

# BCA Dispatch

Newsletter of the **Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy** December 2005

*The real reason no new refineries have been built for almost 30 years is simple: Any oil company that wants to stay profitable isn't going to invest in new refineries when they know there is going to be less and less oil to refine.* —Matt Savinar (see Page 6)

## CHAPTER NEWS (Continued on Page 8)

### Chapter Calendar

\* \* **Al-Jazeera TV in Iraq** \* \*

The Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy's next meeting will be on **Wednesday, December 21 at 7:00 p.m. at Cambridge Friends Meeting**, 5 Longfellow Park (9-minute walk from Harvard Square west on Brattle St.), Cambridge.

The documentary video "**Control Room**" tells the truth about the Arab news network al-Jazeera, attacked by the left as too US and by the Pentagon as pro-al-Qaeda. It's the news on Iraq you don't see on Fox TV. For example, a grassroots reviewer says: *The reporter we get to know best, a big guy who looks like Luciano Pavarotti in makeup for a performance of Otello, and who speaks English fluently... He's watching, for instance, the tape of a demonstration in which yelling, leaping children surround some Americans entering Baghdad and he's listening to the English translation. The children are shouting "Allah" something or other and the on-screen translator comments that the kids are saying "God be with you Americans!" The reporter smiles and turns to the camera, explaining that what the kids are actually saying is, "God damn you Americans."* See many on-site scenes and interviews from Iraq. A reviewer for the *Kansas City Star* says "A documentary as subtle, insightful and evenhanded—as Fahrenheit 9/11 is obvious and one-sided." Discussion follows.

See article by al-Jazeera director Wadah Khanfar, page 7 >

— Refreshments —

## Vermont Convention Votes To Secede Demilitarize, Downsize, Take Care of Ourselves

by Diana Licht, Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy

**O**n October 28, 2005, the day Illinois prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald announced indictment charges against Vice President Richard Cheney's chief of staff, I. 'Scooter' Libby—on charges of fraud, lying to a grand jury, and obstruction of justice in the outing of CIA-employee Valerie Plame Wilson—the Second Vermont Republic (SVR) convened in chambers of the Montpelier State House. A nascent Vermont separatist movement, SVR met to consider alternatives to America's current political status quo.

In full colonial dress and mounted on a black steed, **Jim Hogue** was on hand to greet the conventioners and invoke the spirit and words of the 1776 revolutionary Ethan Allan (Continued on Page 5)



Breaking the diminishing arctic ice, US Coast Guard's Healy

## Arctic Booms as Polar Ice Melts New Gold Rush—Oil, Gas, Fish, Diamonds

by Alex Duval-Smith, *The Observer* (UK), 27 November 2005

**G**iant snowflakes tumble down outside the Kaikanten bar. Inside, Mustafa Mirreh from Somalia stares down his pool cue, trying to pot the black. His opponent, Italian engineer Pier Luigi Poletto, has turned to the slot machine. The Kilkenny beer has run out. There is only canned Guinness. This could be grounds for a fight, but French fishermen J-P and Max have been distracted by the rare sight of a woman crossing the floor.

These are the Klondikers of global warming: men from all over the world who have come to **Hammerfest, Norway**, gateway to the Barents Sea, to make their fortune from new resources—oil, gas, fish and diamonds—made accessible by the receding ice.

It is the dark season here—two months from November to January when the sun never rises above the snow-laced rocks around Hammerfest, ice-free thanks to the Gulf stream. In the horseshoe-shaped port, trawlers from all over the world wait for favorable weather to head back into the Barents Sea. Hammerfest, with its colorful wooden houses, feels cozy. But it is a nerve center of the scramble for the Arctic's wealth that raises urgent questions.

The 14 million sq km Arctic Ocean is home to 25 per cent of the planet's unextracted oil and natural gas. With a population of four million, the region is much more stable than the Middle East. Global warming, in combination with the current high oil price, makes it ever more accessible. Yet the bordering countries—Russia, Canada, the US, Norway and Danish Greenland—have yet to agree on who owns what. Long-forgotten bays, waterways and islands are moving to the top of the international agenda.

Mirreh, 19, has spent eight months as a cleaner at Snow White, a giant liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant at Hammerfest,

one of the world's biggest building sites. 'The wage is £20 [\$35] an hour. I have saved £20,000. The problem is there is nothing to do and not enough women,' he said.

#### **Fish**

French trawler skipper Pascal Verdière has had no trouble filling his Grande Hermine trawler's 250-tonne cod quota. 'Cod likes a water temperature below two degrees, so whereas, three years ago we did our fishing around 75 degrees north, we now have to go as far as 80 degrees, which means Spitzbergen and bad storms.' But each of his 35 crew earns £15,000 for 12 weeks at sea.

Trawlers are frequently at the center of territorial disputes. Whereas the Antarctic was carved up in 1959, no international treaty exists to determine the extent of each Arctic nation's ownership. Last month Cryosat, a space shuttle launched to measure the Arctic thaw and the limits of the continental shelves, crashed after lift-off in Russia. As a result, debates are guided by rival scientific studies, such as one which claims the North Pole for Denmark by alleging it sits on Greenland's continental shelf.

Last week the Norwegian coastguard arrested two Spanish trawlers in the waters around the Svalbard Islands, which Norway has unilaterally decreed a fisheries protection zone. Oslo and Madrid are now in a complicated row over who has the right to prosecute.

#### **Oil and Gas**

Norway and Russia are soon to resume talks - stalled for two years—over a disputed area of the Barents Sea. While an agreement exists between them allowing fishing in part of the area, known as the Grey Zone, both countries want access to the larger disputed area for oil and gas exploration. Immediately to the east of the area, the Russians have discovered the 1,400sq km Shtokman field, the largest offshore gas deposit in the world.

Resolution of the dispute could have an impact on the entire Arctic area. The Russians want the 'sector line principle' to be applied, meaning that the Arctic should be divided, cake-like, from the Pole. The Norwegians want the 'median line principle'—a border line along which each point is equidistant to each country's land mass. Despite the rivalries, Arctic expert Olav Fagelund Knudsen doubts whether anyone would go to war over them. 'Russia and the US became pretty good at resolving their differences during the Cold War. So there is room to hope they will be sensible. The most exciting development in the region is who will control the North East Passage and its lucrative shipping between Europe and China.'

#### **Coal and Diamonds**

He said a Russian mine on Svalbard is already extracting high-quality coal. De Beers, the mining giant, and about 60 other prospecting companies are searching for diamonds beneath frozen lakes in northern Canada. In the US, there is pressure to increase oil exploration. A dispute between Denmark and Canada this year over Hans Island—an uninhabited rock off Greenland—centers on the potential for oil in the Nares Strait. There are outstanding disputes between the US and Canada over the North West Passage and the Beaufort Sea. The Russian parliament has yet to ratify a 1990 agreement with the US dividing the Bering Sea. Only a small international body, the Arctic Council, exists to mediate. Its main focus is the welfare of four million mainly nomadic people. The only legal tool, the Convention on the Law of the Sea, has not been ratified by the US.

Meanwhile, evidence suggests the Klondikers are right to head

## **Big Bank Dilemma**

### **Oil Losing Value as Collateral**

by Matt Savinar, [www.lifeaftertheoilcrash.net](http://www.lifeaftertheoilcrash.net) December 2005

Is the modern banking system entirely dependent on cheap oil? Yes.

The global financial system is entirely dependent on a constantly increasing supply of oil and natural gas. The relationship between the supply of oil and natural gas and the workings of the global financial system is arguably the key issue to understanding and dealing with Peak Oil, far more important than alternative sources of energy, energy conservation, or the development of new technologies, all of which are discussed in detail on page two of this site.

Dr. Colin Campbell presents an understandable model of this complex (and often difficult to explain) relationship: *It is becoming evident that the financial and investment community begins to accept the reality of Peak Oil, which ends the first half of the age of oil. They accept that banks created capital during this epoch by lending more than they had on deposit, being confident that tomorrow's expansion, fuelled by cheap oil-based energy, was adequate collateral for today's debt. The decline of oil, the principal driver of economic growth, undermines the validity of that collateral which in turn erodes the valuation of most entities quoted on* (Continued on Page 6)

north. According to data published last month, the area covered by ice in September—5.3 million sq km—was the lowest since records began in 1978. In August the Akademik Fyodorov became the first ship to reach the North Pole unassisted by an icebreaker.

Opposite the Kaikanten bar, Alf-Birger Olsen sits in the council offices counting the benefits of global warming to the 9,300 population. 'Hammerfest, ice-free all year, was proclaimed a town in 1789. We were a base for polar bear hunters and cod fishermen. But in recent times the Norwegian government had to give people incentives to live in the region,' said the trade and industry director. When talk turns to the Snow White gas project, Olsen's eyes light up. 'Building the plant has required 2,000 people of 57 nationalities ... The population of Hammerfest has increased and dozens of spin-off businesses created.' The project will come on stream in 2007 to deliver 2.4 billion cubic metres of liquefied natural gas to the US and Spain among others.

Property tax paid by Statoil, the company which owns the £5.8bn Snow White terminal, has provided funding for a new Arctic Culture center. 'We are really thankful to Statoil,' said culture chief Gerd Hagen, 'but this development is not all good. When 2,000 men suddenly descend on a little town, it changes things. There are fights at the weekend and women feel the need to withdraw a little bit. They have their bar, Kaikanten, and we have another place in the street behind.' #

## Facing the Oil-free Life Why We Must Localize, without Suburbs

by James Howard Kunstler, at Montpelier VT, 28 October 2005

*Oil is beginning to run out and prices are already skyrocketing, forcing us to change. Our kids will have to live differently. But how? Jim Kunstler is a prophet of post-petroleum revolution. His most recent book is [The Long Emergency: Surviving the converging catastrophes of the Twenty-first Century](#). Read his remarks about relocalizing business, agriculture, and schools in his [Clusterfuck Nation Manifesto](#) posted at his web site, [www.kunstler.com](http://www.kunstler.com). Here is his keynote address to the convention recently called by the Second Vermont Republic, reported on Page 1. —Ed.*

**W**hen we think about the destiny of our land, there are a few questions we might ask: *What do we mean by 'our land?' What has been holding it together? Who are we? And who will we become?*

For about 210 years we have been a federal democratic republic composed of more than a few states, eventually adding up to fifty. At times, the citizen's identity has shifted from allegiance to a particular state to the republic as a whole—as when Robert E. Lee, for instance, famously declared that he was first a citizen of Virginia.

Lately the tendency has been for citizens to think of themselves first as Americans, and secondarily as New Yorkers or Virginians or Vermonters. What has held us together—at least since the convulsion of the Civil War—is a common culture and especially the common enterprise of a great industrial economy.

For much of our history, including the first half of the 20th century, we were a resourceful, adaptive, generous, brave, forward-looking people who believed in earnest effort, who occupied a beautiful landscape full of places worth caring about and worth defending.

Since then, lost in raptures of easy motoring, fried food, incessant infotainment, and desperate moneygrubbing, we became a nation of overfed clowns who believed that it was possible to get something for nothing, who ravaged the landscape in an orgy of wanton carelessness, who believed they were entitled to lives of everlasting comfort and convenience, no matter what, and expected the rest of the world to pay for it. We even elected a vice-president who declared that this American way of life was non-negotiable.

We now face the most serious challenge to our collective identity, economy, culture, and security since the Civil War. The end of the cheap fossil fuel era will change everything about how we live in this country. It will challenge all of our assumptions. It will compel us to do things differently—whether we like it or not.

We are at or near the all-time maximum global oil production peak. We do not have to run out of oil to find ourselves in trouble. When world demand for oil exceeds the world's ability to produce oil, all the complex systems we depend on will de-stabilize.

Everything from national chain retail, to the Archer Daniel Midland Cheez Doodle and Pepsi model of agriculture, to the arrangements for heating our homes and lighting our cities will

begin to wobble. Some of these things will fail us and begin to change our lives.

At the same time, we will be tempted to join a worldwide scramble for the world's remaining oil—most of which belongs to countries whose people don't like us—and the nature of this contest may be very violent.

Our suburbs will prove to be a huge liability. They represent the greatest misallocation of resources in the history of the world. The project of suburbia represent a set of tragic choices because it is a living arrangement with no future. And that future is now here in the form of the peak oil predicament.



Jim Kunstler

Because they have no future, our suburbs entail a powerful psychology of previous investment that will prevent us from even thinking about reforming them or letting go of them. That's why vice-prez Cheney said the American way of life is non negotiable.

There will be a great battle to preserve the supposed entitlements to suburbia and it will be an epochal act of futility, a huge waste of effort and resources that might have been much better spent in finding new ways to carry on an American civilization. We might, for instance, have invested in restoring our national railroad system, which we will need desperately, because no other project we might undertake would have such a profoundly positive impact on our oil consumption.

But instead we will try desperately to make cars that get better mileage, so we can continue being car dependent and continue building out and elaborating the infrastructure for a living arrangement with no future—the subdivisions of the McHouses, the strip malls, the big box pods, the deployments of hamburger shacks and pizza huts.

In the service of defending suburbia, the American public may turn to political maniacs, who will promise to make the country just like it was in 1997, before we started having all these problems.

In the course of this long emergency we face, life and politics are apt to become profoundly local. Many of my friends wring their hands over George W. Bush, whom they regard as the second coming of Adolf Hitler and who think the Federal government will regulate every inch of their lives. I tell them, in the long emergency the Federal government will be impotent and ineffectual—just as they were after Hurricane Katrina—and that the Federal government will be lucky if they can answer the phones five years from now, let alone regulate anybody's life.

I tell them, life in America is going to become profoundly and intensely local, and it will be the local politicians you'll have to worry about. American life will become intensely and profoundly local because the complex systems that hold this nation together are going to fail.

We will have to grow a lot more of our food in the regions where we live. That won't be easy. A lot of our best ag land close to our towns and cities has been paved over. A lot of knowledge has been lost.

We are going to have to reconstruct local economies, local networks of interdependency—and that will not be easy given the methodical destruction of economic infrastructure to our communities by Wal-Mart and the rest of the national chain companies over the past forty years.

As these severe challenges arise, different regions of the United States will cope differently. The sunbelt will probably suffer in equal proportion to the degree that it benefited from the cheap oil fiesta of the past several decades—because it squandered its wealth in building gigantic suburban metropolises that have no future. Atlanta, Dallas, Orlando, Charlotte. The people in these places will be full of grievance and bewilderment, and they may seek comfort in the romance of firearms in seeking to defend the indefensible entitlements their failing suburbs.

The people in Phoenix and Tucson will have dreadful problems with water on top of their problems with oil and the loss of cheap air conditioning. They may not be able to grow any food of their own, locally. In Las Vegas, the excitement will be over. The capital of a something for nothing culture will be left to the wind, the tarantulas and the gila monsters. California, the most tragic part of our country—because it was once the most beautiful and is now most lost—will have many of the previously mentioned problems and the prospect of awful ethnic conflict.

I am describing a nation that may not hold together far into the 20th century. I would like to be wrong about this, but it hard to look at the big picture and come up with a different set of conclusions. All parts of the United States are going to endure hardships in the decades ahead, but some regions or states may be better prepared, or just luckier. I tend to me more optimistic about the future in New England, The mid-Atlantic States, the upper Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest (if it can escape the wrath emanating out of California.)

I include Vermont in this list, of course. This part of the country enjoys some advantages: an armature of towns scaled to the requirements of life in a lower energy world; a lot of good agricultural land; a civic tradition of responsible local governance; a set of regional collective character traits we associate with New England Yankees at their best: rectitude, discipline, perseverance, and allegiance to the community.

I'm personally not an advocate of national breakup or secession. I grew up with United States and I have been, until recently, been pretty comfortable with the idea that we would stick together no matter what. But in the Long Emergency all bets are off for politics, economics, and social cohesion. Turbulence will be the rule and we will have to do our best to make sure that the just prevail over the wicked, and that the weak are not trampled, and that the best that was in us as a people can somehow be rescued from dumpster of memory.

Anyway, I'm a New Yorker, an upstater, and I don't relish the idea of patrolling the waters of Lake Champlain in a solar electric gunboat to keep you Green Mountain boys and girls from chopping down the Adirondacks so you can bake all that granola you are reputed to subsist on.

However things turn out, I hope you'll let me across the border from time to time to see how things are going. ●

## Chinese Peasants, Workers Revolt

Jonathan Teller-Elsberg, *Ctr for Popular Economics*, 23 Nov 05

Edward Cody's articles in the *Washington Post* have described the struggles of Chinese factory workers and peasants as they face various abuses at the hands of factory owners and corrupt local officials—sometimes one and the same people. He reports that the Chinese government believes that the core cause for the increase in spontaneous mass protests across the country is growing economic inequality.

In the southern Fujian province, thousands of peasants have been protesting the seizure of their land, which is often converted to industrial use. Those Cody talked to have received hardly any compensation for the land, and they suspect that the local officials who should be distributing compensation payments have instead used the money to make investments in factories. Few of the peasants have been able to get jobs in the new factories, something that was promised when the land was seized.

In next-door Guangdong province, workers at shoe factories have staged spontaneous strikes, including one in which hundreds of workers ransacked company facilities. There have been numerous walkouts at the shoe manufacturers in the past couple years. The workers are angry about low wages, limited time off, and lack of communication with managers.

Farther north, in the town of Huaxi, villagers fed up with years of polluted air and water and stonewalling by government officials created a protest camp outside the gates to an industrial park. Despite a police raid to shut the camp down, the protesters increased in number. When a large force of police and civilian assistants returned on April 10th, some 20,000 villagers responded. A fierce street battle ensued and the police and city officials were forced to retreat from the town. The protest camp remained for another month and a half, until government officials agreed to shut down the industrial park. However, those suspected of being leaders of the protest movement remained on police wanted lists.

In the Anhui province, the beating of a young man by bodyguards of a businessman sparked a spontaneous riot in which approximately 10,000 city residents torched police cars, threw rocks at anti-riot troops and looted a grocery store after the owner provided water to the police.

Though each of these was an isolated incident on its own, they are part of growing pattern of angry resistance by China's poor—whether from peasant farms or sweatshop factories—to the Communist Party's cozy alliance with capitalist business. A minister for public security in China estimated that 3.76 million people participated in what he termed "mass incidents" throughout the country during 2004, and that the frequency of these incidents has been increasing.

The government has become very concerned, both because this expression of people power threatens the stability of Communist Party control and because it could undermine the party's goals for further economic development in the capitalist mold. The spread of cellphones and the internet are allowing unofficial news of resistance to reach a larger Chinese audience, despite the efforts of government censors in the official media. Even the state-run media has begun reporting that the root cause of the recent unrest is the widening gap between rich and poor in the country. Perhaps conveniently, these reports downplay the idea that protesting citizens could be angry about the political structure of one-party rule. After all, much of the economic development that has been part of China's shift to capitalism and the growing rich-poor gap has relied on collusion between local government officials and private businessmen.

and the Green Mountain Boys.

University of Vermont professor **Frank Bryan**, known for his *Vermont Papers*, and avid proponent of local Vermont town hall meetings, emphasized the need to be in the struggle "for the long haul" and proffered a definition of "communitarianism" based on Aristotle's insight that you can't be a human being unless you are a part of a society.

Keynote speaker **James Howard Kunstler**, author of *The Long Emergency*, warned his listeners that America was succumbing to many delusional ideas as a culture, and that he was describing "a nation that may not hold together in the 21st century".\*

In response to his question "What has been the common enterprise of our great industrial economy?" he answered acerbically that "the project of suburbia as a set of choices with no future" has given America a culture of hair cutting, fried chicken and open-heart surgery. A frequent traveler, "This country looks like a former Soviet republic," says Kunstler. "The overriding imperative task for us in the face of the problems ahead will be the downscaling of virtually all activities in America. We are going to have to reconstruct local economies, local networks of interdependency on a scale adjusted to the requirements of a post-globalist, post-cheap-oil age."

In a statement from their RadCon2 conference of November 2004, following the 2nd-term election of George Bush, and published by co-founder **Kirkpatrick Sale**, author of *Human Scale* and patron of SVR's Middlebury Institute, they take a principled stand against empire.

"We are convinced that the American empire, now imposing its military might on 153 countries around the world, is as fragile as empires historically tend to be, and that it might well implode upon itself in the near future. Before that happens, no matter what shape the United States may take, we believe there is at this moment an opportunity to push through new political ideas and projects that will offer true popular participation and genuine democracy. The time to prepare for that is now."

"First and foremost, we want out of the United States. It's not just an anti-Bush statement and if Kerry had been elected we still would have wanted out," says **Thomas Naylor**, Vermont resident, retired Duke University economics professor, secessionist scholar and founder of SVR.

"The reality is that we have a one party system in this country, called the Republican party, that is owned and operated and controlled by corporate America. So it's not just a Bush protest, but a protest against the Empire... It is high time for all of us to rebel against the American Empire by (1) regaining control of our lives from big government, big business, big cities, big schools, and big public works projects such as dams and levees; (2) relearning how to take care of ourselves by decentralizing, downsizing, localizing, demilitarizing, simplifying, and humanizing our lives; and (3) learning how to help others take care of themselves..."

"The objective of the Vermont Convention is to raise the awareness of Vermonters and flatlanders alike of the possibility of independence as a viable alternative to the incompetence, unsustainability, loss of moral authority, and tyranny of the United States government," asserted Naylor.

Two resolutions were passed by acclamation in this peoples' Convention, which was open to the public and free of charge:

**Be it resolved** that the state of Vermont peacefully and democratically free itself from the United States of America and return to its natural status as an independent republic as it was between January 15, 1777 and March 4, 1791.

and  
Whereas the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), an international membership organization located in The Hague, is dedicated to nonviolence, human rights, self-determination and democracy, environmental protection, and tolerance, **be it resolved** that the Second Vermont Republic apply for membership in the UNPO as soon as possible.

This historic event was the first statewide convention on secession in the United States since North Carolina voted to secede from the Union on May 20, 1861.

\*Read Kunstler's complete speech in this issue, Page 3

## Impending Collapse of WTO? Showdown Due at Hong Kong Negotiations

by **Walden Bello**, *Focus on Global South* [Bangkok],

25 Nov 2005 (excerpt)

... **T**he deep anti-development bias of the WTO allows developing countries very limited space to defend their interests. Certainly, it is not a framework within which they can pursue a positive development agenda. Indeed, the one good thing to emerge from their experience of defensive trench warfare at the WTO is that the developing countries have begun to realize that they need to come together to create altogether different institutions of global trade governance from the WTO-institutions that subordinate trade to development.

The Sixth Ministerial [negotiating session] of the WTO may well collapse in Hong Kong [13-18 December]. This will, however, be a positive development. Contrary to the self-serving doomsday scenarios painted by its corporate supporters, there is life after the WTO. Its demise would create not anarchy but policy space for development...

Let me conclude by borrowing an image from one of my favorite authors, Bram Stoker. The WTO is like his immortal character Dracula. Every time you think you've killed him, he resurrects. Following the collapse of the Third Ministerial in Seattle in 1999, the WTO came back to life with its successful ministerial in Doha, Qatar in November 2001. The Doha triumph, however, was followed by the unraveling of the Fifth Ministerial in Cancun in September 2003. Cancun was followed by the institutional coup of the WTO General Council in July 2004, which rammed through the draconian July Framework.

Thus the stakes in Hong Kong are high. Hong Kong may consolidate the WTO as the engine of global trade liberalization. Or it may prove to be stake that is driven through the heart of this profoundly anti-people organization and finishes it off. Permanently.

\*Walden Bello's most recent book is *Dilemmas of Domination: The unmaking of the American empire*

*Stock Exchanges.* The investment community however faces a dilemma. It desires to protect its own fortunes and those of its privileged clients while at the same time is reluctant to take action that might itself trigger the meltdown. It is a closely knit community so that it is hard for one to move without the others becoming aware of his actions.

The scene is set for the Second Great Depression, but the conservatism and outdated mindset of institutional investors, together with the momentum of the massive flows of institutional money they are required to place, may help to diminish the sense of panic that a vision of reality might impose. On the other hand, the very momentum of the flow may cause a greater deluge when the foundations of the dam finally crumble. It is a situation without precedent.

Commentator Robert Wise explains the connection between energy and money as follows:

*It's not physics, but it's true: money equals energy. Real, liquid wealth represents usable energy. It can be exchanged for fuel, for work, or for something built by the work of humans or fuel-powered machines. Real cost reflects the energy cost of doing something; real value reflects the energy expended to build something.*

*Nearly all the work done in the world economy -- all the manufacturing, construction, and transportation -- is done with energy derived from fuel. The actual work done by human muscle power is miniscule by comparison. And, the lion's share of that fuel comes from oil and natural gas, the primary sources of the world's wealth.*

In October 2005, the normally conservative *London Times* acknowledged that the world's wealth may soon evaporate as we enter a technological and economic "Dark Age." In an article entitled "Waiting for the Lights to Go Out" *Times* reporter Bryan Appleyard wrote the following:

*Oil is running out; the climate is changing at a potentially catastrophic rate; wars over scarce resources are brewing; finally, most shocking of all, we don't seem to be having enough ideas about how to fix any of these things.*

*Almost daily, new evidence is emerging that progress can no longer be taken for granted, that a new Dark Age is lying in wait for ourselves and our children. . . . growth may be coming to an end. Since our entire financial order - interest rates, pension funds, insurance, stock markets - is predicated on growth, the social and economic consequences may be cataclysmic.*

If you want to understand just how cataclysmic these consequences might be, consider the current crisis in the UK as a "preview of coming attractions." On October 23, 2005 the *London Telegraph* reported:

*The Government has admitted that companies across Britain might be forced to close this winter because of fuel shortages. "The balance between supply and demand for energy is uncomfortably tight. I think if we have a colder -than-usual winter given the supply shortages, certain industries could suffer real difficulties." The admission was made after this newspaper revealed that Britain could be paralysed by energy shortages if the winter is*

*colder than average.*

*The Met Office says there is a 67 per cent likelihood of prolonged cold this year after almost a decade of mild winters. That, coupled with high fuel prices, raises the fear that industry will not be able to cope.*

The severe consequences of these relatively small shortfalls between supply and demand (less than 5%) have prompted the UK government to look into draconian energy conservation measures that would be enforced via house-to-house searches by a force of "energy-police."

This is happening despite the fact we are probably at least a few years away from seeing the peak in either oil or natural gas production. You have to ask yourself, "what's going to happen when the 'real problems' start showing up?"

Are the banks aware of this situation? The central ones certainly are. (Those new bankruptcy laws were passed for a reason.) On June 28, 2005, Gary Duncan, the economics editor for the UK based *Sunday Times*, reported that the Bank of International Settlements (BIS), aka "the central banker's central bank", had issued the following warnings regarding the economic fallout of further rises in the price of oil:

*Oil prices may well remain high for a prolonged period of time . . . Further rises—if they materialize—may have more severe consequences than currently anticipated . . . Everyone needs to commit to some unpleasant compromises now, in order to avoid even more unpleasant alternatives in the future...*

Duncan goes on to summarize the bank's report as follows: *The US current account deficit meant that a further slide in the dollar was "almost inevitable", while the BIS sounded a warning that the deficit could yet lead to "a disorderly decline of the dollar, associated turmoil in other financial markets, and even recession."*

A bank as crucially important to the world economy and as influential to the markets as the BIS doesn't just casually toss out terms like "unpleasant compromises", "severe consequences", "even more unpleasant alternatives", "turmoil," and "disorderly decline" in relation to the oil markets and the dollar (which is the reserve currency for all oil transactions in the world) unless something very nasty is brewing in the background. (Note: to read the full text of the bank's report, visit <http://www.bis.org/events/agm2005.htm>)

On a similar note, Warren Buffet, the world's second richest man, recently warned of "mega-catastrophic risks" and "investment time bombs" currently threatening the global economy. Add those to a mix of sky-high energy prices, destabilizing resource wars, less than inspiring leadership, a possible currency collapse, more "petrodollar warfare", and well, the picture begins to look pretty grim, pretty quick.

What all of this means, in short, is that the aftermath of Peak Oil will extend far beyond how much you will pay for gas. If you are focusing solely on the price at the pump, more fuel-efficient forms of transportation, or alternative sources of energy, you aren't seeing the bigger picture.

## Why Bomb al-Jazeera's Offices? US and UK Respond with Silence

by Wadah Khanfar, *The Guardian* (UK), 1 December 2005

I have lost count of the number of accusations levelled against al-Jazeera and the incidents of harassment to which it has been subjected since it was founded in 1996. It was rumoured to have been set up by Israel's Mossad intelligence agency with the purpose of improving Israel's standing in the Arab world. It has also been accused of being a CIA mouthpiece designed to disseminate western culture among the Arabs. Some have suggested that it is part of an international conspiracy to break up the Arab world by means of stirring up discord and creating problems for the Arab regimes. Others decided it was a front for Osama bin Laden and the Taliban; or funded by Saddam Hussein. And, at the same time, it has been condemned by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and bitterly criticised by Donald Rumsfeld.

We know that the intelligence services of some Arab regimes have resorted to spreading rumours about al-Jazeera in an effort to deter Arab viewers from watching it. These are the same regimes that recalled ambassadors from Qatar in protest at its hosting al-Jazeera, and the same regimes that closed the station's offices in their countries and detained its correspondents.

Until 2001, al-Jazeera was perceived in a positive way in the west as a whole and the US in particular. It was seen as the single most important force for reform and democracy across the Arab region. Harassment by Arab regimes was considered proof of its professionalism and testimony to its objectivity. Indeed, al-Jazeera had from its foundation the slogan of "the opinion and the other opinion" and refused to favour one side over another at the expense of truth. As a result, in record time al-Jazeera became the Arabs' number one channel, and last year it was voted the fifth most influential brand name in the world, after Starbucks, Ikea, Apple and Google.

In the aftermath of the September 11 events, al-Jazeera found itself on the frontline of media coverage in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The greater its reputation became globally, the more frustrated some western governments became. The "other opinion" this time did not seem to suit international decision-makers. Criticisms started pouring in and created an opportunity for some Arab regimes to incite the US administration against al-Jazeera; some have even gone as far as demanding the closure of al-Jazeera as a precondition for full cooperation with the US.

Iraq has been a crucial turning point not only in al-Jazeera's work but for media coverage as a whole; 74 journalists, crew and their translators have lost their lives since the start of the war—two of them belonging to al-Jazeera. As far as harassment goes, al-Jazeera has incurred the biggest share. It has been accused by the US of inciting violence through the broadcast of al-Qaida tapes and of playing footage of beheadings. Our viewers know that no beheadings whatsoever were shown on our screens. And we follow strict professional rules in handling the tapes of Bin Laden and other al-Qaida leaders; we only play short, carefully selected and clearly newsworthy clips, and they are followed by

analytical discussion, frequently including American commentators.

Al-Jazeera's offices in Kabul and Baghdad were bombed; we were told at the time that both bombings were mistakes. We pushed for an official investigation, but thus far have received neither the findings of any investigation nor any official apology. The al-Jazeera cameraman Sami al-Hajj was arrested in Afghanistan and has for the past four years been detained in Guantánamo. We have repeatedly asked for an explanation, but none has been given to us.

We believe that all this harassment has been a worthwhile price for our professional commitment to reporting the truth. However, the story in the *Daily Mirror*, which published a leaked document it claimed was a transcript of a meeting in April 2004 between George Bush and Tony Blair, points to a level of threat to our very existence that had never occurred to us or to our viewers before. If it is true that Bush had indeed thought of bombing the al-Jazeera headquarters in Doha, this will undoubtedly constitute a watershed in the relationship between government authorities and the free media. I decided, in view of the great shock and bewilderment felt by many people around the world, to travel to London to look for the truth behind a press report whose reverberations across the Middle East—where reform and democracy have been promised—are far from over.

My colleagues have submitted a memorandum to 10 Downing Street, urging the British government to reveal the truth about the alleged document, and stressing that publishing the part within it relating to al-Jazeera is essential to put an end to speculation. After all, the matter concerns an institution that has never perceived itself to be an enemy of anyone. Our journalists are civilians who have gained the confidence of most Arabic-speaking viewers around the world. The failure to disclose the contents of the memo will cause a great deal of harm and will seriously undermine relations between media and government, and between the western and Arab worlds.

I brought many questions with me to London; it would seem that I shall return to Doha—where al-Jazeera is based—with even more misgivings. Officials in Britain have come up with nothing, and their silence is likely to reinforce suspicion and mistrust. This will not be the end of the road; we are taking legal advice and won't rest until we know the full truth.

However, I shall be returning to Doha with a lot of hope. The support and sympathy that I have sensed from colleagues in the British media represent the best consolation for me and my colleagues at al-Jazeera, whose viewers have seen for themselves the view of British and other western journalists that the truth should be disclosed in full. The issue does not only concern al-Jazeera; it concerns the truth for which we have withstood nine years of pressure and harassment, and for which many journalists around the world have endured all forms of intimidation; it is the truth for which Tayseer Allouni is serving a prison sentence in Spain, for which Sami Al-Hajj continues to be detained in Guantánamo and for which Tariq Ayoub died in Iraq.

---Wadah Khanfar is the director general  
of al-Jazeera. [manager@aljazeera.net](mailto:manager@aljazeera.net)



## CHAPTER NEWS

To explain the **World Social Forum**—which will take place 24-29 January in Caracas, Venezuela—**Sergio Reyes** led the discussion at BCA's 16 November meeting. Sergio, a native of Chile imprisoned as a teenager by Pinochet, is a co-leader of the Boston Delegation Organizing Committee of the WSF. This will be the 6<sup>th</sup> annual WSF which continues to draw scores of thousands of participants to hundreds of forums and seminars aimed at making possible "another world". Among the issues which interested our members were power politics, resisting imperialism, resources for life, diversity, human exploitation, communication, and gender. As a Forum contribution the Boston Delegation will present AfD's economic change model *A Common Agreement on Investment and Society* and promote formation of local groups to draft other popular models to supercede IMF, WTO, etc.

Sergio drew gasps when, in answer to a question, he said that results of the past five WSFs were nil. He evidently meant that followups were unsystematic and without groundswells. But it's hard to believe that people who put in such time, money, and effort don't persevere with some derived program of social change.

### Co-chair/Editor's Complaint

That's a little like BCA. We have 99 current paid-up members—and 200 more receive complimentary newsletters—but usually only a dozen attend any particular meeting. Meetings were tumultuous in the early days, and smooth when we eventually made them basically educational, but we've only once—the 1997 forum at BC on the MAI—succeeded in generating or sustaining anti-corporatist or pro-democracy projects involving a group of BCA members. I think it would be helpful to ask members about their extra-curricular efforts, and share them. Check-in, anyone? Web?

## ACTION ALERTS

**Mon, 12 Dec, Boston, 12:00 noon.** ANTI TORTURE FORUM with U.S. REPS CONYERS and MEEHAN. Please join Marty Meehan for this public forum, on the issue of torture. The discussion will include audience question and answer session with a nationally distinguished panel of experts, including: John Conyers (D-MI) who will also keynote the event, James Moran (D-VA), William Schultz (Executive Director of Amnesty International USA), Kristine Huskey (Shearman and Sterling LLP), Barbara Olshansky (Deputy Legal Director, Center for Constitutional Rights), Scott Horton (President, International League for Human Rights.) Other Contact Information: Meehan - 978/459-0101. David A. Sargent Hall, Suffolk University Law School, 120 Tremont St., Boston.

## JOIN THE BCA

### YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN BOSTON TO LOVE BCA

Please help us as we fight to make a better future for ourselves and our children -- Join the Boston/Cambridge Alliance for Democracy. (Cut out this form and send it to:

Dave Lewit, 271 Dartmouth St. #2h, Boston, MA 02116.)

BOSTON-CAMBRIDGE ALLIANCE fr DEMOCRACY PLEDGE  
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## EDITORIAL REQUEST

*BCA Dispatch* and/or NewEnglandAlliance.org needs an **Associate Editor** to develop **personal news**. She or he would write a column each month profiling one member or associate, and help readers know what other members are up to. So the AE would chat with many Alliance people on the phone, and would obtain photos for profiles. People would know that we care! AE would also learn a lot about what **chapters** and kindred organizations are doing, and that would be valuable news. Such information will help to build the Alliance locally and regionally, and to build a **network** of all system-changing organizations! See **Editor's phone/ email below. THANKS!**

## COLOPHON

Dave Lewit, Editor 617-266-8687. Pls apply as Asso. Editor. 271 Dartmouth St. #2H, Boston MA 02116. [dlewit@igc.org](mailto:dlewit@igc.org)  
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