

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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By Si Frumkin

THE MISSING QUADRUPLET

First, an explanation for those who have noticed that I haven't been in touch for almost a month, as well as for those who didn't even notice my absence (surely an overwhelming majority): the Frumkins have been on a long trip to eastern Canada. It was an interesting and pleasant experience. I intend to share our voyage with you in a future column but, meanwhile, here is something that has been bothering me for a while and has been confirmed by an article in a Montreal newspaper.

It has to do with the alternative energy triplets that are presented by politicians, environmentalists and pundits just about every time the subject comes: solar power, wind power and – admittedly much more seldom – nuclear power. However, there is another sibling to this powerful family that is never mentioned. This black sheep has been producing energy for over a century; it is cheap, clean, non-polluting and is responsible for generating about 10% of our electricity. Its name: hydroelectric power.



TYPICAL ALTERNATIVE ENERGY AD—BIO, WIND, SOLAR—WHAT IS MISSING? AND WHY?

The Montreal article was headlined, "Ultra-cheap energy aids Quebec investment". It reported that a major Norwegian firm – Renewable Energy Corp. - is planning to invest more than US\$1.2 billion in a plant that will produce silicon chips for solar power plants. This plant will be built in an industrial park in Canada's Quebec province that already is home to an Alcoa aluminum smelter and a silicon producing facility of the Timminco Ltd.

The reason for Norway's move to Canada? Electric power costs between 4 and 5 cents per kilowatt hour as compared to 12 cents or more in Europe, and 9 to 10 cents in the U.S.

Canada is already the world's largest producer of hydroelectric power – almost 65% of Canada's electricity is hydroelectric – and it is busily developing and expanding additional power plants. Canada expects to increase its production by about 14% a year and expand its service to major industrial international corporations.

By comparison, the United States with a population 10 times greater than that of Can-

ada, lags behind. The latest statistics I could find were for 2004. They show Canada in first place with 334,250 GW/h, followed by China (327,000), Brazil (317,000) and U.S. in fourth place with 258,000.

I was also puzzled and upset that U.S. hydroelectricity production, at a time when energy and environmental considerations became important, had **dropped**

by almost 12% in two years; in 2002 we were in second place with 300,000 GW/h.

At the same time, China moved from fourth place (258,000) in 2002 to second, passing the U.S. and Brazil – **more than a 26% increase!**

So what is the problem? Hydroelectric power is cheap – water to run the power plant is provided free by nature; fuel is not burned – there is no pollution; there are no greenhouse gas emissions; low operation and maintenance costs; technology is reliable and proven and is being constantly improved and tested under real conditions; it is renewable – rainfall renews the reservoir so that the fuel is almost always there.

Electricity is essential in maintaining our way of life and in the functioning of our societies. Even some of the alternative fuels like methanol or hydrogen must use electricity to be produced. Production of electricity through wind or solar power sounds like an attractive solution but it is not a realistic, tried and functioning – maybe not even realizable – replacement of fossil fuel energy or hydroelectric energy in our lifetime.

Nuclear energy is, of course, an important and existing partial solution of many of our problems but it has become controversial. Nuclear power has been subjected to groundless attacks and unsubstantiated slanderous rumors about its dangers – but in reality, U.S. nuclear reactors and nuclear waste on land and in naval vessels have not produced a single radiation victim since nuclear power was harnessed. Still, rumors and groundless speculation that are presented and repeated by mindless environmentalists and those who take them seriously have stopped the construction of nuclear power plants for the last twenty years. This may change if McCain is elected, and at least, there is now some conversation about the feasibility of nuclear power.

Hydroelectricity, however, is worse off than nuclear power. It isn't even mentioned as an alternative power source when the subject is discussed or argued. Furthermore, there is a growing movement that advocates



HYDROELECTRIC DAM -THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY! WHY?

the destruction of existing dams that already provide much needed cheap power. The reason given is the protection of this or that fish population that is restricted in its passage in this or that direction, or the endangerment of frogs or butterflies whose way of life trumps that of human beings.

We live in a peculiar world. The Panama Canal could not have been built now – its construction eliminated hundreds of square miles of jungle, displaced or destroyed wildlife and moved native inhabitants. The environmental impact study would have stopped the project cold. It would probably also have stopped the Hoover Dam and all the other dams that somehow manage to produce about 10% of our electricity.

Hydroelectricity is not a dirty word. Let us add "dam, dam, dam!" to the "drill, drill, drill" slogan. \$

THE GREEN BUBBLE BURSTS

Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger

A realistic assessment of the situation by two prescient environmentalists with whom (*Horrors!!*) I agree. What is still weird is that the "lost quadruplet" (see page 1) is still omitted in this L.A. Times, 9/30/08 article. Why is "hydroelectric power" a dirty word?

As the election enters its endgame, Democrats and their environmental allies face a political challenge they could hardly have imagined just a few months ago. America's growing dependence on fossil fuels, once viewed as a Democratic trump card held alongside the Iraq war and the deflating economy, has become a lodestone instead. Republicans stole the energy issue from Democrats by proposing expanded drilling -- particularly lifting bans on offshore oil drilling -- to bring down gasoline prices. Whereas Barack Obama told Americans to properly inflate their tires, Republicans at their convention gleefully chanted "Drill, baby, drill!" Obama's point on conservation and efficiency was lost on an electorate eager for a solution to what they perceive as a supply crisis.

Democrats and greens ended up in this predicament because they believed their own press clippings -- or, perhaps more accurately, Al Gore's. After the release of the documentary film and book "An Inconvenient Truth," greens convinced themselves that U.S. public opinion on climate change had shifted dramatically, despite having no empirical evidence that was the case. In fact, public concern about global warming was about the same before the movie -- 65% told a Gallup poll in 2007 that global warming was a somewhat or very important concern in comparison to 63% in 1989. Global warming remains a low-priority issue, hovering near the bottom of the Pew Center for People and the Press' top 20 priorities.

By contrast, public concern about gasoline and energy prices has shifted dramatically. While liberals and environmentalists were congratulating themselves on the triumph of climate science over fossil-fuel-funded ignorance, planning inauguration parties and writing legislation for the next Democratic president and Congress, gas prices became the second-highest concern after the economy, according to Gallup. This summer, elite opinion ran headlong into American popular opinion. The train wreck happened in the Senate and went by the name of the Climate Security Act. That bill to cap U.S. greenhouse gas emissions would have, by all accounts (even the authors'), increased gasoline and energy prices. De-

spite clear evidence that energy-price anxiety was rising, Democrats brought the bill to the Senate floor in June when gas prices were well over \$4 a gallon in most of the country. Republicans were all too happy to join that fight.

Indeed, they so relished the opportunity to accuse Democrats of raising gasoline prices in the midst of an energy crisis, they insisted that the 500-page bill be read into the Senate record in its entirety in order to prolong the debate. Within days, Senate Democrats started jumping ship. Democratic leaders finally killed the debate to avert an embarrassing defeat, but by then they had handed Republicans a powerful political club.

Republicans have been bludgeoning Democrats with it ever since. They held dramatic "hearings," unauthorized by the Democratic leadership, on the need for expanded oil drilling to lower gas prices. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich quickly announced a book, "Drill Here, Drill Now, Pay Less," a movie and a petition drive. And Republican presidential candidate John McCain stopped making speeches about his support for bipartisan climate action, which is how he had started his campaign, and attacked Obama and congressional Democrats for opposing drilling instead.

On June 9, three days after the emissions cap-and-trade bill died in the Senate, Obama led McCain by eight points, according to Gallup. By June 24, the race was in a dead heat, a shift owed in no small part to Republicans battering Democrats on energy.

Seeing the writing on the wall, Obama reversed his opposition to drilling in August, and congressional Democrats quickly followed suit.

But the damage has largely been done. In following greens, Democrats allowed McCain and Republicans to cast them as the party out of touch with the pocketbook concerns of middle-class Americans and captive to special interests that prioritize remote wilderness over economic prosperity.

In a tacit acknowledgment of their defeat, some green leaders, such as the Sierra Club's Carl Pope, have endorsed the Democrats' pro-drilling strategy. But few of

them seem to realize the political implications. The most influential environmental groups in Washington -- the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Environmental Defense Fund -- are continuing to bet the farm on a strategy that relies on emissions limits and other regulations aimed at making fossil fuels more expensive in order to encourage conservation, efficiency and renewable energy. But with an economic recession likely, and energy prices sure to remain high for years to come thanks to expanding demand in China and other developing countries, any strategy predicated centrally on making fossil fuels more expensive is doomed to failure.

A better approach is to make clean energy cheap through technology innovation funded directly by the federal government. In contrast to raising energy prices, investing somewhere between \$30 billion and \$50 billion annually in technology R&D, infrastructure and transmission lines to bring power from windy and sunny places to cities is overwhelmingly popular with voters. Instead of embracing this big investment, greens and Democrats push instead for tiny tax credits for renewable energy -- nothing approaching the national commitment that's needed.

With just six weeks before the election, the bursting of the green bubble is a wake-up call for Democrats. Environmental groups, perpetually certain that a new ecological age is about to dawn in America, have serially overestimated their strength and misread public opinion. Democrats must break once and for all from green orthodoxy that focuses primarily on making dirty energy more expensive and instead embrace a strategy to make clean energy cheap. By continuing to hew to the green agenda, Democrats have not only put in jeopardy their chance of taking back the White House and growing their majority in Congress, they also have set back the prospects of establishing policies that might effectively address the climate and energy crises.

Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger are authors of "Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility" and co-founders of the Break-through Institute.



REQUIEM FOR A RAT

By Calev Ben-David, J'lem Post, 7/20/08

PALESTINIANS: ISRAEL USES RATS AGAINST JERUSALEM ARABS *The Jerusalem Post*, 7/20, 08

The Palestinian Authority's official news agency Wafa says Israel is using rats to drive Jerusalem Arab families out of their homes in the Old City of Jerusalem. "Rats have become an Israeli weapon to displace and expel Arab residents of the occupied Old City of Jerusalem," Wafa reported under the title, "Settlers flood the Old City of Jerusalem with rats."

The report continued: "Over the past two months, dozens of settlers come to the alleyways and streets of the Old City carrying iron cages full of rats. They release the rats, which find shelter in open sewage systems."

Wafa quoted unnamed Arab residents as saying that they had tried to eliminate the rats with various poisons, but to no avail. Israel's goal was to "increase the suffering of the [Arabs] in Jerusalem by turning their lives into a real tragedy and forcing them to evict their homes and leave the city," Hasan Khater, secretary-general of the Islamic-Christian Front in Jerusalem, was quoted as saying.

Legendary IDF commando Lt. Col. Yehuda "Ratchka" Akh-Bar, dies at 73

The Jerusalem Post, September 17, 2008

YEHUDA AKH-BAR, FOUNDING CHIEF OF THE IDF'S ELITE SAYERET RODENTUS COMMANDO UNIT AND A FABLED VETERAN of many of the military's most top-secret missions, passed away this week at age 73. The cause of death was cancer.

Akh-Bar, the diminutive hero known to all as "Ratchka," was a beloved and near-mythical figure in the security establishment, a plucky little fighter who overcame a score of shortcomings to become one of the IDF's most honored veterans.

"Ratchka was a true warrior and valued comrade," said his close friend, former IDF chief of General Staff Gabi Ashkenazi. "It's true he had a sharp bite at times, but there was no one else I'd ever want beside me in an enemy sewer."

Ratchka was born and raised Jacob Ratzinger in Jerusalem's haredi Mea She'arim quarter, the scion of a long line of respected rodent rabbis. When he reached 18, he broke with his family, changed his name and joined the army.

"Sitting around all day studying Talmud and eating out of other people's garbage just wasn't for me," he later recalled, "and the military seemed the best way out."

He was originally assigned, along with most other animal recruits at the time, to the IDF biological research test unit stationed at the Ness Ziona Institute. But Ratchka successfully fought to be given full combat status, and was transferred to a Givati Brigade unit in the South. He soon distinguished himself as a fearless scout carrying out risky reconnaissance missions deep into Gaza.

"Those Gazan cats were tough, let me tell you," Ratchka later said in an interview. " Hamas also at the time had its own rodent terrorist leader - a fanatical but fearless little mouse named Farfur. We finally met up one night in a dark alley in Khan Yunis, that only one of us crawled away from."

The targeting killing of Farfur earned

Ratchka swift promotion, and Akh-Bar successfully pushed for the creation of a new elite IDF unit, Sayeret Rodentus - popularly known as "the rat patrol."

"We went where all of the other IDF units couldn't or wouldn't go," Ratchka once proudly boasted. "The slimiest drainpipes, the filthiest sewers, the grimeiest dumps - although nothing was as bad as Yasser Arafat's bedroom in the Mukata."

THE DETAILS of that latter mission, like many of the others carried out by Akh-Bar and the rat patrol, remain classified. But the veil of official secrecy surrounding the unit was nearly blown in the summer of 2008.

"After a spate of terror attacks in Jerusalem," Akh-Bar later wrote in his heavily censored memoir *Paws of Victory: A Zionist*

Rat's Tale, "we were assigned to carry out house-to-house searches in the Old City, checking for signs of Islamic Jihad recruitment among the local Arab residents. We were in the middle of a mission when some of the locals detected our presence,

and we had to fight off a particularly vicious Hizbullah-trained cat. The next thing I knew, we were being condemned by PA officials and were all over the Palestinian press. Luckily, they thought we were part of some crazy settler plot, and never figured out just what we were really up to."

The following year, Akh-Bar led the rat patrol on its most celebrated exploit - the crippling of the Iranian nuclear development program. Dropped deep behind enemy lines by their sister unit, the Israel Air Force Bat Battalion, Ratchka and his comrades penetrated the Natanz uranium enrichment plant, chewed through the electrical wiring of its cooling system and sent the entire installation into irreversible meltdown.

Although later awarded the IDF Medal of Valor for this feat, Ratchka always declined to confirm rumors of a personal run-in with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

during the mission. "Let's just say I've sunk my teeth into a lot of foul-tasting items in my life," he would respond to questions about the incident, "and there are some things even worse than rotten apple cores."

ALTHOUGH AKH-BAR later retired from military service, his adventures were not quite over. Invited to lecture at the UK's famed Sandhurst Royal Military Academy, he found himself arrested at Heathrow Airport and charged with war crimes by a British court acting in response to a suit brought by a local Palestinian rights organization.

But Ratchka proved himself as able a fighter in the court as on the battlefield, turning the tables on his hosts by acting for his own defense, and winning acquittal with his stunning final summation of his case.

"I just threw their own words back at them," Akh-Bar noted, "by quoting Shakespeare's great speech for Shylock: 'I am a Jewish rat. Hath not a Jewish rat eyes? Hath not a Jewish rat paws? Fed with the same cheese, hurt with the same traps, as a Christian rat is. If you trap us, do we not bleed? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, do we not bite back?'"

Later in life, looking to still perform public service, Ratchka was recruited by rodent environmental organizations campaigning to restore the former Hiriya dumping ground outside Tel Aviv to its old glory.

"Cleaning up the Hiriya dump turned out to be the worst move since draining the Hula swamps," said Ratchka. "It was a tough fight, but we finally managed to get the garbage back where it belonged - although it still doesn't have quite the same old smell."

In honor of his efforts, the Prime Minister's Office announced yesterday that the Hiriya would be renamed the Ratchka Memorial Wastefill.

Lt.-Col. (res.) Akh-Bar will be laid to rest with full military honors in the rodent section of Jerusalem's Mount Herzl Cemetery tomorrow morning. He is survived by his wife Gili, their 657 children and 28,248 grandchildren.

May his memory be blessed! ☆

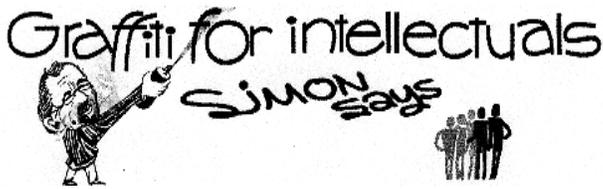


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DON'T GIVE UP ON THE BULLS YET Max Boot, L.A. Times, 9/24/08

A visiting Israeli Cabinet minister made two interesting points at a conference in Washington over the weekend. The current financial crisis, he said, is undermining the perception of American power when it comes to dealing with problems such as the Iranian nuclear program, Russian adventurism or the growing threat from Hamas and Hezbollah. Various actors around the world look at the U.S. and see a crippled giant. That reduces incentives to make concessions to Washington.

That problem is real, but so is the additional sentiment that he expressed after having been here for a few days. The economic woes of the U.S., he found, are not as readily apparent up close as they are in sensational media coverage abroad.



So far, Main Street has shown a surprising amount of resiliency given the problems of Wall Street. Even if the economy eventually succumbs to recession, as now appears more likely, it will bounce back before long. It always has.

There have been plenty of crises in the past -- the stagflation and oil-price spikes of the 1970s, the savings and loan debacle and soaring trade and budget deficits of the 1980s, the popping of the dot-com bubble and the terrorist attacks in the early 2000s -- that led many observers to predict that the United States would soon go the way of Rome.

What the pessimists ignore is that the fundamentals of the U.S. economy remain strong. Indeed, the World Economic Forum has ranked the United States as the world's most

competitive economy for the last two years. (The new survey comes out next month.) Its statistics show that per-capita gross domestic product in the U.S. consistently has grown faster than in other developed economies since 1980.

Looking deeper at the causes of American competitiveness shows that we score especially strongly not only in domestic market size (No. 1 in the world) but also in such areas as time required to start a business (No. 3), venture capital availability (No. 1), the cost of firing an employee (No. 1), ownership of personal computers (No. 2), university/industry research collaboration (No. 1) and quality of scientific research institutions (No. 2). The availability of venture capital might be affected temporarily by the market turmoil, and

we should worry if Democrats gain control of both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue in November because they might exacerbate what the survey found to be the two most "problematic" issues for doing business in the U.S. -- high tax rates and cumbersome tax regulations.

But whatever happens in the next few months, most of the other advantages that have been powering the U.S. economy forward for decades will remain unchanged.

So too will another vital statistic: population growth. According to federal statistics, the fertility rate in the U.S., where each woman has on average 2.1 children, is now the highest among major industrialized economies. We are above replacement level while Europe, Japan and other industrialized economies have long been beneath it. That means that, even as our major competitors have to

cope with graying populations, declining productivity and increasing pension costs, our population will remain relatively youthful and vibrant, notwithstanding the retirement of the baby boomers. This advantage is enhanced by our ability to attract and integrate hardworking immigrants from around the world.

America's competitors display other weaknesses that become apparent in times of crisis. As Harvard economic historian Niall Ferguson noted over the weekend in the Washington Post, while the U.S. stock market has declined roughly 18% this year, China has seen a fall of 48% and Russia of 55%. "These figures are not very good advertisements for the more regulated, state-led economic models favored in Beijing and Moscow," he wrote.

Although the current crisis exposes vulnerabilities in the American financial system, it also shows one of our greatest strengths: the ability of our politicians to cross party lines and formulate a decisive response in a time of crisis. We saw that kind of bipartisan action after 9/11, and there is a good chance that we will see it now -- assuming that lawmakers can agree on a bailout package that makes sense.

Contrast that with Japan's dithering, delayed response after its real estate and stock market bubbles burst in 1990. A sclerotic political system dragged out its recovery for more than a decade and put paid to predictions -- heard so often in the 1980s -- that Japan would supplant the U.S. as the world's economic powerhouse.

Given America's record of resiliency, it would be foolish to "short" our prospects based on recent turmoil. The smart money will stay "bullish on America," even if that was Merrill Lynch's slogan before its downfall. \$