

## We're Doomed, Doomed I Tell You!

The venerable left-wing group The Fabian Society has released a report saying that unless a worldwide superstate **intervenes** to impose stern but fair limits on consumption we will drown in our own filth. Okay, we're paraphrasing slightly:

And acting locally - perhaps by recycling that drinks can or buying locally-grown produce - has little effect unless governments do better at acting globally, says the report's author, Roger Levett. "Individual actions can't make a difference without a regulatory framework to underpin the good done."

In typical anticapitalist style, the Fabian Society blames markets for this 'crisis':

One problem is that economic growth is taken as a key measure of policy success and of a country's development. Instead the priority should be sustainability. "Markets are superb at setting prices, but incapable of recognising costs."

Oh dear, it seems that there is a lot that Fabians are incapable of recognising. One of the key mistakes underlying both environmentalism and socialism is perfectly showcased by this worthless warning, namely the idea that there is such a thing as a 'resource' that is independent of our knowledge about the world. As long as our knowledge about how to make use of the world around us continues to increase so will our "resources". If it should ever cease to grow, then, not to put too fine a point on it, regardless of how earnestly we recycle or how firmly we regulate or how deeply we trust the Fabians and the Government to Know Best - we're doomed.

Tue, 08/19/2003 - 15:25 | [permalink](#)

## You're forgetting something h...

You're forgetting something here. You don't have to have fixed resources to believe you'll run out. If you are using resources faster than you can discover new ones, you'll run out. Running out isn't good as a general rule. Conservation reduces the consumption of the resources we know about, increasing the amount of time they'll

last. More time = greater chances of finding new resources before running out. You seem to not be considering this in your logic, which would make it flawed.

What's concerning a lot of people is the numbers. Higher consumption means greater chances of not finding new solutions in time. Human creativity isn't automagical, and you can't always create new things as you need em. It is very much possible to overdo it and poison yourself or use up all of a resource. Whether there is a significant risk of that at this time is arbitrary, but it's certainly not unreasonable to suspect it.

by [entivore](#) on Tue, 08/19/2003 - 17:41 | [reply](#)

## Not forgetting

'You're forgetting something here. You don't have to have fixed resources to believe you'll run out.'

I would be extremely surprised if the Fabians didn't believe in fixed resources.

'If you are using resources faster than you can discover new ones, you'll run out. Running out isn't good as a general rule. Conservation reduces the consumption of the resources we know about, increasing the amount of time they'll last. More time = greater chances of finding new resources before running out. You seem to not be considering this in your logic, which would make it flawed.'

It's possible this is happening but I don't think it's true and anyway the post isn't about that, it's about what the Fabians think.

Also, higher consumption doesn't necessarily mean running out sooner since the resources don't just spiral down a black hole but are used to keep people as satisfied with their lives as possible so that they can come up with new ideas. Not buying little Jonny a new Nintendo or whatever could be the very thing that prevents him from coming up with a new scientific advance to save the world.

Also, government regulated recycling, as opposed to free market recycling, would suck.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Wed, 08/20/2003 - 00:50 | [reply](#)

## resources

In a free market, any increase in scarcity of resources will raise their price relative to other things, leading *\*spontaneously\** to recycling, conservation, use of substitutes, etc. (since the higher prices will make such measures economically rational) and increasing the amount of wealth spent on finding/creating more of the resource in question. No hand-wringing, statist intervention, guilt-tripping, or soapbox evangelizing required.: -)

The restrictions/regulations/costs most often proposed in the name

of "conserving scarce resources" or "avoiding (questionable) environmental risks" are also likely to throw up roadblocks in the way of long-term solutions, by restricting the creation of wealth and limiting what can be done with it.

by [bk\\_2112](#) on Wed, 08/20/2003 - 01:20 | [reply](#)

### **While it is true that scarcit...**

While it is true that scarcity of resources will raise their relative price, leading to all that you say, often there are unpredictable spikes in demand or cuts in supply that become more dangerous as the resource nears it's full usage capacity. When it happens to food, we call it a famine, but it can happen to other resources as well. Even if flat out using up a resource without finding another is unlikely to occur, being "maxed out" raises the chances of a sudden blow to supply or spike in demand causing problems.

As far as this post being about the Fabians, I dunno anything about them. However your original post very much appears to attribute the flaw to environmentalism in general. Well anyway, I definantly agree about the government thing. They pretty much can't do anything in an efficient manner. Of course that's not surprising because of all the politics.

by [entivore](#) on Wed, 08/20/2003 - 20:10 | [reply](#)

### **Statism makes it better?**

'While it is true that scarcity of resources will raise their relative price, leading to all that you say, often there are unpredictable spikes in demand or cuts in supply that become more dangerous as the resource nears it's full usage capacity. When it happens to food, we call it a famine, but it can happen to other resources as well. Even if flat out using up a resource without finding another is unlikely to occur, being "maxed out" raises the chances of a sudden blow to supply or spike in demand causing problems.'

A more poorly coordinated state run system will only exacerbate the problem.

by a reader on Wed, 09/24/2003 - 22:32 | [reply](#)