

Letters to the Editor

EDITOR:

Perry Lorenz may be right that electronics use relatively little energy, but most of the rest of his letter is terribly wrongheaded (*The Social Contract*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, Fall 2003, p. 3).

(1) Heinberg's warning that information may become irretrievable in the absence of alternative power sources for the grid is not "nonsense" at all, but quite plausible. If energy from fossil fuels becomes increasingly scarce thanks to depletion and declining EROEI, and none of the alternatives (solar, wind, etc.) can adequately replace fossil fuels, then the abundant and utterly reliable supply of electricity on which the Information Economy absolutely depends will disappear. Sure, you can store your information on a disk, but so what? Storage is one thing, retrieval quite another. If large-scale power outages such as August 2003's become frequent and protracted, the Information Economy will no longer be viable.

(2) Depleting all oil resources as rapidly as possible is a very dangerous way to teach people about resource finitude. It is like slashing a hemophiliac's wrists in order to impress upon him that he has a problem with blood loss. Hmm.

(3) Lorenz's unfortunate fixation on "high-priced oil" misses the whole point of Campbell's and Heinberg's books. The real problem, to repeat, is that our entire way of life is dependent upon abundant supplies of oil and gas; that they are finite resources subject to depletion; that their worldwide extraction will soon peak and then relentlessly decline; that supplies will then be nowhere near sufficient to sustain our way of life; and that nothing can adequately replace oil and gas. "High-priced oil" will be the *least* of depletion's consequences.

Lorenz's statement, "Suggestions that civilization may collapse because of high-priced oil is far-fetched" is thus an exasperating misrepresentation of what Campbell, Heinberg, and I actually said, as well as an exercise in straw man-bashing. We did not suggest any such thing. Price is not the issue. Physical scarcity is the issue. A civilization which is absolutely dependent on a depleting resource is likely to collapse when that resource becomes too physically scarce to keep that civilization's activities going.

Just one example, which Lorenz entirely missed:

modern agriculture is utterly dependent on oil for fuels and on natural gas for nitrogen fertilizers. It cannot function without them. Oil and gas depletion means our current mode of agriculture cannot endure. How is our civilization supposed to survive the collapse of its agriculture? Coal and nukes can't operate plows and combines and react with nitrogen to make nitrogen fertilizers. They can't be made into petrochemicals, of which we use half a million, either.

(4) Coal and nukes are no answers. We currently use oil, in the form of gasoline and diesel fuel, to mine coal! And coal is becoming increasingly costly, not least in energy, to extract. Anyone who thinks nuclear power is the answer needs to read Chapter 15, "Nuclear Power: A Nonsolution," of Garrett Hardin's *Living Within Limits*.

JOHN ATTARIAN, PH.D.

Ann Arbor, Michigan

EDITOR:

The Fall 2003 issue of *The Social Contract* is a premier issue! Every article so full of vital information. Dr. Tanton, I was especially interested in your correspondence with Dr. Borlaug about using crop residues for fuel. And I note David Pimentel's letter also. From my travels in some seventy countries I would agree with David that after population growth, the matter of loss of soil fertility through loss of the humus provided by the crop residues is the world's greatest problem. The world depends on the upper six inches of Earth's surface for its living and we are losing that six inches both in total loss by erosion but also in losing its fertility by removing crop residues to use as fuel.

I have seen it especially in Peru where I lived and worked for a number of years, and in China, the Philippines, Senegal, and worst of all, in Haiti.

Clearly the carrying capacity of the world is being markedly diminished daily, and what is going to stop it beyond famine I don't know. But we are surely headed that way in the not too long run. Here in the States I see the same thing in many areas, and the great push to produce ethanol from corn and from crop residues I look on as pure disaster.

I expect to draw on this issue of *The Social Contract* considerably for the revision of *GeoDestinies*. I hope to put out a second edition as there are many improvements and additional things I would like to put [in].

Wherever the world is going, we are getting there at an exponential pace which cannot be sustained. So, even at my age, I think I may live long enough to see the edge of the cliff ahead.

Again, I want to comment on what a splendid and most important issue you have compiled as your Fall 2003 issue.

WALTER YOUNGQUIST, PH.D.

Eugene, Oregon

EDITOR:

My name is Edwin Nyhus. I have been a carpenter since 1977. Currently, I am the Director of Organizing for the Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters.

Jobs in the building trades continue in a downward spiral because of the growing problem in America with the use of illegal immigrants. They are being smuggled in by greedy contractors and labor brokers who use them as "slave" labor. The illegals are paid sub-standard wages, receive little or no benefits, and are housed several in a room. The money they receive is sent back to their families with very little spent to support local economies in the areas in which they are working.

However, they are also taking away jobs from Americans and the unemployment lines continue to grow. The tax base in our country is being eroded because employers are not paying their fair share of taxes (local, state, and federal; unemployment and workers' compensation).

As the financial fabric of our country is being eroded and American families struggle to make ends meet, Tom Ridge (Homeland Security) is proposing that we give legal status to ten million illegal aliens. What we need to do is close our borders now, and we need to start putting our American workers first and maintain the high standard of living we have worked so hard to achieve.

EDWIN NYHUS

Brighton, Michigan

EDITOR:

I got some information off the FAIR website a few days ago in regards to population in the city of Santa Ana, California. The fact sheet indicates a 2002 population of 343,413 (which I suppose is already out of date) and a projected population of 479,000 for 2025. Right now the Hispanic residents (non-citizens) of Santa Ana are about 85% of the population of which approximately 75% are non-English speaking. There are

currently shortages of housing, class rooms and teachers. The infrastructures (streets, sewers, etc.) gas, water, electricity are all at capacity right now which begs an answer to the question: "Where are all of these people going to live, go to school, etc.?"

I am not absolutely sure of the answer but I have a good idea what it is. I live in Costa Mesa which adjoins Santa Ana on parts of its southern border. I will have been here 20 years come August (in building maintenance, a licensed construction contractor since 1964 until a few years back when I got tired of the hassle etc.). This city has grown by anywhere from six to sixteen thousand. I am not absolutely sure but I don't think there have been more than a couple hundred homes or apartment buildings built in the last ten to fifteen years. So where are all these people living?

I know where they are going to school. There are four elementary schools within about two miles or less of where I live and every one of them has about four times the number of students they were designed for.

RICHARD GOFF

Costa Mesa, California

Correction: In the Winter 2003 issue of *The Social Contract*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, page 113, we neglected to acknowledge the source of the information about Muslim numbers in France as being Madame Michele Tribalat, formerly a member of the High Council on Integration in that country.