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Provided by Helen Diemert - Technocrat

RUMINATIONS ON RUIN AND RENEWAL - By Mike Byron Ph.D.

Continued from Aug. 08 Trendevents: Today we live in a world in which the renewable resources of the natural world along with the stored energy resources of hydrocarbons, sustain nearly seven billions of us. Industrialization, its hydrocarbon energy dependence, and the core values of its pioneers the Europeans, have become global reality.

The core values of this planetary-scale civilization are those of the European Age of Discovery: That we humans exist outside of and above nature; that Nature is a cornucopia of limitless bounty waiting to be exploited and transformed into wealth for humans; that Nature is also a limitless sink into which we can dump our waste products without incurring any significant adverse effects upon ourselves; and that we only need better technology to keep the wealth flowing in ever increasing abundance. And yet, the energy foundation of our technological civilization, based as it is almost exclusively upon hydrocarbon energy, is fatally insecure. That is because production of conventional oil peaked in the spring of 2005 and has declined slightly in the three years since that time.

Production of "all liquids," a catchall term for all hydrocarbon liquids including ethanol and coal derived oil, has recently shown a slight increase. However this is misleading for several reasons. As Mark Twain once observed, there are "lies, damned lies, and then there are statistics." The energy content of liquids such as ethanol is less than two-thirds that of gasoline. So including it in a one-to-one equivalent resource with oil-derived liquids is comparing apples with oranges. Also, the energy required to produce ethanol, from corn at least, is actually greater than the energy obtained by combusting it. Unconventional oil sources such as tar sands require vast amounts of energy from natural gas or other sources, and divert water from vitally-needed agriculture to produce the oil. Also, demand for energy is now increasing within oil-exporting nations. So each year, less of what is produced in those nations is being exported for the use of other nations. The net amount of energy available from exported hydrocarbon liquids has also peaked. At the same time that we are reaching the peak of net energy from hydrocarbon liquid production, coal production is approaching its limits as well. Within the next ten to twenty years, coal production too will peak and then decline... In the meantime, its profligate usage is rapidly accelerating the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere, and is driving an accelerating rate of climate change. Increasing winter temperatures are decreasing the snowpack in many populated areas, which is in turn causing the long term decrease in water supplies for agriculture to feed the planet's teeming billions—along with diminishing the available water supply for direct human use.

Our economy has been based for five centuries upon the assumption that material wealth would always increase. From appropriating new lands to developing new energy supplies, this assumption has been fulfilled throughout this half-millennium period. Now however, with hydrocarbon energy about to enter an ever-accelerating decline, and with the environmental consequences of burning hydrocarbons becoming more acute, the assumption of limitless growth must inevitably break down and our economy must collapse. This collapse is inevitable because capitalist economies are based upon debt. Money lent today for some income-generating activity can be paid back by new wealth created in the future... Investments are based upon the expectation that new wealth will be generated to repay the loans. However, with declining energy supplies, production will decrease and less material wealth will exist in the future than exists today. Once this fundamental change in our reality is widely understood, our whole global economy will collapse. However, human societies are capable of learning. Societal learning occurs in a manner analogous to how our immune systems "learn." Such learning is directly encoded in the structure of the system itself. For an immune system, the physical shape of harmful intruders such as viruses or bacteria is imprinted into specialized cells which "recognize" and destroy these pathogens whenever they reappear.

For human societies, institutions perform this function. National level institutions such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, founded in 1934, seek to incorporate the lessons learned by past disasters—the Great Depression for example—into the behavioral repertoire of government so that whenever conditions such as those that caused the past disaster recur, they will be identified and neutralized before they can cause harm. International level institutions such as the United Nations, founded in 1944, similarly seek to incorporate the lessons learned by past global disasters— World War II, in this instance—so that similar disasters can be prevented.

Unfortunately, as a direct consequence of the core values of our civilization which prioritize endless material acquisition above all else, one form of human organization—the global corporation—has with rapidly increasing effectiveness, subverted all forms of institutional memory along with all methodologies of popular control—democracy for example—over the agendas of governments across the planet. This has occurred not through the action of some nefarious conspiracy but rather through what amounts to faulty programming. Corporations exist solely to make profits—as much profit as possible, in as short a time as possible. This profit obligation is encoded into law which effectively “programs” corporate behavior.

Responsible behavior, such as control of their pollution, occurs at the expense of increased profit. For corporations, the institutions which seek to constrain their activities for the “greater good” are impediments to profit maximization, and impediments that must be removed. These “impediments” which obstruct profit maximization unfortunately are also our societal “memory” and the institution of popular democracy itself. Public good and private gain, are generally different things. Thus, the maximization of corporate private gain requires the subversion of the public good... Once corporations achieved the legal status of “persons” by means of the legal doctrine of corporate personhood, these artificial entities were able to out-compete all other flesh and blood persons such as ourselves. A contest between natural persons and these world-spanning artificial persons is no contest at all. In single minded pursuit of profit maximization, all human institutions along with human control over government itself have been progressively swept aside... Yet ultimately these cancerous monstrosities are not alien impositions upon our planetary civilization, they are, in fact, nothing but the embodiment of our own individual desires for ever more material wealth. Corporations are our self-centered, materialistic values made tangible, and then subsequently run amok to trample us as they follow their pre-programmed agenda of profit maximization above all else... Thus, at the supreme moment of crisis for our global civilization, at the time when the greatest possible civilizational adaptability and the most rapid possible civilizational learning and capacity for restructuring are required— at this supreme moment of existential crisis for all of humanity—our capability for navigating these crises is declining precipitously towards zero.

Consequently, it is too late to use our existing political system to avert our rapid rendezvous with disaster. It is also too late economically and technologically. We simply cannot quickly replace most of the energy which we are about to lose due to declining supplies of hydrocarbon energy. Indeed, given the reality of corporate dominance of our political processes, attempts to develop technologies to avert the crises will likely turn out to be scams by which wealth is taken from people via taxation and given to corporations—or more specifically—to the wealthy elites who control them...

So if we cannot look to government for our salvation, where can we turn?

We can look to ourselves and to others who see the reality of the present age as we do. We can begin now to improve ourselves—our ability to think clearly and logically, our skills, our basic health... We can network with others locally, regionally and globally. We can each become a nucleus for a self-organizing movement operating at each of these levels of organization. We can become the instigators of a new and sustainable system of human organized complexity which coexists with our biosphere... We need not revolt directly and forcefully against the present order because this order is inherently doomed. Past revolutions have required force to remove the oppressive presence of a tyrannical old order; but today’s revolution is a struggle for the survival and future of humanity and for the biosphere. However, since our opponent is busily engaged in its very own destruction, we do not have to struggle against it to bring it down. It will fall of its own weight... We can therefore concentrate upon our new order’s process of self-assembly. The more that we do this, the more we entice others to join us and to defect from the old order. And the more that this occurs, the more the old order is undermined by this process of quiet secession from it.

I do not believe that future human societies will entail reversion to a pre-technological, pre-scientific order. Nor is such an order inherently benevolent; for example, there were few to no cities under feudalism, but the few still dominated and oppressed the many to their material enrichment. Needless suffering occurred, where the application of reason could have alleviated such senseless pain... What is necessary is a fundamental change within us—a change in our values and our understanding of our relationship with our environment. We must understand that we are integral parts of a greater whole, which encompasses all other humans and indeed all other life. We must use available renewable sources of energy with this understanding firmly in mind, and in ways which do not conflict with or undermine this understanding, or harm other life forms upon which our web of life depends.

We must institutionalize the lessons learned from the collapse of our present order in such a manner as to prevent its mistakes from being repeated in future ages. One planetary disaster is more than enough! I personally believe that we can do these things and still in the fullness of time rise to challenges which we of this present age can only dream. In a very real sense we can look at crises engendered from our present crises of civilization as a learning experience—but only if we actually learn from them... We are the creators of this future, and we must start with ourselves—right here and right now... Mike Byron, Ph.D., is a professor of political science in the San Diego area

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How RFID Tags Could Be Used to Track Unsuspecting People

A privacy activist argues that the devices pose new security risks to those who carry them, often unwittingly

By Katherine Albrecht - August, 2008 - SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN MAGAZINE

Radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags are embedded in a growing number of personal items and identity documents.

- Because the tags were designed to be powerful tracking devices and they typically incorporate little security, people wearing or carrying them are vulnerable to surreptitious surveillance and profiling.
- Worldwide, legislators have done little to address those risks to citizens.

If you live in a state bordering Canada or Mexico, you may soon be given an opportunity to carry a very high tech item: a remotely readable driver's license. Designed to identify U.S. citizens as they approach the nation's borders, the cards are being promoted by the Department of Homeland Security as a way to save time and simplify border crossings. But if you care about your safety and privacy as much as convenience, you might want to think twice before signing up.

The new licenses come equipped with radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags that can be read right through a wallet, pocket or purse from as far away as 30 feet. Each tag incorporates a tiny microchip encoded with a unique identification number. As the bearer approaches a border station, radio energy broadcast by a reader device is picked up by an antenna connected to the chip, causing it to emit the ID number. By the time the license holder reaches the border agent, the number has already been fed into a Homeland Security database, and the traveler's photograph and other details are displayed on the agent's screen... Although such "enhanced" driver's licenses remain voluntary in the states that offer them, privacy and security experts are concerned that those who sign up for the cards are unaware of the risk: anyone with a readily available reader device—unscrupulous marketers, government agents, stalkers, thieves and just plain snoops—can also access the data on the licenses to remotely track people without their knowledge or consent. What is more, once the tag's ID number is associated with an individual's identity—for example, when the person carrying the license makes a credit-card transaction—the radio tag becomes a proxy for that individual. And the driver's licenses are just the latest addition to a growing array of "tagged" items that consumers might be wearing or carrying around, such as transit and toll passes, office key cards, school IDs, "contactless" credit cards, clothing, phones and even groceries.

RFID tags have been likened to barcodes that broadcast their information, and the comparison is apt in the sense that the tiny devices have been used mainly for identifying parts and inventory, including cattle, as they make their way through supply chains. Instead of having to scan every individual item's Universal Product Code (UPC), a warehouse worker can register the contents of an entire pallet of, say, paper towels by scanning the unique serial number encoded in the attached RFID tag. That number is associated in a central database with a detailed list of the pallet's contents. But people are not paper products. During the past decade a shift toward embedding chips in individual consumer goods and, now, official identity documents has created a new set of privacy and security problems precisely because RFID is such a powerful

tracking technology. Very little security is built into the tags themselves, and existing laws offer people scant protection from being surreptitiously tracked and profiled while living an increasingly tagged life.

Beyond Barcodes

The first radio tags identified military aircraft as friend or foe during World War II, but it was not until the late 1980s that similar tags became the basis of electronic toll-collection systems, such as E-ZPass along the East Coast. And in 1999 corporations began considering the tags' potential for tracking millions of individual objects. In that year Procter & Gamble and Gillette (which have since merged to become the world's largest consumer-product manufacturing company) formed a consortium with Massachusetts Institute of Technology engineers, called the Auto-ID Center, to develop RFID tags that would be small, efficient and cheap enough to eventually replace the UPC barcode on everyday consumer products...By 2003 the group had developed a working version of the technology and attracted investment from more than 100 companies and government agencies. The tags' promoters promised the tiny chips would revolutionize inventory management and counterfeiting prevention [see "[RFID: A Key to Automating Everything](#)," by Roy Want; Scientific American, January 2004]... To kick-start government adoption of the technology, the General Services Administration (GSA), a federal bureau that manages purchasing for other government institutions, issued a memo in 2004 urging the heads of all federal agencies "to consider action that can be taken to advance the [RFID] industry." Suddenly, virtually every agency, from the Social Security Administration to the Food and Drug Administration, began announcing RFID trials.

During the same period, similar initiatives were under way around the world. In 2003 the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a United Nations agency that sets global passport standards, endorsed the use of RFID tags in passports. ICAO now calls for their use in all scannable "e-passports." Today dozens of countries, including the U.S., issue e-passports with RFID tags embedded in their covers... Since their debut, the new passports have been controversial on both privacy and security grounds. In a 2006 report one ICAO official promised that encryption measures would provide a "level of protection [that] should reassure the most anxious passport holder that his personal data cannot be read without his knowledge."

Security experts quickly proved otherwise. In 2007 British security consultant Adam Laurie cracked the encryption code on a U.K. passport and "skimmed," or remotely read, its personal information—while it was still sealed in its mailing envelope. Around the same time, German security consultant Lukas Grunwald copied the data from a German passport's embedded chip and encoded it into a different RFID tag to create a forged document that could fool an electronic passport reader. Investigators at Charles University in Prague, finding similar vulnerabilities in Czech e-passports, wrote that it was "a bit surprising to meet an implementation that actually encourages rather than eliminates [security] attacks."

Yet these demonstrated security problems have not slowed the adoption of RFID. On the contrary, the technology is being deployed for domestic ID cards around the world. Malaysia has issued some 25 million contactless national identity cards. Qatar is issuing one that stores the cardholder's fingerprint in addition to personal information. And in what industry observers are calling the single largest RFID project in the world, the Chinese government is spending \$6 billion to roll out RFID-based national IDs to nearly one billion citizens and residents... There is an important difference, however, between other nations' RFID-based ID cards and Homeland Security's new driver's licenses. Most countries' contactless national IDs and e-passports have adopted an RFID tag that meets an industry standard known as ISO 14443, which was developed specifically for identification and payment cards and has a degree of security and privacy protection built in. In contrast, U.S. border cards use an RFID standard known as EPCglobal Gen 2, a technology that was designed to track products in warehouses, where the goal is not security but maximum ease of readability... Whereas the ISO 14443 standard includes rudimentary encryption and requires tags to be close to a scanner to be read (a distance measured in inches rather than feet), Gen 2 tags typically have no encryption and only minimal data safeguards. To skim the data from an encrypted ISO 14443 chip, you have to crack the encryption code, but no special skills are required to skim a Gen 2 tag; all you need is any Gen 2 reader. Such readers can be purchased readily and are in common use in warehouses worldwide. A hacker or criminal armed with one could skim a border card through a purse, across a room, even through a wall... As of this past April, more than 35,000 Washington State motorists had signed up for enhanced driver's licenses, and other border states, including Arizona, Michigan and Vermont, have agreed to participate in the program. New York State will begin making the new licenses available to its residents after Labor Day.

But the possibility that the security of such cards could be compromised is just one reason for concern. Even if tighter data-protection measures could someday prevent unauthorized access to RFID-card data, many privacy advocates worry that remotely readable identity documents could be abused by governments that wish to tightly monitor and control their citizens.

China's national ID cards, for instance, are encoded with what most people would consider a shocking amount of personal information, including health and reproductive history, employment status, religion, ethnicity and even the name and phone number of each cardholder's landlord. More ominous still, the cards are part of a larger project to blanket Chinese cities with state-of-the-art surveillance technologies. Michael Lin, a vice president for China Public Security Technology, a private company providing the RFID cards for the program, unflinchingly described them to the New York Times as "a way for the

government to control the population in the future.” And even if other governments do not take advantage of the surveillance potential inherent in the new ID cards, ample evidence suggests that data-hungry corporations will.

Living a Tagged Life

If the idea that corporations might want to use RFID tags to spy on individuals sounds far-fetched, it is worth considering an IBM patent filed in 2001 and granted in 2006. The patent describes exactly how the cards can be used for tracking and profiling even if access to official databases is unavailable or strictly limited. Entitled “Identification and Tracking of Persons Using RFID-Tagged Items in Store Environments,” it chillingly details RFID’s potential for surveillance in a world where networked RFID readers called “person tracking units” would be incorporated virtually everywhere people go—in “shopping malls, airports, train stations, bus stations, elevators, trains, airplanes, restrooms, sports arenas, libraries, theaters, [and] museums”—to closely monitor people’s movements... According to the patent, here is how it would work in a retail environment: an “RFID tag scanner located [in the desired tracking location]... scans the RFID tags on [a] person.... As that person moves around the store, different RFID tag scanners located throughout the store can pick up radio signals from the RFID tags carried on that person and the movement of that person is tracked based on these detections.... The person tracking unit may keep records of different locations where the person has visited, as well as the visitation times.”... The fact that no personal data are stored in the RFID tag does not present a problem, IBM explains, because “the personal information will be obtained when the person uses his or her credit card, bank card, shopper card or the like.” The link between the unique RFID number of the tag and a person’s identity needs to be made only once for the card to serve as a proxy for the person thereafter. Although IBM envisioned tracking people via miniature tags in consumer goods, with today’s RFID border cards there is no need to wait for such individual product tags to become widespread. Washington’s new driver’s licenses would be ideally suited to the in-store tracking application, because they can already be read by Gen 2 inventory scanners in use today at stores such as Wal-Mart, Dillard’s and American Apparel.

A tracking infrastructure will become increasingly fruitful to marketers as more people begin carrying, and even wearing, RFID-tagged items. At present, tens of millions of contactless credit and ATM cards containing RFID tags are in circulation, along with millions of employee access badges. RFID-based public-transit passes, widely used in Europe and Japan, are also coming to U.S. cities. IBM’s person tracking unit is still only a patent, but an English amusement park called Alton Towers provides a living illustration of RFID’s tracking potential. On entering the park, each visitor is offered an RFID wristband encoded with a unique ID number. As people enjoy the attractions, a network of RFID readers placed strategically throughout the park detects each wristband as it comes within range and triggers nearby video cameras. Candid footage of each individual is stored in a file labeled with the wristband ID number, then made available to the customer on a keepsake DVD at the end of the day... Meanwhile the RFID train is barreling forward. Gigi Zenk, a spokesperson at Washington’s licensing agency, recently confirmed that there are 10,000 enhanced licenses “on the street now—that people are actually carrying.” That’s a lot of potential for abuse, and it will only grow. The state recently mustered a halfhearted response, passing a law that designates the unauthorized reading of a tag “for the purpose of fraud, identity theft, or for any other illegal purpose” as a class C felony, subject to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. Nowhere in the law does it say, however, that scanning for other purposes such as marketing—or perhaps “to control the population”—is prohibited. We ignore these risks at our peril.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

Katherine Albrecht holds a doctorate in education from Harvard University and is director of CASPIAN, a 15,000-member consumer privacy organization opposing retail surveillance. Since 2003 she has worked to expose and prevent unethical uses of RFID in products and in people. She regularly testifies before legislators and delivered a keynote address at a workshop on RFID and privacy held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She has also co-authored two books describing how corporate and governmental uses of RFID could threaten individual privacy and security



<http://www.pubrecord.org/nationworld/239-5-years-after-blackout-power-grid-still-in-dire-straits.htm>

5 Years After Blackout, Power Grid Still in 'Dire Straits'

By Jason Leopold - The Public Record - August 07, 2008 - Published in : [Nation/World](#)

Five years ago this month, a devastating blackout rippled through the Northeastern United States. The blackout plunged more than 50 million people into darkness for nearly three days and left a gaping \$10 billion hole in the nation’s economy... The power outage, however, wasn’t an isolated incident. - Three years later, in July 2006, Queens, New York lost power for nine days, which resulted from the deterioration of decades old electrical cables responsible for sending power to the city’s 100,000 residents...The US power grid - three interconnected grids made up of 3,500 utilities serving 283 million people - still hangs together by a thread, and its dilapidated state is perhaps one of the greatest threats to homeland security, according to Bruce deGrazia, the president of

Global Homeland Security Advisors and a former assistant deputy undersecretary for the Department of Defense, who spoke at an electricity industry conference in Shepherdstown, Van... The slightest glitch on the transmission superhighway could upset the smooth distribution of electricity over thousands of miles of transmission lines and darken states from Ohio to New York in a matter of seconds, bringing hospitals and airports to a standstill.

"The U.S. electrical grid—the system that carries electricity from producers to consumers—is in dire straits," the Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank, said in a report last year. "Electricity generation and consumption have steadily risen, placing an increased burden on a transmission system that was not designed to carry such a large load."

President George W. Bush made grand promises in the aftermath of the August 2003 blackout, vowing to modernize the nation's dilapidated electricity grid, and to work with Congress on a comprehensive energy bill that encouraged investment in the country's energy infrastructure... Yet, in the five years that have passed since the worst blackout in US history blanketed the Northeast, nothing substantial has been done to overhaul the power grid and Bush has failed to follow through on his pledge.

Now, severe power shortages and rolling blackouts have become a daily occurrence around the country as the antiquated power grid is continuously stretched beyond its means - mainly a result of electricity deregulation - whereby power is sent hundreds of miles across the grid to consumers by out-of-state power companies instead of being sent directly to consumers by their local utilities, which is what the grid was designed for.

In an article in the May 7, 2008 issue of Energy Bulletin, Gail E. Tverberg wrote "in the years ahead, we in the United States will have more and more problems with our electric grid. This is likely to result in electrical outages of greater and greater durations."... "Quite a few people believe that if there is a decline in oil production, we can make up much of the difference by increasing our use of electricity--more nuclear, wind, solar voltaic, geothermal or even coal. The problem with this model is that it assumes that our electric grid will be working well enough for this to happen. It seems to me that there is substantial doubt that this will be the case... "If frequent electrical outages become common, these problems are likely to spill over into the oil and natural gas sectors. One reason this may happen is because electricity is used to move oil and natural gas through the pipelines. In addition, gas stations use electricity when pumping gasoline and homeowners often have natural gas water heaters and furnaces with electric ignition. These too are likely to be disrupted by electrical power outages," Tverberg wrote.

In 2005, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave the power grid a 'D' rating in its report card on the state of domestic infrastructure. The group issues "report cards" every four years... "The U.S. power transmission system is in urgent need of modernization," a summary of ASCE's report says. "Growth in electricity demand and investment in new power plants has not been matched by investment in new transmission facilities. Maintenance expenditures have decreased 1% per year since 1992. Existing transmission facilities were not designed for the current level of demand, resulting in an increased number of "bottlenecks," which increase costs to consumers and elevate the risk of blackouts..." "A study conducted earlier this year by the Carnegie Mellon Electricity Industry Center concluded "Despite efforts to mitigate blackout risk, the data available from the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC) for 1984-2006 indicate that the frequency of large blackouts in the United States is not decreasing."

Demand for electricity is expected to increase by 45 percent by 2025, according to the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC), a power industry-funded organization in charge of overseeing the rules for operating the nation's power grid... "In some cases, demand has reached levels that were not expected for another three or four years," said Jone-Lin Wang, most recently the managing director of the Global Power Group at Cambridge Energy Research Associates. surging demand put the distribution systems through extreme stress, leading to some equipment failures and localized power outages."... But neither the Bush administration nor federal lawmakers have developed a comprehensive plan to handle, at the very least, the annual increase in demand. Blackouts will likely become more frequent in areas like New York and New England, Wang said... "We are concerned about New England because there is nothing in the pipeline, but some small renewable projects and wind," Wang said. "New England is in trouble."

Who will end the War on Science?

Last month the American public was treated to a "faith forum" during which the two principal presidential candidates answered questions about their religious convictions and how these guided their approach to issues like abortion, social justice and the economy. The forum took place in a 22,000-seat California mega-church and was televised across the nation... Two days later a group of officials, leaders and academics gathered at Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee for a National Science and Technology Summit, mandated by Congress as part of the 2007 America Competes Act, intended to stimulate discussions about the state of research in the US and the education system that keeps it supplied with talent... The disparity between these two events in terms of publicity could not be more stark. Science has a low profile in the US political arena, and that's worrying because science and technology are crucial to the well-being of the country, and to that of people around the world...

*In defining Science, The Technocracy Study Course opens thusly: Technocracy is dealing with social phenomena in the widest sense of the word; this includes not only actions of human beings but also everything that directly or indirectly affects their actions. Consequently, the studies of Technocracy embrace practically the whole field of science and industry; biology, climate, natural resources, and industrial equipment – all enter into the social picture... All things on the Earth are composed of matter and therefore require knowledge of **chemistry**. These things move, and in so doing involve **energy**. An understanding of these relationships requires knowledge of **physics**. Industrial equipment, as well as the substances of which living organisms are composed, is derived from the Earth. This requires a knowledge of **geology** and earth processes. Humans are organisms and derive their food from other organisms. Hence a knowledge of **biology** is necessary... thereby demonstrating the interconnectivity of these so called separate branches of science, and therefore Technocracy recognizes there is only one science. **Science is, in a dynamic sense, essentially a method of prediction. It has been defined as: The method of the determination of the most probable.***

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Boatloads of Trouble: How We Are Importing Our Way to Destruction

By Stan Cox, AlterNet - September 5, 2008

Nineteen hundred miles of railroad track separate Gardner, Kan., from the seaports of Southern California. But through the miracle of global trade, Gardner will soon be transformed into a Los Angeles suburb... Over the next decade, an "intermodal and logistics park" will be built on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railway at the southern edge of Gardner. It's needed to handle goods imported from Asia via the Los Angeles and Long Beach seaports. Gardner could eventually find itself playing host to as many as 30 freight trains per day, each a mile and a half long, along with thousands of big-rig trucks... The community of 16,000, just across the state line from Kansas City, Mo., will eventually be sandwiched between 7 million square feet of warehouses in the logistics park to the south and 4 million to 5 million square feet in an industrial park to the north. The total warehouse floor space easily exceeds that of all the housing in Gardner..."... And Claud Hobby, who will be living about three-fourths of a mile from the new facility, can already feel the burn of diesel fumes in his nostrils. The pollution will be growing thicker over his neighborhood with each passing year, but he's trying to keep his sense of humor. He says, "They talk about making Kansas a smoke-free state, but it looks like Gardner's going to be the designated smoking section."

With environmentalists devoting most of their efforts in recent years to sounding the alarm on global climate change, local pollution isn't always getting the attention it deserves. But if you share your neighborhood with the sprawling -- and growing -- infrastructure that moves imported goods from seaports to retailers, you can't help but pay attention. You don't need to be reminded that air pollutants, even when they're not warming the planet, can threaten your health and even your life.

Along the cancer trail

Economists, bureaucrats and investors rejoiced late last month when the Commerce Department [announced](#) that U.S. exports in June were up sharply, \$28.8 billion higher than in June 2007. The department made less noise about the rising tide of imports, which were up \$26.4 billion... Leaving aside that portion of the increased import bill that was due to rising oil prices, the nation's seaports, airports, railways and highways were still faced with moving an additional \$40 billion worth of stuff in and out across our borders, on top of the \$330 billion worth of stuff that's already going in and out each month... Imports -- mostly consumer and industrial goods, not oil -- continue to dominate over exports in America's trade equation. Hunger for imports keeps rising, and the nation's capacity to manufacture those products keeps shrinking. So hauling, sorting and delivering foreign-made goods has evolved into a fast-growing, high-tech, high-profit industry.

The American Association of Port Authorities says the nation's seaports are now handling 1.4 billion tons of goods annually and that waterborne container traffic will double by 2020. These days, as every shopper knows, a big share of that traffic is coming across the Pacific from Asia... Seattle and Oakland handle some of those Asian goods, but most enter the United States through the twin seaports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Together, they comprise the third-largest container-handling facility in the world, receiving 40 percent of all imports entering the country. Traffic through the two ports is expected to triple within 15 years... At those cargo bottlenecks where ships, trains and trucks converge, the air can kill you. Oceangoing ships burn the lowest of low-quality diesel oil, and the fuel used by locomotives isn't much better. Trucks burn a greater quantity of fuel per ton hauled, with correspondingly high emissions... According to Los Angeles and Long Beach authorities, the movement of cargo through their ports was responsible in 2005 for emissions laden with 6,000 tons of particle matter -- soot, smoke, dust, organic matter and other microscopic flecks that can invade deep into the lungs -- and more than 46,000 tons of nitrogen and sulfur oxides... In and near the world's ports and coastal sea lanes, emissions from oceangoing vessels caused 60,000 premature deaths in 2002. With increasing trade, the number of such deaths is projected to rise 40 percent by 2012. Ships' crews, dock workers, truckers, other port personnel and local residents are all vulnerable... The particulate matter produced by burning diesel has been associated with lung cancer, asthma, chronic bronchitis, cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease, decreased lung function in children and infant mortality... Currently, according to the California Air Resources Board (CARB), a relatively small community of 50,000 people living on the fringes of the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports suffers 25 new cases of cancer each year because of diesel pollution from ships, trucks and dock equipment. Similar cancer risks were found for people living near rail yards. Within a "several mile" radius of the ports, estimates CARB, the air pollutants kill about 75 people per year.

The great indoors

Given the rate at which shiploads, trainloads, truckloads and planeloads of goods have been arriving from abroad in the past eight months, 2008 is on track to set an all-time record for imports, topping \$2 trillion for the first time. (Not counting oil, imports will amount to more than \$1.8 trillion, also a record). Clearly, recent economic pain and soaring diesel fuel prices have not diminished Americans' appetite for imported merchandise... That merchandise never sits in one place for long. It is moved out of the ports, sorted at sophisticated warehouse complexes known as "logistics facilities," and distributed throughout the country as quickly as possible. In recent years, California's Inland Empire, lying east of Los Angeles in San Bernardino and Riverside counties, has already seen construction of logistics warehouses covering 330 million square feet... To get a mental picture of the massive extent of roofing and concrete that requires, imagine 7,300 football fields paved and enclosed (or have a look at [these images](#).) Similarly vast acreages surrounding the warehouses are paved as well. And remember, goods traffic in the area could triple in coming decades.

In a 2006 commentary, Andrea Hricko, associate professor at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine, cited an example of a doll, made in an Asian sweatshop and destined to sell for \$9.97 at one of Chicago's big-box discount stores. By the time the doll reaches Chicago, notes Hricko, "she has traveled more than 8,000 miles -- on diesel-burning conveyances the whole way." And she will have left a dark trail of pollution in the ports and communities she passed through... Hricko's doll, more than likely, arrives at the Los Angeles or Long Beach port and rides the Burlington Northern railway to the Elwood, Ill., intermodal terminal outside Chicago, where it is transferred to a truck. Once the intermodal facility in Gardner, Kan., goes into operation, the doll may end its train journey there and, after a quick rest in a warehouse, take a truck ride past Hobby's house on its way to Wal-Mart somewhere in the nation's midsection. From there, it will land in a child's bedroom for a while before going to the basement or garage and, eventually, a landfill... Hobby visited Elwood

last year to get a glimpse of his own future, and it wasn't pleasant: "With so many trucks in the area, they had three police officers on the roads directing traffic, and it still took me 30 minutes to drive one mile."

With a rising tide of imports from China and other countries choking the ports of Southern California and the roads around Chicago, the goods-transport system is looking for alternate routes, and Mexico stands ready to help. In contrast to the mythical "[NAFTA superhighway](#)," the rail lines from Mexico are very real, and they're humming. Month by month, more Asian goods are making landfall at the port of Lazaro Cardenas on southern Mexico's Pacific coast and riding the Kansas City Southern railway northeast for 2,200 miles... To unload merchandise at the other end, the railway and its corporate partners will be developing yet another intermodal hub, south of Kansas City and east of Gardner. It will have the potential for 23 million square feet of warehouse space on its 970 acres of land... The *Kansas City Star* reported in March that the developments at the intermodal hub are "all part of the railroad's strategy to encourage companies and ocean carriers to ship goods from Asia to Lazaro Cardenas and on into the United States." According to a transportation analyst quoted by the paper, "More than two-thirds of intermodal shipments are consumer goods. They (Kansas City Southern) have to convince the Wal-Marts, the J.C. Penneys and Home Depots to use the Mexico-U.S. corridor... The longer the haul, the better the margins and the greater the revenues (**for the railway**)."

The purchase-driven life

The sheer volume of imports, growing by the day, threatens to overwhelm all attempts to clean up the environment along trade routes. The value of goods being imported nationwide has risen 68 percent just in the past decade; that's after adjustments for inflation, and it excludes oil imports... Halting that growth or even making deep cuts in imports would not only help clear the air, it would make it easier to clean up the toxic water pollution that accumulates in sea lanes and ports; it would curb the noise pollution that can do serious damage to human health and interfere with communications among marine mammals; and it would stop the headlong rush to pave more land for logistics parks.

Slashing imports would address those and a host of other environmental and human-rights problems created by overproduction and overconsumption. But with an increasingly fragile economy that depends so heavily on consumer spending, politicians and economists continue to call for more trade, not less... That's certainly the case on the 2008 campaign trail. The presidential candidates express concern over imports only when urging "independence from foreign oil." Republican John McCain, a committed free-trader, saluted June's strong trade report, saying that it "provided an important reminder of the role that exports play in our economy."... Democratic candidate Barack Obama's campaign Web site says, "Obama believes that trade with foreign nations should strengthen the American economy and create more American jobs." In practice, he appears to [vacillate](#) between advocating mild trade regulations (for which critics repeatedly brand him as a "protectionist") and flirting with "strong dollar" policies that would bring in even higher volumes of imports.

On the issue of ports and distribution centers, environmentalists are focusing on pollution control, while assuming that consumption of imported goods will continue to grow. Asked if the root of the problem is simply that we're importing too much stuff, NRDC's Lass changed the subject back to efficiency: "We don't want to stand in the way of progress. We need a way to expand our ports in an environmentally sustainable manner and create more jobs."... In Kansas, too, the debate is over how to deal with the surge of imported goods, not how to curtail it. Hobby says that the Burlington Northern facility should be built in an area 14 miles farther south of Gardner, where there's plenty of open land: "We've had this thing thrown into our backyard. Instead, they should put it where growth can move toward it. Then any people or companies who don't mind being near this thing can buy land and move in around it."

A deep recession or depression could disrupt the "purchase-driven life" that fuels the American economy. Until then, it appears, the quest for more efficient methods of importing ever-greater tonnages will continue... A clean-running economy that can thrive on less production *and* less importation of consumer goods would look very different from today's economy. It may be out there somewhere in the future, but it's hard to see through the clouds of diesel exhaust... [Stan Cox](#) is a plant breeder and writer in Salina, Kan. His book, [Sick Planet: Corporate Food and Medicine](#), was published by Pluto Press (2008).



William Greider | Paulson Bailout Plan a Historic Swindle

<http://www.truthout.org/article/paulson-bailout-plan-a-historic-swindle>

William Greider, The Nation: "Financial-market wise guys, who had been seized with fear, are suddenly drunk with hope. They are rallying explosively because they think they have successfully stampeded Washington into accepting the Wall Street Journal solution to the crisis: dump it all on the taxpayers. That is the meaning of the massive bailout Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson has shopped around Congress. It would relieve the major banks and investment firms of their mountainous rotten assets and make the public swallow their losses - many hundreds of billions, maybe much more. What's not to like if you are a financial titan threatened with extinction?"

Seven Hundred Billion Dollars Sought for Wall Street in Vast Bailout

<http://www.truthout.org/article/seven-hundred-billion-dollars-sought-wall-street-vast-bailout>

David M. Herszenhorn, The New York Times: "The Bush administration on Saturday formally proposed a vast bailout of financial institutions in the United States, requesting unfettered authority for the Treasury Department to buy up to \$700 billion in distressed mortgage-related assets from the private firms. The proposal, not quite three pages long, was stunning for its stark simplicity. It would raise the national debt ceiling to \$11.3 trillion. And it would place no restrictions on the administration other than requiring semiannual reports to Congress, granting the Treasury secretary unprecedented power to buy and resell mortgage debt."

Howard Scott's definitions: A Criminal: "Any Human Being with Predatory Instincts and insufficient capital to start a Corporation." ... Public Confidence: "That euphoric state of mind desired by every Chiseler, where-in the Sucker forgets the last time he was "Trimmed".

The JPM Derivatives Monster - 09/19/08 http://www.gold-eagle.com/gold_digest_01/hamilton091001.html

The SEC said today it will initially ban short-selling on 799 financial stocks for 10 days but this could be extended for up to 30 days. In the UK, the FSA has permanently prohibited short-selling, where traders make money by betting a share price will drop sometime over a four month period. This is how Rockefeller through JP Morgan Chase, and the Rothschilds through their banks and the BIS et al, acquired an extra \$50 Trillion of the world's corporate assets on 9/11 of 2001. Rockefeller currently owns 5% of the world-corporate-state, worth \$50 Trillion, and the Rothschild family owns about thirty percent of 'that world', valued at about \$300 Trillion.

[The BIS is part of the international security-state banking cartel -- currently publicly 'auditing' its own (US) Federal Reserve! That cartel is above the law, by law, giving them the privilege of being both the security-state managers-of and profit-takers-from their routine 'crashings' of the world markets. Other members include the Rothschild London Banks, the Federal Reserve, Goldman Sachs, Deutsche Bank andCitigroup.]

"Let me issue and control a Nation's money and I care not who makes its laws." -- Meyer Amschel Rothschild

Energy Added Input: 0.040 kwh