

# Advancing an 'Oil Depletion Protocol'

## *Is mankind's a coal-fired future?*

Book Review by E. E. Timm

Colin Campbell's polemic, *The Truth about Oil and the Looming Energy Crisis*, stands alone among the multitude of new publications assessing the status of the world's fossil fuel supply. In a mere forty-five pages this spiral bound document explores the technical and political dimensions of the indisputable technical conclusion that production of conventional crude oil is matched or exceeded by increasing demand. Using the artifice of an imaginary judicial inquiry, Campbell forces the reader to realize that we are reaching past the midpoint of what has been called the "Petroleum Interval" on the timeline of world history and that a pivotal point along this timeline has been reached.

The technical arguments for the conclusion that world oil production capability is at or near its peak are only briefly outlined in *The Truth about Oil* but the bibliography references several excellent technical works that support this conclusion including Deffeyes' excellent book, *The Impending World Oil Shortage*. Campbell goes on to discuss the political, social, legal and economic factors that have resulted in widespread popular ignorance of a situation that is well known by petroleum production experts. Campbell's book is intended as a teaching text so that an informed layman can publicize the impending world energy imbalance. To this end, the text includes a CD on which is a Power Point® presentation that facilitates dissemination without the need to create a

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presentation from scratch.

*The Truth about Oil* was "produced for the Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas (ASPO), a network of concerned scientists in universities and government departments now representing most European countries." Although this reviewer has not been able to find much information about ASPO (<http://www.peakoil.net/>), the technical details that lie behind Campbell's data summaries and conclusions appear to be largely correct. Campbell projects three possible scenarios that will develop in the future as world oil production is overmatched by demand during periods of first world economic prosperity. These scenarios include:

- National profiteering where oil resources remain within the jurisdiction of the producing countries,
- Imperialistic profiteering where one or more oil consuming countries use their military might to take control of significant oilfields,
- Consumer restraint, the option advocated by Campbell and ASPO, where an internationally supported Oil Depletion Protocol results in proportional cuts in national oil consumption preventing runaway oil prices and energy starvation in the third world.

A draft Oil Depletion Protocol is included in Campbell's text and a plan of action is proposed that he believes could result in the political will to address the situation.

It is on this plan that this reviewer takes issue with Campbell's analysis of future energy scenarios. The data presented in the appendices and presentation appear to greatly underestimate the potential for a future energy economy based on coal and coal conversion technology. Just as Germany and South Africa turned to coal and

### The Truth About Oil and the Looming Energy Crisis

by C. J. Campbell  
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convenient fuels derived from coal when their oil imports were cut off, it appears likely that the world will turn to this abundant heat source as oil prices rise to the 60-100 \$/bbl range. Modernity started with coal fired technology and it may proceed past the present "petroleum interval" using advanced coal fired technology. Since burning coal has more geographic impact, produces more carbon dioxide and releases more trace toxins than burning oil or gas, this coal-fired future could be a disaster for Homo

sapiens unless it is implemented wisely on a global scale via advanced coal-use technology.

Despite this apparent flaw in *The Truth about Oil and the Looming Energy Crisis*, I highly recommend this text as an informative and easily communicated means of preparing the population of our planet for what may be the greatest challenge in the history of modern civilization. •