

The Energy Crisis and the Problems of a Post-Oil World Civilisation

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Abstract

The production and consumption of hydrocarbons, especially oil, have led to several environmental problems that include global warming and serious environmental degradation in several regions and countries around the world. But as a non-renewable energy source, oil resources will run out at some point in the future. 'Peak oil' is therefore expected to occur before 2020 will come to an end. Although there are various projections, oil and gas reserves are expected to last another 35-50 years. This is the issue that is at the heart of the perceived energy crisis. The struggle for control over oil resources as the major energy source has created local, regional and international conflicts in the world. This conflict is multidimensional: It is present between nations, just as it is present in class conflicts within nation states and indeed in the economic and political programmes orchestrated by the capitalists' multilateral organizations against the peoples of the Third World and the entire working class movement of the world. In these contexts, the key question raised in this paper is, how correct is it to assume that depleting oil reserves is at the centre of the looming energy crisis? Or put differently, is it true that oil is actually the problem? Is oil not simply a metaphor for a larger, more irrational and sinister, underlying

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problem? In response, the paper contends that a focus on a post-oil world economy that leaves capitalist relations of production intact will necessarily reproduce, with perhaps greater consequences, another crisis in whatever alternative energy sources are developed and applied in production. The solution has to be to replace capitalist relations of production with more cooperative forms of production relations.

Key Words: *Energy Crisis; Post-oil World; Civilisation; Hydrocarbons; Third World*

Introduction

A mass of writing and data are currently available on the energy question in general and oil resources in particular (Price, 1995; Campbell, 1997; Nowak, 2006; Kaplan, 1994; Bartlett; 2000; Corsi, 2000; Hawkins, 2004). The writings and data point to some salient issues. In the first place, all societies, including that of our stone-age ancestors, depended upon one or more forms of energy sources: stones, water, wind, coal, the sun and now oil (Duncan, 1996). It is clear from this that any civilization, including future ones, will depend upon some source for its energy needs. In the modern period, oil and other non-renewable hydrocarbons have become the main sources of energy. These account for about 75% of total energy consumption. But the production and consumption of hydrocarbons, especially oil, have led to several environmental problems that include global warming and serious environmental degradation in several regions and countries around the world.

The struggle for control over oil resources as the major energy source has created local, regional and international conflicts in the world. This conflict is multidimensional. At one level, it is present in North – South relations; at another level, it explains the current aggression of the US against the people of Iraq; at yet other levels it is present in class conflicts within nation states and in the economic and political programmes or wars orchestrated by and through such organisations as the WTO, IMF, World Bank and IMF against the economies and peoples of the Third World in particular and the entire working class movement of the world in general.

As a non-renewable energy source, oil resources will run out at some point in the future. Peak oil is expected to occur before 2020 (Youngquist, 1999); and will come to an end. Although there are various projections, oil and gas reserves are expected to last another 35-50 years. Attempts to develop alternative sources of energy are not producing results as quickly as the rate of the depletion of non-renewable energy sources. Moreover, they are far more expensive than oil to produce in the required quantities (Peet, 1992; Trainer, 1997; Gever, Kaufman & Skole, 1991; Price, 1995; Georgescu-Roegen, 1975).

The combination of several of the above factors has produced in the centre of capitalism a sense of crisis not simply about energy sources but more seriously about the future of humankind. Evidence of this abounds in such reports as 'Life After the Oil Crash' (<http://lifeaftertheoilcrash.net/>), 'Preparing for a Crash: Nuts and Bolts' (Nowak, 2006), 'The End of the World as We Know it' (McKillop, 2007), 'Spending Our Great Inheritance – Then What?' (Youngquist, 1998), 'The Olduvai Theory: Sliding Towards a Post-Industrial Stone Age' (Duncan, 1992) among hundreds of others. Although there are other sources (e.g., concerns about sustainability especially from the point of view of the earth's carrying capacity and population), it is largely within the context of discussions of 'life after the oil crash', the need for alternatives to oil as an energy source and more efficient, environmentally friendly use of fossil fuels that the idea of a post-oil economy and civilization has taken root.

The components of a post-oil civilisation

The components of a post-oil world economy are still hazy. However, if we follow Northernist energy crisis literature, a post-oil civilisation would be one that is not based upon hydrocarbons, especially oil and gas, as the main sources of energy. It would also be an economy that obviously avoids the eco-systemic pitfalls of the oil economy where, for example, all 'nations (i) agree to regulate rates of utilization of both natural resources and of the natural sinks that absorb effluents; (ii) accept limits on resource flows that it can command; (iii) pledge to control environmentally-damaging emissions that have trans-border impacts; and (v) agree on a global

cap on carbon dioxide and other key greenhouse emissions' (Daily & Ehrlich, 1995). Other components of a post-oil world economy are seen to include a world where population growth is not only controlled but where also the population adjusts to lesser food supplies and resources. It will be a world that is dominated by new energy technologies that increasingly focus on biomass and carbonless emissions. It is also one in which there will have to be a 'substantial narrowing of the rich-poor gap' where 'poor nations would develop fast enough to increase their per capita energy use by 2% per year between 1990 and 2025, doubling it from 1.0 to 2.0 kW. Simultaneously, rich nations would strive to reduce their per capita use by 2% annually through increased efficiency, dropping their use per person from 7.5 to 3.8 kW' (Daily & Ehrlich, 1995:1). Ultimately, however, a post oil world economy from this perspective would be one that is based upon the triumph of not simply technical solutions but also of (technical) rationality.

Although there are certainly more problems, I see at least, five fundamental problems with the available conceptions of a post-oil civilisation, especially as mediated by concerns over peak oil, global warming and environmental corruption. The first is the idea that a post-oil world economy would or could be produced by the application of technology or technical reason. The second is what is assumed to be at the core of the energy crisis. The third, flowing from what is assumed to be at the core of the energy crisis, is the silence over those forces that are driving the crisis. The fourth is the assumption that there is one world for which there is one energy crisis and for which one post-oil economy template will work. The fifth flowing from the other four problems is the failure, in the discussions to address those historical wrongs that have been occasioned by the very process through which the energy crisis has been produced.

The energy crisis and technical reason

The search for alternatives to oil as an energy source is based upon the notion that the category of problems involved in the energy crisis is subject to technical solution. It is for this reason that some governments such as that of Norway have been building up an oil

reserve fund for the rainy day. But much more seriously, the achievements of science, especially in the last century, have created the illusion that 'nothing is beyond technical reason'. This is the position of Bray (1972) and Solow (1974) and has found much popular use in the discussions of the alternatives to oil as an energy source. However, as Georgescu (1975) has argued, this position is a fallacy. It is a fallacy because as Hardin and Baden (1977:53) have observed in their discussion of *Managing the Commons*: 'There has developed in the contemporary natural sciences a recognition that there is a subset of problems, such as population, atomic war, and environmental corruption, for which there are no technical solutions'. The energy crisis belongs to this category of problems because its roots are locked within modes of technical reasoning that do not enable them surface as the problem in the first instance. In essence, its roots are irrational and lie outside the scope of rational reflection and action.

Assumptions about what is at the core of the oil (energy) crisis

For this reason, discussions of the evolving oil (energy) crisis have usually assumed that the crisis is the result of the fact that production of the major energy source, oil, has peaked or will peak in the next few decades. This assumption has also informed the various solutions that are being proposed either for delaying the 'oil crash' or for surviving it when it occurs. As we have seen, these solutions have included energy saving schemes (more efficient use of energy, less per capita energy consumption, more efficient technologies) and survivalist agendas (development of alternative sources of energy, the establishment of energy funds, and reduction of ozone layer depleting energy practices).

The key question that needs to be asked however is, how correct is it to assume that depleting oil reserves is at the centre of the looming energy crisis? Or put differently, is it true that oil is actually the problem? Is oil not simply a metaphor for a larger, more irrational and sinister, underlying problem? In response to the above questions, we would like to argue that oil, or any other energy resource for

that matter is not at the centre of the energy crisis or potential crisis of the global economic system. As Christie (1980:11) rightly observed long ago:

There is patently no energy crisis in nature. Neither the earth nor the sun will become too cold for humanity in this millennium or the next. Nature is not running out of energy. ... If there is an energy crisis, therefore, it must be seen less at the level of *the forces of production* and more at the level of the relations of production. In other words, if there is an energy crisis, it is a crisis less of humankind's relations with nature, and more of relations between human beings. It is in the social use of energy under capitalism that the crisis may arise, not in nature. If there is a crisis, it will be a capitalist crisis, not a natural crisis. Therefore it is capitalism that must be understood, rather than the physical number of buried hydrocarbons, which is a secondary question, albeit still a very important one.

The above observation not only indicates that it is the crisis of capitalist production relations that is at the centre of the energy and, hence, oil crisis but also that Peak oil is another name for a capitalism that has peaked and is in decline. It also suggests that rather than pose the solution to the energy crisis in terms of a post-oil civilisation, we ought to be standing Fukuyama on his head and discussing the solution to the crisis in terms of a post – capitalist civilisation. In other words, given the fact that the developing energy crisis has the potential of ending a particular phase in human history, (indeed there are those such as Havel, (1995), who believe that we are already in a period of transition to a new multicultural world that is not strictly capitalist) it turns out that capitalism is not the end of history but the history of a particular end in the organisation of the human enterprise. This suggestion also indicates that teasing out the requirements for a post-oil or post-capitalist world economy and hence civilisation requires an understanding of the dynamics of capitalist production relations in general but also the political economy of oil and gas (energy) production and consumption within the capitalist world economy in particular.

Capitalist production relations are driven by the logic of the need of the capitalist to extract maximum surplus from the system of production. This logic constantly drives the capitalist to seek to redefine the organic composition of capital in ways that increase the share of past labour while reducing the share of living labour from the surplus of production. The overall result of the operation of this logic is the increasing mechanization and, at the same time, rationalization of the world. While increasing mechanization and rationalization of life lead to improvements in living standards for some groups, mainly in the centre of capitalism, they also lead to an ever increasing demand for energy to power machines and a way of life. This increasing demand puts a continuous pressure on energy sources. It also leads to higher levels of unemployment and underemployment, as well as depressed or starvation wages for millions of workers around the world. It is therefore not surprising as the UNDP Human Development Report (2005) has noted that the number of unionised workers has been falling in the last ten years.

A focus on a post-oil world economy that leaves capitalist relations of production intact will necessarily reproduce, with perhaps greater consequences, another crisis in whatever alternative energy sources are developed and applied in production. The solution has to be to replace capitalist relations of production with more cooperative forms of production relations.

The forces driving the energy crisis

Because it seeks to mask the irrational order within which the energy crisis is produced, the Northernist discussion of the crisis pays scant attention to or glosses over, the forces and interests that are driving the energy crisis. And yet, to adequately understand the crisis and solve it, such interests must be unmasked. Among these interests, the state in the US and global capitalist transnational corporations and institutions have primary responsibility.

The global capitalist division of labour is often realised within a global structure of domination in which the centre plays a determining role. This centre may be one empire or a series of empires that also compete with each other. Following the collapse of classical colonialism and the success of counter revolution in

Eastern Europe, the current system of energy production, distribution, exchange and consumption has been realised within a structure of domination in which the United States of America has emerged as the last standing empire. As all empires go, the US has staked its claim to the resources of the world and to defend the American way of life even if this way of life portends tragedy for the rest of humanity. Susskind (2002) has asked, for example, that we:

...Consider the words of George Kennan, one of the most influential post-war US policy makers addressing the State Department in 1948. Kennan said, 'we have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population. In this situation we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships, which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity... We should cease to talk about vague and ...unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards and democratization... The less we are hampered by idealistic slogans, the better'.

The idea that the US must have access to energy resources wherever they may be and that the US cannot and will not alter its energy consumption patterns even if this impacts negatively upon the rest of the world explains the fact that the US has refused not only to sign the Kyoto Protocol but continues to maintain consumption patterns of energy resources that are at the heart of the energy crisis. Turner (2006) has shown how this definition of the right of the US to the resources of the world is affecting oil and geo-politics in the world. Several recent papers emanating from the US Department of Defense indicate that the US not only considers access to oil anywhere in the world as a right but also the preparedness of the US to employ military action to secure those resources.

These papers confirm another observation of Susskind (2002) that,

Kennan's view remains the touchstone of US foreign policy, which, as in his day, generally consists of economic moves made with ideological rationales. This point is often better

understood by people in countries where these policies are implemented than by those in the US whose tax dollars finance them. One reason is that foreign policy is usually presented domestically as serving the very objectives Kennan characterizes as irrelevant: human rights, living standards and, above all, democracy. But when we look at the record of post-war US military actions (both direct and covert) we see that nearly all of them aimed to force developing countries into an economic role prescribed by the US: namely to, provide markets and raw materials to industrialized countries. This economic lens highlights an important facet of US aggressions against countries as diverse as Vietnam, Chile, Iraq, Congo and Guatemala. Even economically negligible countries like Nicaragua, Grenada, Haiti and Cuba have been targeted for insisting that their national resources be used to benefit local populations instead of US corporations, thereby setting a dangerous example for others.

We would like to insist that the claims of the American empire about its rights to the energy resources around the world and the actions taken by the managers of the empire to realise those claims lie at the heart of the energy crisis. Any discussion of a post-oil world economy that leaves out the danger that US energy strategies and practices raise would simply be like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

In addition to the state in the US, one major feature of imperialism is the emergence of global political and economic organisations through which the overall interests of capital are coordinated and the hegemony of the imperial power maintained. Today, these global political and economic organisations include Transnational Corporations, (TNCs) the World Trade Organisation, (WTO) the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Several writers have observed, for example, that TNCs in general are characterized by an ideology that is applied uniformly in all parts of the world where they operate. The elements of this ideology operate at two interdependent and mutually reinforcing levels. The first is the level of the TNCs themselves while the second is at the level of the home governments of the TNCs and the multilateral

institutions such as the world Bank, IMF and WTO that provide the institutional support for the TNCs (Susskind, 2002:2-3). Following Korten (1996:70-71) these assumptions are that:

The world's money, technology, and markets should be controlled and managed by gigantic global corporations; Corporations should be free to act solely on the basis of profitability without regard to national or local consequences; There should be no loyalties to place and community; People are motivated primarily by greed; The relentless pursuit of greed and acquisition leads to socially optimal outcomes.

Ashton-Jones, (1998:130) has also pointed out that the willingness with which global oil and gas companies as part of the TNC family tend to exploit oil resources around the world and relate with the governments and peoples in the periphery arises from an entrenched oil industry culture that defines the relationship of Western oil companies with Third World countries. This oil industry culture is founded on five assumptions:

That profit maximization is the only basis upon which a company can run, so that any expenditure beyond what is required to get out the oil is resisted; That a deal can be made with governments only, regardless of the government's legality or morality; That once an arrangement has been made with a government, a mining company can do what it likes, in fact, to act as if it is a government agency; That the "market", (that is, the industrialized world) has a right to have the resources it wants, at the lowest price, and regardless of the costs to local people who are obliged to play host to mining companies; and that "we", the mining companies, know best and are acting responsibly...

Continuing, Ashton-Jones, (1998:31) says:

Generally, neither the companies nor the governments with whom they associate, (from both first and third worlds)

are willing to accept any divergence from this culture which is reinforced with a mixture of cynical public relations and intimidation. It is fair to say that the adverse impacts of mining upon the lives of host communities (and, for that matter, the extravagant use of mineral resources by the industrialized world) arise more from this immoral culture (this wickedness) than from anything else.

At the level of the state and multilateral structures that support the activities of TNCs the ideology is even more specific, supremacist and even racist. Economic Justice (2000:4) has documented that when Lawrence Summers was chief economist of the World Bank, he authored an internal World Bank memorandum in 1991 which argued that, "the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable... Under-populated countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted, their air quality is vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City. Only the lamentable facts that so much pollution is generated by non-tradable industries (transport, electrical generation) and that the unit transport costs of solid waste are so high prevent world welfare enhancing trade in air pollution and waste." The memorandum further insisted that "the death of an African due to toxic pollution is less costly in economic terms than the death of a Northern citizen because the forgone earnings from increased mortality are less per capita... Concern for environmental quality rises with income. Transferring polluting industries to low-income countries would be welfare enhancing since it would augment their money incomes." This racist position in the World Bank finds a close parallel in official thinking in the US about its right to the resources of the world in general and the Third World in particular. It is this thinking that lies, as we have shown, behind the US invasion of Iraq and its current preparation for another war against Iran. It also lies behind the current presence of US armed forces in Africa's Gulf of Guinea.

A post oil world economy cannot be constructed without the question of the power of global capitalist institutions and corporations that operate in the interests of capital.

An energy crisis in a divided world

A major problem with the Northernist discussions of the energy crisis and a post-oil world economy is the implicit assumption that we all live in one world and therefore commonly face one energy crisis in this world. In effect, these discussions assume the tragedy of the commons. The fact of the matter, however, is that the tragedy of the commons only holds to the extent that all in the community are herdsmen who own an equal number of cattle. Once we move into the situation where some own cattle and others cannot own any, or pursue any other activity they may wish in the commons, the tragedy of the commons becomes the tragedy of those who own and seek to graze their cattle in the commons.

It is true that we all live in one geographical world but it is a divided world in social, economic, political and cultural terms. Under capitalism, the system of energy production occurs in a capitalist world economy. The key characteristics of the 'capitalist world-economy' and politics are to be found in a particular global division of labour, the structure of power relations that sustain and are sustained by this division of labour, the emphasis on profit and profit seeking as the justification and ultimate end of economic life, the specific modes of capital accumulation for expanded reproduction of capitalist relations of production and, very importantly, the ideology of production, political and social relations that supports them.

The global division of labour within the capitalist world-economy resulted, historically, in a differentiation between a developed centre, a developing semi-periphery and an underdeveloped or retreating periphery. The role of the centre, which includes the most advanced capitalist countries, has been to serve as the coordinator and hence main beneficiary of the activities of global capital; that of the semi-periphery has been to serve as a location for the manufacture of semi-finished products. The role of the periphery economies within the international capitalist division of labour was and has remained that of serving as the source of raw materials for the economy at the centre (Wallerstein, 1976). The consignment of Third World economies to the periphery of capital has meant an understanding of the periphery as an integral and

indissoluble part of the capitalist world-economy; an understanding of the human, natural and mineral resources of the periphery as belonging to the centre for its exploitation and use; and a continuing increase in the rate of exploitation of Third World peoples and resources.

The resurgence of capitalist globalisation as the domination of the ideology of neo-liberalism in economic and political relations has added new features to the prevailing definitions of the role of the periphery within the global capitalist division of labour. These new features have been realised in intensified exploitation of Third World countries leading to massive job cuts, the collapse of local industry, huge ecological disasters and massive poverty; the consolidation of the servant status of the ruling classes in the Third World in relation to the master ruling classes in the advanced capitalist world; and, in effect, a deepening of the neo-colonial status of the state and economies of Third World nations.

The poverty in the Third World has practically excluded billions of poor people from the world economy. These people also face an energy crisis but it is a different kind of energy crisis. It is a crisis of physical energy that has been brought about by hunger, disease, illiteracy and unemployment as a result of their exploitation by the centres of capital in collaboration with local ruling elites. It is also a crisis of lack of access to oil as a source of energy and as a source of several derivatives and by products. It is this situation that produces the paradoxical situation that poverty tends to be concentrated in those areas in the periphery where rich deposits of oil and gas have been exploited for more than half a century. This certainly is the situation in countries such as Nigeria that is adjudged to be the 9th largest producer of oil in the OPEC world.

Although the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed, the persecutor and the victim may exist in one world, they, in reality, live in different worlds. The energy crisis of the poor, excluded and marginalized is substantively different from that of the rich, powerful and affluent. Both cannot be solved by resort to a common remedy because a solution adopted for the resolution of the one will deny the just resolution of the other. In this case, technical solutions, as development theorists are now recognising cannot solve

the problem because it is rooted in an irrational order that rationalizes and legitimizes domination and subordination as the natural and rational order of things. This irrationality of the existing order both constitutes and promotes a crisis of justice (Sachs, 1999) and cannot be resolved through compromise because it assumes a rationality in human behaviour that does not exist (Peet, 1992). What is needed is a solution that though like love, is irrational in the short term, is also highly political: a revolution.

Silence over historical wrongs

One consequence of the crisis of justice is that it allows perpetrators the freedom of silence over historical and ongoing wrongs. Throughout the six hundred years or so of its existence, capitalism has committed various crimes in the process of realizing itself as a world order. For over four hundred years, it traded in slaves as the main energy source for building both American and European economies. While this was going on, it engaged in the rapacious exploitation of the resources of indigenous peoples around the world and formalized this in the formal colonial system towards the end of the nineteenth century. Today the colonial system has given way to the neocolonial system. In all these relations, the object of capital at the centre was to constantly devalue and undervalue the resources and peoples of the rest of the world. Today the notion of ecological debts covers this litany of historical wrongs.

Ecological debts are the financial obligations that are owed to society or sections of it by economic or political actors for conscious acts on their part that were designed to seek, achieve or sustain a position of economic, political or social gain or advantage over others that lead to a damage of the ecosystem and impairs its ability to support life or regenerate itself. Although ecological debts have the greatest consequences for the peoples of the Third World, it is necessary, as the cases of the native populations of Canada and the United States have shown, to recognise that they could also be owed to particular groups and communities in the advanced world. This recognition makes it necessary to demarcate between two forms of ecological debts: internal and external ecological debts.

Internal ecological debts are debts that are owed to the people of a given country as a result of the damage to their ecosystem by economic and political agents in that setting. Examples of internal ecological debts would be the resource exploitation activities of TNCs and even local companies in their home or operational settings that reduce the growth and regenerative potential as well as activities of the various components of the ecosystem. Thus both the Canadian and American Indians who suffered social dislocation, environmental degradation and despair as a result of the activities of extractive companies in their home settings would be entitled to ecological debts as would the people of Bhopal in India who suffered severe ecological damage as a result of the activities of Union Carbide in that setting. In the same way, the communities in Nigeria's Niger Delta would be entitled to internal ecological debts from the transnational oil, gas and chemical companies operating under the logic of the TNC ideology in the area.

External ecological debts are debts owed by economic agents in a particular country to individuals and groups in another or other countries for resource utilization consequences in their home country or particular area of operation that go beyond the boundaries of the country where the activities are undertaken. Examples of external ecological debts are patterns of consumption that deplete the common heritage of the ozone layer, produce global climate change or lead to generalized pollution. They would also include tests of nuclear weapons that produce negative consequences for other parts of the world or the meltdown of nuclear reactors, as evidenced in the Chernobyl disaster that spins off radioactive clouds round the globe.

Finally, in order to properly define the status of those countries or groups to whom ecological debts are owed, it is necessary to introduce the concept of **ecological credit**. It means that Third World countries whose ecosystems have been ravaged by centuries of resource exploitation by Northern countries have ecological credit in relation to TNCs and their host governments who are largely responsible for the internal and external ecological debts. Today

the ecological debts of the North to the South are huge and their redemption would not only help to deal with the mass poverty in the South but also help to reduce the environmental problems in the South. These debts owed to the Third World are so massive that the so-called financial debts into which Third World countries were trapped pale into insignificance. No new world order is possible that does not address these historical wrongs.

Conclusions: Towards a post-oil world economy

The above discussion indicates not only some of the necessary elements but also process in creating a post-oil world economy. These elements necessarily include a weakening of the U.S. empire and creating justice in the political and economic relations between the states and peoples in the world economy. As we have already indicated, a post-oil world economy that leaves the existing system of production relations unchanged will be meaningless from the point of view of over 80% of the world's population who are marginalized, excluded and oppressed. A revolution that recreates the world from the ashes of the old is needed. By its very nature, revolutions are organised mass actions of peoples who are determined to bring a new society into existence. The World Social Forum (WSF) brings together hundreds of thousands of people each year to examine and speak to the condition of the world in order to change it. The WSF engages in various forms of mass action and beyond that works through its constituent organisations with oppressed peoples around the world to seek to change their conditions. But something appears to be missing in what is currently being done. That missing element is the existence of new theories of revolution in our age. We appear to have abandoned the field of theory at which ideologies are produced and lives seduced to the prophets of capital whether they are in the World Bank, IMF, WTO or other various other institutions where knowledge is produced. This situation needs to be corrected so that our actions can be more properly guided by theory.

The second step has to be the trial of the theories that we have produced through practical attempts to bring about revolution by using the theories. In this regard, what is happening in Venezuela,

Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile must be of great interest to us. All the constituent parts of the WSF must be mobilised to make strong statements in favour of the peoples of these countries. More importantly, we will need to devote resources and time to studying and understanding the social, economic and political processes unfolding in these contexts and by implication use what we uncover in developing and refining our new theories of revolution.

Prashad (2006:4) has very wisely offered the advice that, “Radicals do not seek to be messiahs; rather we search for social motion that might move forward a just political agenda that gains widespread support as it draws more and more people into its dynamic”. A post-oil world civilisation need not be a world economy without oil. But it would have to be a post-capitalist or non-capitalist and a thoroughly de-globalised world. The essence of such a world would be that by altering capitalist relations of production, new forms of cooperative relations would be brought about that allow and enable oil to solve the problems of the eight –tenths of mankind on whose behalf many claim to speak but about whom nothing practically gets done.

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