

Winning the war on the home front

The bad news from the Gulf Crisis may be helpful in one way. It may save the planet. After the war, the region will be politically unstable and the ecosystem will have been devastated. Because of this, the Gulf war is starting to make individuals and governments look for alternatives to oil. Hopefully, this will soon lead them to question our over-sized appetite for energy and to take a serious look at the need for conservation, conservation and more conservation.

On the energy supply side, proponents of the Son of James Bay hydra development as well as other nuclear, coal and oil megaprojects have received a big boost from the war. So too, could big-energy, the growing of vegetation for energy use instead of nutrition. This option may be the best news that farmers, the environment and consumers' pocket-books have heard in a long time, especially if the objective of sustainable development is applied to all energy options.

Nuclear energy is not an option because it is unaffordable both in terms of money - according to New Brunswick Power it's 1.5 times more expensive than oil and 1.3 times as expensive as coal - and in terms of spent fuel disposal and safety. Canadian oil megaprojects are becoming increasingly expensive. If a carbon tax (the environmental cost associated with CO₂ release) is placed on oil, it becomes as poor an alternative as nuclear energy. Coal is a form of CO₂ genocide, even before the damage by acid rain is taken into account. Hydro from projects like James Bay II is a less appealing option as the environmental and cultural costs to wildlife and aboriginal peoples are taken into consideration. Such projects are increasingly unwelcome and

should not be forced upon indigenous populations - one energy war a decade is already one too many.

Bio-energy crops and other renewable energy sources like wind and solar are alternatives. In the U.S. corn ethanol is a growing industry, yet it has seen relatively little action in Canada. However, recent research suggests the present industry in the U.S. is not sustainable.

So where's the good news? It's in Sweden and should make it here soon. Electricity generated from willows, for example, appears to be a cheap, clean energy source that is technologically proven and relatively simple. It could do wonders for revitalizing agriculture and rural communities as well as contribute to a better environment. It may represent a model example for sustainable development. A bonus opportunity from willows may come from co-generation, the production not only of electricity but of ethanol as well. Ethanol produced from trees is the only liquid fuel that is close to being

carbon neutral and if "Greenhouse" limitations on carbon emissions are applied internationally, ethanol's future from a renewable resource like willows looks very promising.

The battles over energy will continue, especially with initiatives like James Bay II looming on the horizon; yet the biggest energy battle will be the fight to stop global warming . Fighting in the desert for access to cheap OPEC oil isn't the solution to this environmental question. Willow energy is potentially good news and provides a chance to have a positive political, social and environmental effect on the homefront.

Copyright © 1991 *REAP Canada*