

King Coal

Riches for a Handful – Tragedy for the Rest

“Increasing global industrial and consumer demand for more power are expected to result in the construction of new coal-fired power plants producing 1,400 gigawatts of electricity by 2030, according to the International Energy Agency. These new plants **will increase worldwide annual emissions of carbon dioxide** by approximately **7.6 billion metric tons by 2030**. These emissions, which will accelerate global warming, would **equal roughly 50 percent of all fossil fuel emissions over the past 250 years.**”

Half of all fossil fuel emissions over the past 250 years; that’s an astounding figure, isn’t it? Let’s see; all that since the year 1759; what was occurring at that point in history?

In the year 1759, George Washington was 27 years old when he and Martha Dandridge Curtis were married. On the international scene, Pope Clement XIII allowed the Bible to be translated into languages other than the official Latin; the British Museum opened in London and Arthur Guinness, bless his heart, built a brewery to bottle stout in Dublin.

Many things have happened since 1759: wars and revolutions that saw the demise and creation of new countries; technological innovations that took mankind from the outhouse to the flushing toilet, the 2 year and 4 months long exploration of Lewis and Clark to the Pacific Ocean, and the hard 6 month-long journey of pioneers across the Oregon Trail in Conestoga wagons; to Neil Armstrong blasting off from Cape Canaveral on July, 16 1969 and 4 days later walking on the moon; and from Pony Express riders on horseback being replaced by the telegraph, telephone, radio, television, the computer and the Internet.

Wow, 250 years in the history of mankind on Earth. A lot has happened during that time, including the pointless polluting and poisoning of our planet.

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Coal contributes forty-percent of the USA's carbon dioxide emissions, and that number accounts for 25 percent of the world's total CO2 emissions.

While coal has heated many a hearth and home and supplied electricity to those homes, and the industries in which the residents of those homes labored, there have been social inequities and environmental costs associated with its use.

The publication of Upton Sinclair's classic novel, *King Coal*, in 1917 detailed the hardships faced by those workers who labored to carve the coal from deep in the mountain and bring it to the surface. Those workers were paid slave wages, indebted to the 'company store' and their spirits crushed by the brutality of the coal mine owner's private police forces; while those owners became so wealthy that their heirs, still today, live like lords.

The most apt summation of the environmental effect of coal mining is the couple lines in the 1971 John Prine song:

“Daddy, won't you take me down to Muhlenberg County, down by the Green River, where Paradise lay.”

“I'm sorry my son but you're too late in asking, Mr. Peabody's coal train has hauled it away.”



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In the late 1970's I met a family who lived in the fancy penthouse of a fancy building in a fancy neighborhood of Cincinnati, Ohio. Not only did these people live in the best part of this posh, multi-storied building, but they owned it. These folks were **multi-millionaires**, and that was back when a million dollars was real money.

This family derived their wealth from several coal mines in eastern Kentucky and West Virginia. Those mines had been in their family for generations, but not one of the members of that family had ever ventured

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down into the bowels of the mountains to actually work those treasure troves of carbon riches.

There were three sons in that family; they were young and healthy, certainly able to lift a shovel, but they occupied their time with other worthy endeavors. What did they do? Did they attend college or serve their Country in the Armed Forces or the Peace Corps or at some other admirable task?

No, they used all their time, when they weren't sleeping or recovering from hangovers, drinking and raising hell in bars. Now, a third of a century later, what are they doing? They're still drinking and raising hell in bars. And, guess what? That family is even richer today than they were back then – all from coal.

Just this past Sunday, March 22nd, in the Courier-Journal newspaper was a very interesting article written by, Erik Reece. The sub-title was: “Kentucky’s poorest counties are also nation’s saddest”.

This article dealt with the “systematic cause of that poverty: namely, a single industry – coal”. Generations of families: men and women; husbands and wives and their children working, basically, as indentured servants at miserly wages, so that a select handful of rich people could get richer.

Mr. Reece's article outlines some very serious points, among them, that:

- Poverty was Eastern Kentucky's only tourist attraction.
- ... someone is getting rich. But if the region's 100 years of coal mining has been accompanied by 100 years of poverty – 30 percent now, the nation's highest – it may be time to quit digging.
- ... climate change, which coal, more than anything else is causing.

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- ... the coal industry has brought neither well-being nor wealth [except to a few] to Appalachia...
- ... the destruction of these mountains has only led to more health problems related to water quality and respiratory illness...

And, Mr. Reece goes into some practical uses for those raped, barren, strip-mined mountains such as re-planting trees like willows, which might be harvested for biomass; and planting hardwood trees to start a forestry industry; and how the some of the \$80 billion of taxpayer money allocated to renewable energy from the current stimulus plan might be used to install solar panels on top those now empty, lifeless mountains.

The article ends with the statement that:

- ... Eastern Kentucky needs more jobs. A sustainable, renewable energy economy could finally bring such jobs to the region.

Well, Mr. Reece, I couldn't agree with you more on that last point. However, I don't necessarily agree with your ideas for how that might be accomplished.

Oh, sure, planting trees is a good idea – the only problem with that is that it takes years for a tree to grow to harvestable size. While we sit and wait and watch those trees grow, (kind of like watching paint dry) the problem of poverty still exists.

Solar panels? I've got nothing against solar; in fact I've been a proponent and supporter of active and passive solar systems for many years. The problem with that idea is that it would still take a long period of time to realize a return on investment, and while the initial construction might generate jobs, once those arrays of collectors are built the only jobs they would require is for a handful of technicians to maintain the equipment. This would not employ the hundreds, thousands of people necessary to create a "sustainable, renewable energy economy".

So, what can we do with those mountains and the people who live in them? How can a “sustainable, renewable energy economy” be established that would create prosperity for all those needy and worthy Americans?

Try this on for size:

INDUSTRIAL HEMP

Industrial hemp is a crop that is renowned for its ability to renew the soils of abused and sub-marginal land. Those barren mountains could be green again in just a few, short growing seasons.

Industrial hemp is a crop with many practical uses that would spawn other related industries that could employ thousands such as:

- Biofuel and the processing plants to render and transport the fuel.
- High-quality clothing, textiles and the associated mills and sewing plants.
- Nutraceuticals and high-protein food products for human consumption.
- High-protein feeds for livestock and bedding.
- Pharmacological products
- Shampoo, skin care and cosmetics.
- Construction products such as plywood, insulation and wall panels
- Automobile door panels, dashboards and other supplier parts.
- Oils and paints
- Ropes, yarns, threads etcetera

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Mr. Reece, the list goes on and on. Many of those products are now being made, in America, from petroleum byproducts and Industrial Hemp could be a substitute for them. Indeed, our farmer neighbors to the north, in Canada, are growing Industrial Hemp and shipping countless products to American consumers right now. The Governor and Agricultural Secretary of North Dakota are assisting two of their constituents in a legal battle to make the growing of Industrial Hemp in North Dakota legal. The products from Industrial Hemp, which are being made in Canada, Germany, China and many other countries would not contain the toxic substances of products made from petroleum.

This is the immediate solution to replace coal and create that “sustainable, renewable energy economy” you referred to in your article. This is the solution we could implement right now, during this growing season, instead of waiting and hoping and wishing that something good might happen by the year 2030.

The year 2030 is when the political witch doctors in Washington hope that Energy Independence will then be possible; according to their plans, projections, rules and legislation. That’s twenty-one long years away which equals five more presidential elections, five more administrations and five more chances for the next Big Boss to change what the previous Big Boss started.

That’s twenty-one years of continued poverty for those Americans, while they wait breathlessly for the “Plot-i-ti-cian’s Newest and Greatest Plan to Work”.

That’s also twenty-one more years of America contributing their excessive share to the Planet’s accumulation of carbon dioxide poisoning and twenty-one more years of continued Global Warming.

How many countries and how many of their citizens will point the finger at America when ocean levels rise and millions are displaced from their low-lying homes? And how many of those people will become our enemies because of our short-sightedness and failure to act?

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Those last two paragraphs are global in scope and may seem far off; however, the problems of poverty and ecological disaster are right in our backyards. It surely is a Global Economy now, and what happens in the Eastern Kentucky coalfields is just a hint of what will happen – Globally.

If we don't fix the problems in our own backyards, those problems will magnify, worldwide.

That makes the future sound pretty doomish and gloomish doesn't it?

Well, it doesn't have to be all doom and gloom. There is a solution, if only we can make those responsible for making decisions see that solution. Our elected officials are stuck on either continuing down the same paths to economic and environmental disaster, or intent on expensive fixes that will take too long to achieve the goal of Energy Independence.

The time for **CHANGE** is now. We must open our eyes to the very real possibility of substituting Biofuels made from Clean, Green, Renewable and Home-Grown Industrial Hemp and Commercial Algae.

Mr. Reece, if I may suggest, the next article you write for the Courier-Journal or other publications, please research the uses and promise of these two crops. The more people who speak up, the louder the volume, and then, maybe, just maybe, we can be heard by those who are responsible for making the decisions that affect Our Lives, Our Liberties, and Our Pursuit of Happiness.

Mr. Reece, every administration since the Panic of 1873 has campaigned on "stimulating the economy" and basically, "putting a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage", or some such election year hyperbole.

Throughout the history of America it has not been political genius or a lucky draw of the cards that has improved American's economic well-being. No, it has been the American citizens themselves who tightened their belts, used ingenuity and elbow grease, balanced their household budgets and contributed to the Gross Domestic Product.

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To paraphrase one famous Americans words: “Ask not what your Country can do for you, ask what you can do to fix the mess the politicians have gotten our Country into.”

It's time for all Americans to stand as one and demand a solution. Demand that the politicians use a Common-Sense approach to the problems we face.

The coal fields of Eastern Kentucky are a microcosm of the problems all America faces.

1. An energy shortage that will only get worse as carbon-based fuels diminish and become more expensive.
2. Pollution from carbon-based fuels that is contributing to Global Warming.
3. The economic hardship that is directly related to the above two points.
4. The national security issues that are directly related to the above two points.

We must **CHANGE** the way we source our fuel supplies. Fixing that problem will fix all of the four above.

Imagine for a moment those stripped, barren mountains in Eastern Kentucky planted with Industrial Hemp. Imagine the Green of it. Imagine for a moment those hills with Commercial Algae bio-reactors constructed atop them. Imagine for a moment the desperate, 30% unemployed population of that area offered the thousands of well-paid jobs that could be created by the cultivation of those two Clean, Green, Home-Grown and Renewable crops.

Now, imagine that being multiplied across the Land: From Sea to Shining Sea.

What will it take to realize that promise, freedom and prosperity?

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It's very simple. It will take about one-hundred million Americans getting:

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And demanding that the politicians in Washington DC and our State's Capitals **CHANGE** the way they do **OUR** business. **CHANGE** their concept of Americans as simple serfs who exist only to pay their taxes out of the withholding from their weekly checks and on April 15.

CHANGE their concept of Americans who exist only so that their hard-earned tax dollars can be splurged by the politicians who cavort like drunks at the casino.

CHANGE the way America sources our fuel and start immediately a Manhattan Project #2 that concentrates on common-sense, readily available Industrial Hemp and Commercial Algae, instead of more oil and science-fiction dreams that will take years to realize and billions of taxpayer dollars to fund.

In France, the government is afraid of the People, because the People know the government belongs to them.

In America, the People are afraid of the government, because they've forgotten that the government belongs to them.

Contrary to what you may be thinking: This is not a call for armed revolt or anything like that. But, it is a call for Common-Sense, before it's too late to **CHANGE**.

I leave you with the profound thought of America's first President:

"Make the most of the Indian hemp seed and sow it everywhere!"

George Washington – note to the gardener at Mount Vernon. The Writings of George Washington, volume 33, page 270, (Library of Congress).

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<http://www.howlinwolfstudio.com/MHN20Jan.htm>

<http://www.USA-EnergyIndependence.org>