

In search of a new Energy

Did you ever wonder what makes the world go round? I mean, what powers the diverse technical world we live in? From airplanes and automobiles to toasters and Teenage Mutant Ninja turtle figurines. If you take everything we have and seek out a common denominator that makes it all possible, the answer would be energy. Without energy, and abundant supplies of it, our world and way of life would grind to a screeching halt within a matter of seconds (perhaps, as some would indicate, it would be much for the better). Almost every manufactured object that we possess requires energy. All of our computers, phones, televisions, cars and homes (the staples of the Western world) require energy. Actually, we are now so dependent on energy that all anyone would have to do to severely cripple our modern society would be to destroy the Gulf oil fields (hmm... that sounds familiar). Well, a more likely scenario of our society's demise will be energy depletion. Current estimates project that the world's current fossil fuel supply will only last approximately another 60 to 100 years at the current rate of consumption. These are not alarmist projections but projections done by the oil companies themselves. Imagine, in sixty years, the world's energy resources could be run dry. Yet, every year, the consumption rates increase. One would think that there

might be a bit of panic or at least a slight sense of anxiety about this paradox. Of course, I've not even mentioned the vicious assault that the pollution from this energy utilization has made on our environment. With the current trend of ecological damage caused by fuel exhaust, in sixty years, our planet may be uninhabitable. Perhaps that's why people aren't too worried.

Fortunately, the average person has enough common sense to realize that we can't go on the way we have been. The problem is that few people realize that the longer we procrastinate, the more irreversible our energy problem becomes. Heaven knows that in this country we can't count on our enlightened leaders to provide any solutions. In Canada, a politician's foresight goes as far as the next election. A logical course of action seems to be to conduct research into the alternative energy field (you remember... hydrogen fuel, solar energy, wind power, etc) and find a non-polluting renewable energy source that will fulfill our needs. Unfortunately, Canada spends one of the lowest amounts on any kind of research out of all the western developed countries. It seems that the cur-

rent administration attitude is "Let's burn it up, the future will take care of itself!" Stupid? Yes, of course, but remember where it's coming from.

However, we can't let our politicians shoulder all the blame (they have enough as it is!). A problem of this magnitude is the responsibility of the world community and their track record

hasn't been much better. Remember the most recent fiasco in the Persian Gulf. During

this episode, the world rallied around George Bush and his Patriot missiles to save the world from an evil tyrant bent on subjecting a humble and innocent people to his cruel and capricious will. Give me a break. It was about oil, for oil and because of oil. The fact that the coalition gave the idiot Saddam a slap in the head is nice, but if he'd invaded some backward, poor third world nation instead of oil rich Kuwait, we would have heard nary a word. The thing that disturbs me the most is that if all the billions of dollars and technological wizardry that was used on Desert Storm went into energy research, we would have probably found a viable alternative source and wouldn't have to worry about megalomaniac Arabs again.

So, just why hasn't the world come

up with a reasonable substitute for fossil fuels yet. I mean, how hard can it be? Internal combustion engines that run on clean burning and renewable hydrogen? A super long lasting battery cell? We always hear now and again how close they are to developing these things. Well, where are they? I mean, we've put a man on the moon, we've got super computers and super conductors, we can even listen to the late Nat King Cole sing a duet with his daughter, so why can't we come up with an alternative form of energy. Well, if I might hazard a guess, I'd say it probably has something to do with the fact that oil business is worth more money that you and I can count to. Imagine small Joe scientist discovers a means to fulfill the world's energy needs with an inexpensive, renewable resource. I doubt that Exxon, B.P., Gulf and the others are just going to roll over and die. There are two kinds of *successful* renewable energy scientists... the kind that's given up research and counting his money is his South American villa and the kind that's counting fishes at the bottom of an anonymous lake while wearing cement galoshes.

The deck is stacked against those of us who wish to leave a clean sustainable world for our children. Not only do we have to convince the powers that be that it is a goal we must actively pur-

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Chris Reid

The Treadmill

Shedding the golden handcuffs

Bob Chondon and Al Jones, both of Thunder Bay, are caught in the middle. The brothers-in-law are two of the 400 people laid off by the mothballing of Abitibi Price's Thunder Bay division mill. Their union, the Canadian Paperworkers, has rejected the company's last severance package because a sweetened severance package for the Thunder Bay division employees was coupled to also accepting concessions at the company's other mills. Bob says "the union's trying to get a feather in their cap by saying 'look what we did for the Abitibi-Price boys', but they're dragging it out." So Bob and Al and the other 400 are caught in the middle of a company-union standoff.

Bob and Al are also caught in the vortex of a major societal transformation. The Canadian economy, particularly in northern Ontario, is painfully moving from an industrial to a post industrial or an "information age" economy. Bob and Al are forced to jump straight from the industrial jobs they held for more than a decade and a half each to a new world that's evolving under their feet.

Al says he never liked working at his old job, but it was a comfortable existence. "I hated the place from the minute I stepped in 'till the moment I was kicked out. I hated it - hot, noisy. The only thing good about it was the people we worked with. I was a paper maker. I started off on the low job - sixth hand - and worked up to relief

machine tender and back tender, but as for working for someplace that I liked or anything, no, that was no loss to me."

"But as much as I hated the place, when we were on 12 hour shifts, I had four days on, four days off, and when you took a couple of floaters (extra days off) you're hardly working at all. The money was good. It raised a family, put my oldest daughter through Lakehead University, and it paid off my house. The money's good."

Sociologists say people like Al and Bob were wearing "golden handcuffs" until they were laid off. The "golden" part comes from the fact that, like Al says, the money was very good. The work was awful, but the pay was high enough and the time off frequent enough that he didn't look around for alternatives. But Bob and Al were "handcuffed" nonetheless - lulled into believing that their jobs would always be there until they retired, so they didn't need to worry about anything except their next shift or their next holiday.

I explained the concept of "golden handcuffs" to Bob and Al, and they knew exactly what I meant. Bob says, "I knew that if I was to focus on just my job and have the golden handcuffs on, my brain would go dormant. So I got involved with unions. I went from

Treasurer right up to union president for five years. In 1979, in conjunction with my union work, I joined the credit union movement. And since then, I've been on the board of directors."

Al didn't get involved in the community like Bob did while at the mill, but he's landed on his feet nonetheless, since being laid off March 31st. The two have spent a lot of time researching various business opportunities, especially franchises. They've studied a

customized packaging business, Baskins & Robins' Ice

Cream and Subway sandwich shops, before settling on their first choice; on-premise custom beer brewing.

Al's eyes sparkle when he starts to talk about it. Bob's enthusiasm is contagious. The two of them have found something that really seems to make sense, the more they research it. In their store, to be called The Brewing Experience, a customer will be able to pick from one of 80 brewing recipes, buy all the ingredients, and then brew their own beer, right in the store. Instead of brewing your own beer at home with all the mess and hassle, you use the store's space and expertise.

The Brewing Experience started two years ago in Guelph. Franchises have since opened in Toronto, Ottawa and Cornwall. Bob and Al have sunk their severance pay into buying the licence

for Thunder Bay. Bob thinks the market is ready for it. "The average beer consumption in Ontario is 88 litres a year. In the Thunder Bay district, Marathon to the Manitoba border, it's two and half times that. Now if that isn't incentive enough, I don't know."

By buying into a franchise, Bob and Al have side-stepped a lot of the usual problems connected with starting a new business; the franchise fee provides them with a model business plan to follow, advertising material and market-tested products. They've already closed the deal on a substantial bank loan and were about to close a deal for a lease on their new store when I interviewed them recently.

I have no idea whether Bob and Al's Brewing Experience will succeed or fail. The point is that Bob and Al have shed their "golden handcuffs." They're not sitting around moping and waiting for Abitibi and the union to settle, or for someone to run up and offer them a job. They know their old paper making jobs are history. Besides, they didn't like those jobs anyways. They've now got a real opportunity. They're willing to risk their severance pay and set up a new business, using all the expertise and support they can find.

Bob says, "We are part of a special group, and if we don't take advantage of it now, we'll never get that shot again. It's like a window opening. The windows open, so take advantage of it,

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**NORTHERN
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders

