

## Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

**ID number:** 986

### **Summary:**

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This essay deals with the question if our (western) society despite the challenges provided by food and energy crises can improve its well-being. I approach the topic not from an idealistic but from a more rational viewpoint. After a short introduction I divide the topic into two parts. First, I deal with the question of food then I continue with the issue of energy, which is closely related to the questions of availability of mineral resources. Finally, in the conclusion of this essay I provide an answer to the question in title.

### **Essay:**

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The lack of food and/or mineral resources is a quite popular topic. Most people from university campuses to pubs all seem to have an opinion. The media is full of experts and “experts” on environmental subjects and everybody talks about protecting nature and alternative energy sources. But in spite of the popularity of those topics there is a lack of progress, it almost seems like nothing is happening – apart from the almost periodically organized conferences of world leaders.

Many ordinary people in the West don't even realize that their living conditions are better than those of the 70-80% of the planets population. But why is it so? What is the basis of the prosperity of the West? The answer is quite simple – it is the abundance of food and mineral resources. For most people it was only one of many topics in the news but imagine – in 2007-2008 there was a world food price crisis! People in the West experienced at most that they had to pay a few cents more for the bread in the supermarket but in Egypt or in Bangladesh the increasing prices of food lead to street violence.

When it comes to energy the fragility of the West was laid bare during the Russian–Ukrainian gas disputes in 2008/2009. They lasted just a few weeks but imagine what would happen if, for some reason, one of our main suppliers of crude oil decides that he just simply closes the valves? Just think about it – most mineral resources on which the western way of life and prosperity is based are mined outside of the West, despite this the West is the greatest consumer of mineral resources in the world. This can't hold on for much longer. Besides, the population of the West is aging and slowly shrinking and the population in poor countries is increasing. The West is besieged by immigration from the developing world. But what drives those people to the West? Most African and Near/Middle Eastern countries from where most of the immigrants come are plagued by a lack of food, civil wars, epidemics and corrupt regimes, in short – bad living conditions. This puts our societies under pressure because we are partly dependent on the workforce of these immigrants but we also have to share with them some of our wealth in the form of social or unemployment benefits and this in turn generates more immigration.

But what is the root of the problem? Where did it begin? It began approximately two centuries ago when modern capitalism was born. Marx was right when he said that the basic premise of capitalism is exploitation of human beings, but this exploitation doesn't end with human beings, we exploit not only each other but also our environment. It seems absurd but for most transnational companies it is more profitable to produce goods (cars, computers but also foodstuff or furniture) on the other part of the world and then ship them back and sell them here in the West – this is called globalization. This trend cannot continue indefinitely, the world has not enough mineral resources that would allow everybody such a wasteful lifestyle.

I think, that now, we can formulate a conclusion and give an answer to the question in the title. The society, at least our current western society, simply can't improve its well-being. Surely, there is no lack of good intentions, but there is definitely a lack of will to change something. As long as the political and economic elites of our society don't feel compelled to act and limit our dependence on mineral resources and end, or at least restrict the wasteful way of life that is collectively called "consumer society" there will be no change. In the next few decades mineral resources will become even scarcer and the prices of food will increase. When we now have problems of providing enough food for the people what will we do with the next few billions that will be around here in the next decades? When we think that the price of oil is high what will we do when the two and a half billion Chinese and Indians decide that they want to drive to work with their cars like the people in the West? That are not easy questions and it seems like that everybody is just waiting that something will happen. Well, we will find out in the next few years.