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ENERGY AND THE NATION  
The Social and Political Trends

John R. Dew

Abstract

The manner in which America fulfills her energy needs will be in accordance with a process begun during Theodore Roosevelt's era and expanded throughout this century. By continuing its gradual centralization and aggrandizement the Federal government will eventually control every aspect of energy supply and consumption in the United States. More than any other factor, the energy situation will cause Americans to realize their dependence upon global politics and affairs. Our stability will not only depend upon meeting domestic energy demands but upon the ability of European and developing nations to meet the demands of their economies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The United States, along with the rest of the world, has entered a crisis period when economic, social, and political stability and development depend upon increasing our capacity to produce and wisely use more energy. The ultimate task confronting this nation extends far beyond insuring domestic tranquility through higher living standards. The wealth of all nations and the condition of all men must be greatly uplifted through technology, applied in harmony with our environment.

The social and political aspects of the energy crisis are numerous and varied and cannot be adequately discussed in any single study. This paper will focus upon domestic, social, and political issues which will influence energy policy and be influenced by energy decisions. Secondly, this paper will examine the impact of energy policies on our economically developed allies and the underdeveloped nations, and consider recent developments in the Soviet Union.

Finally, some observations will be offered concerning social and political implications of the use of fossil fuels and nuclear energy.

2. DOMESTIC ASPECTS

The most recent projections comparing domestic energy consumption and production presented by the Energy Information Administration to Congress are not encouraging.<sup>(1)</sup> In 1975, the United States consumed 70.6 quadrillion BTUs while producing only 59.1 quads. The difference was made up by importing 13.5 quads in the form of oil. Projections of domestic consumption by 1985 range from 91.2 quads to 96.9 quads while production ranges only from 68.3 to 75.5 quads. Imports for 1985 range from 20.4 to 28.3 quads, which, the report points out, exceeds the National Energy Plan's import figures. The 6.1 million barrels of oil imported each day in 1975 grew to 8.7 Mmb/d in 1977 and is projected to rise to

between 9.1 and 12.5 MMb/d by 1985. By 1990 imported oil is projected to range from 9.8 MMb/d to 16.1MMb/d. This may simply be a burden too great for our economy to manage.

If the United States meets these energy requirements, it will be by continuing a process begun under Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt created close cooperation between government and science through the conservation movement and this combination of science and government grew together during the 1930s and mushroomed with the Second World War. Modern American affluence stems directly from the continuing centralization and aggrandizement of the federal government and the expanding scientific community. Today most Americans either work directly for the government either at the federal, state, or local level, or for a corporation which depends on government contracts, or work by providing goods and services for the people in the first two categories. Federal funds support education, highway construction, housing, health care, and the massive defense industry so that tax dollars now undergird most aspects of the economy.

In the same way, federal funds now control sizeable portions of energy production and may eventually dominate it. For instance, the federal government has always directly controlled the essential technology for producing nuclear energy. Through the Tennessee Valley Authority the federal government created and sustains much of our hydroelectric power generation and many coal-fired generators. All aspects of the oil, gas, and coal industries are fundamentally influenced and regulated by the federal government and have been more tightly controlled during national emergencies. Federally funded research programs are designed to harness every conceivable energy source. Tax dollars support research to replace gasoline with alcohol or electric automobiles. Government grants support most solar research, geothermal studies, laser research, and investigations into using various forms of fossil-fuels. All aspects of nuclear fusion and fission research are financed by the federal govern-

ment as well as wind studies and the possibilities of orbiting solar satellites.

As supplies of privately owned oil and gas dwindle, and the expense of imported oil becomes prohibitive, the federal government will control larger portions of available energy resources. Only the federal government will invest the billions of dollars necessary to build risky prototypes required in the major energy proposals now being considered. However, the government can distribute energy technology, if it so chooses, to maintain the image of free enterprise as we know it, and has done so with less sensitive parts of the nuclear fuel cycle. Possibly the government will expand its current practice of hiring private corporations to operate costly equipment developed and financed by the government. In the field of energy, the United States might resemble Japan, with its close cooperation between business and government, creating what could be termed an America, Inc. Critics of this trend already point out the so-called "revolving door" through which top officials move in and out of government and business positions.

Recognizing that energy needs will be met increasingly by government control still allows latitude for social and political pressure to influence government policies. It is a safe bet that no matter what energy policies are implemented by any administration, many people will be unhappy, and their discontent will fuel the political opposition's fire. People who oppose an energy plan will either guide the energy proposals of the party out of office, or will be exploited by politicians seeking office.

The political parties controlling government believe changes in domestic energy consumption must be gradual to insure social and economic stability which promotes tenure of political office. The present strategy employs a ubiquitous number or regulations, investments, taxes, and incentives to attempt to ease the public

into conserving fuel and adopting alternate fossil-fuel sources. Since the party in office controls the purse strings to most research and development of energy resources it actively chooses which to employ. However, to the consternation of many technically oriented people, the choice of developing energy systems is a political one subject to demagogery, pork-barreling, and corruption.

For now, the successful politicians may be those who exploit the public's fears of technically sophisticated energy systems, such as the various nuclear options. To gain office some opportunists already exploit the good intentions of people who advocate limited growth and soft technology such as solar options, and, in so doing, will eventually undermine the legitimate concerns and benefits of these approaches.

As the Department of Energy grows in magnitude to rival the military establishment, it will find appropriations subject to Congressional bartering. Many Senators and Congressmen will build their political careers by pork-barreling to locate new energy facilities in their states or districts regardless of the national needs. Indeed, many proposed systems will be funded by swapping Congressional votes for large energy packages in exchange for energy facilities in home districts. The President may eventually exploit this as a means to reward party loyalty with a reactor or punish party opponents by withholding a proposed steam plant. Without doubt, many states are now dominated by powerful energy concerns which stand to profit or lose by energy policies. Senators and Representatives who owe industry favors for campaign contributions can repay their debts by supporting energy policies favorable to their benefactors, regardless of the nation's welfare or security.

### 3. INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS

When the energy crisis finally becomes tangible to most Americans it will intensify their awareness of the ties binding them with other developed nations and with developing countries. Domestic energy policies not only affect our economy but the economies of Western Europe, Japan, Africa, and South America. The stability of the European Community is already threatened by a declining economic growth rate caused by spiraling energy prices. As a result of this economic stress, William Haferkamp, a top European Economic Community trade official, foresees trade protectionism which could lead to the re-emergence of Facism in Europe.(2) Without the economic strength of the European Community, the American economy will rapidly decline and national security will be undermined. However, instead of assisting our European allies in developing the more viable solutions to their energy needs, such as the fast breeder reactor, the United States is raising anti-nuclear barriers. The export restrictions of the Anti-proliferation Act threaten the efforts of the Euratom countries who do not want to be hampered in reprocessing spent fuel which was enriched in the United States.(3) Furthermore, instead of stringently conserving foreign oil, the United States continues its wanton consumption. Many European critics claim this will directly lead to energy shortages in Europe by the mid-1980s, driving gas and oil in Europe even higher and worsening the inflation rate which will topple the western democracies.

If present national energy policies exasperate our affluent allies they are deadly for the economically underdeveloped nations. In the name of non-proliferation, the United States has turned its back on the third world nations which look to us for technical solutions to raise their standards of living. Bayard Rustin, president of the

Phillip Randolph Institute, states that the very existence of democracy in underdeveloped nations depends principally on America and Europe's ability to provide economic growth.(4) Of course soft technology will gradually improve living conditions in poor countries, but the concentrated plight of people in cities such as Jakarta and Calcutta demand sophisticated technical solutions which cannot wait three or four more decades. One proven alternative capable of supplying large and small amounts of electricity to depressed areas is nuclear energy. However, the United States has repeatedly interrupted the sale of reactors by European countries to developing nations, such as Pakistan, and offers no nuclear assistance on its own. A nation such as India has difficulty even re-fueling a small reactor such as the one at Tarapur. If economic conditions in the underdeveloped nations are allowed to deteriorate because energy technology is withheld, these nations will surely realign themselves politically. The former Secretary-General of the United Nations, U Thant, placed the issue in perspective in 1969 when he estimated that development methods must be launched by 1979 or the plight of poor nations would be beyond control.(5)

Another important international political aspect concerning energy policies relates to the Soviet Union. The Soviets are widely held to be facing an energy crisis of their own in the mid 1980s as their oil sources are depleted. They will be unable to export oil to the east European communist bloc nations which could undermine the Soviet control of these areas. However, the Soviets are well-known for their five year plans and they are developing some firm energy plans of their own. A high priority in the Soviet Union now is the construction of numerous thermal reactor power plants to be operational in the mid 1980s.(6) For long range energy production the Soviets are developing the Liquid Metal Fast Breeder Reactor. A Russian prototype fast breeder reactor is reportedly ready for operation in 1980 and plans are continuing on a larger breeder, the

BN-1600.(7) If the Soviets overcome their energy crisis while we do not adequately overcome ours there should be little doubt in anyone's mind about the fate of our democracy.

#### 4. FOSSIL FUELS

It is increasingly popular in the United States today to claim that energy requirements can be met by emphasizing fossil fuels. By raising prices, the argument goes, an abundance of natural gas and oil will flow and new coal seams will be mined. This presents an easy answer to our energy needs which many people will readily adopt in the short term. However, some unsettling facts about coal raise some disturbing questions about the social impact of its use. Although coal makes up 85% of our domestic fossil fuel reserves, it contributed only 20% toward national requirements in 1977.(8) It is doubtful that the coal industry can increase its production to the 1.3 billion tons a year required by 1985 to handle oil and gas-fired electric generators now converting to coal plus the present coal-fired generators. More coal, at increasingly higher prices, will foster inflation and unemployment, leaving increasing numbers of Americans unable to afford the cost of living. This will lead to increased social and political instability while leaving the basic problem of providing affordable energy still unsolved. The total cost of coal as an energy source is a big unknown when the ecological and technical aspects are considered. Much of the readily available coal which will be used is high sulfur coal, and although the fluid-bed furnace is being developed it will not be feasible to re-fit all the generators now in use. After the coal is stripped and the air and water is fouled, the nation may still be economically crippled while a viable long-term energy supply will still be needed.

While Europe and the United States rely on coal reserves to meet the demands of the next decades, the underdeveloped nations will be left out. Few poor countries have any energy resources to convert to while

oil and gas prices increase to satisfy the developed nations' appetites. While preaching the merits of domestic coal we delay the development of other technology and consign millions of people to a very dim future.

#### 5. NUCLEAR POWER

Critics opposed to nuclear power claim that if nuclear options are widely adopted the nation will be forced into becoming a police state to prevent sabotage and diversion of spent fuel. A police state is not unlikely if the nation falls into serious economic trouble thirty years from now because it failed to utilize nuclear technology. A police state is not unlikely if the United States finds itself virtually alone in the international arena after losing allies and potential allies to the communist bloc by failing to support them in meeting their energy demands. Certainly there will be more people working under security clearances in a nuclear economy, but a little more security is not too high a price to pay for a healthy economy and stable alliances.

A wide variety of nuclear reactors such as fast breeder reactors, thorium reactors, and thermal reactors can now be developed which could profoundly influence the domestic and foreign political and social situations. For instance, the energy potential in the uranium which has already been mined and is now being stored by the Department of Energy equals the nation's entire unmined coal reserves.(9) At home, more reactors mean less oil imports and thereby less inflation which will benefit the whole nation. Abroad, reactors can make the difference between life and death for millions of people, and nothing can be more profound politically and socially than that. However, present administration policies combined with irresponsible muckraking in the media are currently damaging the nuclear industry. A minority of anti-nuclear demonstrators are capturing the nation's attention with unfounded accusations and spurious issues.

The energy crisis now upon us is a crisis because it demands unified, decisive action

on technical issues with serious social and political implications. Billions of dollars invested by government and business are at stake. The lives of this generation will be drastically influenced by the decisions made in the next decade. The life or death of millions of people in poor countries are also at stake. The magnitude of the energy crisis' impact is staggering and it should be a sobering thought that the future of this country, and the fate of western civilization, hangs in the balance.

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#### Biography

The author earned his Masters of Art in American History from Murray State University and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Kentucky Wesleyan College.