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A Leadership Opportunity for Canada

There can now be no doubt that a world peak in the production of oil is rapidly approaching. While the exact date of peak oil is uncertain, and will only be known with certainty in retrospect, there is strong evidence that the peak will occur in this decade. But even should present evidence be in error, and the peak does not occur for another decade or more, the nations of the world are unlikely to escape economic, financial and political consequences unprecedented in history. In the words of Richard Heinberg(1): *"The global peak in oil production is likely to lead to economic chaos and extreme geopolitical tensions, raising spectres of war, revolution, terrorism, and even famine, unless nations adopt some method of cooperatively reducing their reliance on oil."*

Today oil provides over 90% of the world's transportation fuel, and plays a critical role in agriculture. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that there is no alternative source of energy available in the quantities required, and in the short time remaining, before an unrelenting decline in oil production begins.

The present free market approach by nations to gain control of the planet's remaining oil resources may provide the economic and military strong countries with a disproportionate advantage over the weak. But should the competition among the strong turn violent, world chaos can be expected and all nations will suffer. Several developing nations are already experiencing oil shortages and serious economic difficulties because of the recent sharp increase in the price of oil. A completely unregulated world market cannot distribute a diminishing resource to the advantage of either the weak or the strong.

The evidence is mounting that the nations of the world now have a choice. As Heinberg suggests, they can either develop a cooperative approach to reducing their reliance on oil, or they will enter a period of aggressive competition – a destructive free-for-all – for the planet's remaining oil energy resources. The alternative to international cooperation in managing this vital diminishing resource will be trade anarchy and violence, to the disadvantage of all nations. No nation, not even the military powerful United States, will be able to escape.

The cooperative alternative to reducing our reliance on the world's diminishing oil energy resources will require an agreement among nations to share the resource based upon the principles of fairness and equity. A draft international agreement,

called **The Oil Depletion Protocol**, has recently been prepared and is printed on pages 9 and 10 of this issue of Proceedings(2). Its purpose is to establish a necessary measure of coherence in managing the inevitable decline in world oil. The basic idea of the Protocol is easily understood: oil importing nations would agree to limit their annual imports to match the **World Oil Depletion Rate**, while oil exporting countries would agree to limit their exports to their **National Depletion Rate**. Additional information on the proposed Protocol, including examples of how it would work, appear on pages 3 to 8 of this issue.

It is expected that the present draft Oil Depletion Protocol will soon be discussed at international conferences and other fora on oil depletion. However, to advance the agenda more rapidly toward serious international negotiations and eventual agreement, it would appear essential that one or more nations take the initiative. Our nation, Canada, may be particularly well qualified to assume a role of leadership in this endeavor for at least three reasons:

- 1) Unlike all other industrial nations in western Europe and the Americas, Canada is potentially self sufficient in oil for at least a generation and perhaps longer.
- 2) At present 70 percent of Canada's oil production is exported to the United States. While Canada produces more oil than it consumes, 58 percent of its consumption is imported, most of it to Eastern Canada from politically unstable countries.
- 3) Canada is a well regarded and respected middle power with wide experience in international relations. As both an oil importing and exporting nation, it not only has an understanding and an appreciation of each, but it has important and influential links with both oil importing and exporting countries throughout the world.

It would appear unlikely for internal political and other reasons that a major power, including the United States, China, India, Russia, Brazil, Japan, Germany, Great Britain or France, will step forward to provide the needed leadership. Canada's international experience, middle power status, and many years experience as both an exporter and importer of oil, as well as the potential to be self sufficient in oil perhaps longer than any other industrial nation, places it in a unique position to assume a leadership role in gaining acceptance of The Oil Depletion Protocol, an important step leading to the eventual transition to a post fossil fuel world. AADC

- (1) Richard Heinberg is the author of several books on energy including *Power Down, Options and Actions for a Post-Carbon World* (2004). He is a frequent speaker at conferences on Peak Oil and related matters, and is at present working on a book to put the Depletion Protocol before both the general public and decision-makers at all levels internationally.
- (2) Dr. Colin J. Campbell, a prominent geologist and former advisor to oil corporations and governments, and the founder of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas, is the originator of The Oil Depletion Protocol. He reviewed a draft of the above editorial and provided the Editor with suggestions.

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