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Faced with a food and energy crisis, how can society improve its well-being?

Introduction

In contemporary society, the public generally maintain strong ideological values. But as resources such as food and energy are used up, the future of civilization appears increasingly bleak. However it isn't too late for society to make changes, if the issues are addressed now. Commercially speaking it could be argued that although food resources are becoming increasingly difficult to replenish and non-renewable energy sources are beginning to run out, at the rate society blindly keeps manufacturing in ways that waste and use up, implies we are not yet at crisis point, "The energy crisis is a snare and a delusion. Worse, it's a hustle." Antony C. Sutton, economist and historian, from article 'The food and energy crisis, fiction or reality?' This is an opinion which will need to be challenged if society is to be successful in improving its well being. Energy consumption from transport from 1980 to 2006 has increased for using the capacity of 37 million tonnes of oil to using 60 million tonnes in the space of 26 years; Statistics are from UK defra e-digest environment statistics online. So it emerges that population growth and the demands of living increase vehicle usage, and as the pollution from carbon emissions pollute the atmosphere, it alters of makes growing food a social nightmare.

Historically, during the 1960's there was a revelation in China, which meant technological advances when Maoism – a new era communism arrived. This resulted in industrialisation, also the population ratio increased as with other countries, particularly developing countries, more community means more need for energy production. Another historical event which brought about the requirement for fossil fuel usage was the Second World War. It is synthetic plastics which use crude oil, coal and natural gas in their manufacture. Synthetic plastics begin to be created in the early 20th century and the huge industry of plastics which is known today was a result of meeting the demands of the Second World War, providing a cheap way of constructing products in times of hardship. Before synthetics, natural plastics were constructed from materials such as plant matter, and other natural resources, if the plant materials was sustainable then returning to natural plastic should be considered. 'Even with major technological breakthroughs, renewables could account for only 30 per cent of energy supply by the middle of the century.' A figure set by Van Der Veer, at an estimate even with relying on renewable energy to replace the non-renewable energy loss, the world's energy supply will inevitably strain in the next 50 years, and therefore other alternatives will need to be explored.

As the population has so heavily relied on the use of fossil fuels to maintain its ever growing demand for power source, (the main resource of fuel of course being oil) the supplies from the countries that have oil wells are beginning to get used up. This is because oil (and other fossil fuels) takes millions of years to occur naturally in the earth, so their reproduction doesn't happen quickly enough to replace what has been used. There are two main reasons that non-renewable energy sources are chosen over the renewable, being that they are easy to harvest and readily available, for now. "Although there is no shortage of oil and gas in the ground, Mr. van der Veer says, the industry currently lacks the technology to recover even half of that resource." The Time 25th June 2007, Non-renewable energy does however have its disadvantages, being pollution and that once they are used up they will be impossible to replace for millions of years and leave behind waste products, which can be damaging to the environment. As the flow of oil reaches crisis point, restricted now to wells in Russia, Ukraine and other parts of Europe, importing costs sky rocket as availability begins to cease, the cost of petrol increases and use of the conventional vehicle becomes more strained. The solution is to quite simply find a source of renewable energy that can be easily obtained and replaced as well as not contaminate the atmosphere. However, "Contrary to public perceptions, renewable energy is not the silver bullet that will soon solve all our problems," as stated by Jeroen Van Deer Veer, The Times 25th June 2007. There is a danger that society will, not seeing renewable energy as a convenience start burning coal for energy and fuel, making CO2 emissions rapidly increase, and with a rapid increase in the cost of crops due to their slumping seasonal availability, the risk of creating more GM crops is imminent.

Society is very wasteful, so in order to reduce the use of more expensive materials such as wood and metals, man uses oil in the process of manufacturing plastic which constructs an array of household and general products. Plastic is cheap, but if the wood contributed is from sustainable forests, an immense amount of plastic production could be cut down. If all materials: metal, glass, plastic, wood are recycled so too is its energy, alternative materials should be found for products that don't need to be constructed from plastic, such as bottles which could be made from glass. This would then mean that with the prices of oil rising, plastic would become more widely recycled, so the crude oil that manufactured it could be extracted and used again for the purpose of products that actually do have to be constructed from plastic. It needs to be carefully considered with product don't really need to incorporate plastic into their final design; another example would be over packaged food produce such as biscuits and crisps. In densely populated urban zones, where workers have access to public transport, or are within 20 minutes walking distance of their workplace, should not be eligible to own a car. However, the disadvantages of this suggestion are that those who are not eligible will not be able to travel long distances throughout the land for

personal reasons on their terms. Perhaps an alternative solution to this would be ownership of electric, LPG, or hydrogen powered cars, rapidly decreasing carbon emissions and providing the freedom to still use transport when required. 'It has been estimated that enough sunlight hits the earth each day to meet the world's energy needs for 20 years.' The oil factor by Stephen Leeb states, collecting solar power could be achieved by using solar roof panels on housing and cars. Other exceptional methods of collating renewable energy sources would be wind farms and gathering hydrogen, with the only by-product being water, resulting in less pollution, but it's obligatory for hydrogen to be separated from elements as it doesn't stand alone. Finally another possible solution to consider is advancement and investing in the space programme in order to harvest resources from other planets which have hydrogen in their atmosphere, for example mars which is reachable via space probes. Although this procedure could take years, the renewable energy provided by earth's atmosphere and recycling process would be an instantaneous answer, while a more long term one is discovered.

Conclusion

Ultimately to solve the problem of the impending food and energy crisis society is required to make several changes and stick to them. If renewable energy doesn't provide a complete answer it should least provide part of it. The renewable power sources could then be combined with a reduction in vehicle use for short feasible distances and decreasing mass production of plastic goods. To relive to food crisis organic home grown produce should be widely encouraged and educated as well as free tool kits supplied to every household. Unnecessary production of additional plastic packaging should also cease. The public need to become energy efficient, incorporate the use of renewable energy resources even if it does only count for 30% of future energy resources and recycle all reusable consumables.