” or “carbon offsetting”). These palliative, if palatable solutions to our present problems will not deliver real change. To update the earlier “soma” analogy, “*we have to take the red pill*” – we engage in a personal revolution that will allow us to quickly shed one form of existence and adopt another, more sustainable one.

If we are to change and move forward we have to begin by admitting that, for all its consolations, our high-energy, high-consumption lifestyle is not tenable. This admission isn't just an issue of understanding the technical basis of the problem (what makes oil production peak, the climate change, or why there are thermodynamics limits our lives) it must be a realisation that the problem is yours: you cannot pass it to another group; another actor in the process (politicians, markets, or technology, as outlined earlier); or worse still to the excuse of futility – believing that your own action will not solve the greater problem.

Change your consciousness, not your energy supplier!

The *Laws of Thermodynamics* do not permit us to continually grow our demand for resources within an isolated system (the planet Earth). Whether you agree with the market or not (but in this sense, Communism's system of *Five Year Plans* were identical) the principle of “*high and sustained economic growth*” (to use New Labour's phrase from the *UK Sustainable Devel-*

opment Strategy) is not compatible with the *Laws of Thermodynamics*. Any system based on the principle of growth will ultimately hit one environmental limit or another as growth runs out of expansion space – be that pollution, material shortages, or peak oil.

The solutions we need are not about solving energy consumption or peak energy for the whole world. In any case these outcomes are inevitable – even if we cut the consumption of oil, gas and coal, production will eventually reach a peak at some time (but the subsequent decline would be slower). Instead it is about redefining your relationship to the problems of peak energy, resource depletion or climate change – the goal being to manage the unwelcome effects that they might have on your life in the future.

We cannot live a life that is in conflict with the natural principles that underpin the operation of our world. We have to admit this, embrace it, and move on to restructure our lifestyle in a way that accepts these limits. Essentially that means limiting our consumption to meet the sustainable limits that our environment can provide. Those aspects of our lifestyle which cannot be resolved within this process will, very simply, have to be abandoned.

The simplest way to encapsulate the solutions to these problems is to use one word – LESS. For example, it has been estimated that every calorie you eat takes ten calories to get it from the field to your mouth – as a result the “average” person puts more energy into their mouth than into their individual share of the “average” house. You can't significantly reduce your calorie intake, but you can significantly cut that ten calories in the supply chain.

Where do I go next?

There are no off-the-peg proscriptions for reorganising your life to adapt to peak energy. Any such plans would be very general, and for that reason, not suitable to meet your specific circumstances. Everyone is different – we all have different abilities, circumstances and skills. What is important is that you undertake a review of your life and identify the role of energy in it. Then you can work to reduce your relationship with the energy problem.

This series of guides, produced for the Peak Energy Tour, scratches the surface. For certain parts of the problem – oil, gas, food or waste – they are designed to give a brief outline of the key issues. Perhaps the most useful unit is the *Suggested Reading List* – its a bit of a drudge, but in order to produce your own route out of the energy problem you're going to have to learn more about the many solutions that are out there, and whether or not they apply to you.

It's also important that you network. Improving your skills is one thing, but working or learning with others will give you far more than working alone. The simplest way to begin is by signing up to on-line forums, such as *Powerswitch* (see the Internet Resources briefing for further details).

This briefing was produced for the “UK Peak Energy Tour”, 2007 – see <http://www.fraw.org.uk/ebo/> for information.

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