

ECO-IMPERIALISM: Green Power - Black Death

Excerpts from Chapters

(Note: All endnotes and citations in original text have been deleted; asterisks denote missing text.)

7. Renewable Energy Mirages

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The notion that we are running out of energy (and metal) resources also reflects an abysmal grasp of basic mineral economic principles. “Proven reserves” is not a static number. It reflects what we can expect to extract from known deposits at a particular commodity price and with existing technology. As more deposits are discovered, prices increase, and technologies improve, proven reserve numbers also rise, often dramatically.

In May 2003, to cite just one example, Canada increased its proven oil reserve figures from 4 billion barrels to 180 billion barrels! Literally overnight, with the stroke of a pen, it became a global petroleum powerhouse, behind only Saudi Arabia and Iraq in total reserves. Canada was able to do this simply by recognizing that, at just \$15 per barrel, its vast tar sand reserves were commercially and technologically producible.

Moreover, societal needs and scientific breakthroughs constantly change the kinds and amounts of energy, metallic and non-metallic resources we need. Because of incremental improvements in extrusion technology, aluminum beverage cans are now 30 percent lighter than they were in the 1960s, dramatically reducing the amount of metal needed to make a billion cans. Improvements in tensile strength and architectural design mean modern high-rise buildings require 35 percent less steel than did their counterparts a mere 20 years ago. And today, a single fiber-optic cable made from 60 pounds of silica sand (the most abundant element on earth) carries hundreds of times more information than did an “old-fashioned” cable made from 2,000 pounds of copper.ⁱ

Third and most important, for Northern Hemisphere NGOs and policy makers to tell Third World nations that they must rely on wind and solar power – and forego hydroelectric or fossil fuel projects – is to deprive the world’s poorest citizens of reliable, affordable energy. It condemns billions of people to continued poverty and misery. And it does so for no valid reason – but only to promote the ideologies of vocal activists whose indifference to this abject poverty will eventually prove their undoing.

ⁱ Lynn Scarlett and Jane Shaw, *Environmental Progress: What every executive should know*, Bozeman, MT: Political Economy Research Center (1999); Lynn Scarlett, “Doing More with Less: Dematerialization – unsung environmental triumph?” in Ronald Bailey (editor), *Earth Report 2000: Revisiting the True State of the Planet*, New York: McGraw-Hill (2000).

