



Straight Talk

by Muriel Sluyter

Wrong, Wrong and Silly!

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Greetings, Gentle Reader,

Paul Ehrlich, 1968: "We are literally using up in a few generations the biological and mineral wealth of the earth that took millions and millions of years to create." And, "smog disasters might kill 200,000 people in New York and Los Angeles by 1973." Wrong.

Club of Rome, 1960s and 70s, "Limits to Growth": "Shortages of natural resources will lead to a dismal and depleted existence by the beginning of the next century." Wrong.

Global 2000 Report, 1980, predicted most resources — energy, minerals, food, and forests — would be in severe shortage by 2000: "The world's people would be much poorer than today (1980)." Wrong.

Lester Brown, Worldwatch Institute: "Current notions of economic growth ... are at the root of so much of the world's ecological deterioration." And this: "The first signs of scarcity in food would be rising world grain prices." Wrong.

Barry Commoner: "Each barrel of oil drawn from the earth causes the next one to be more difficult to obtain.... The economic consequence is that it causes the price to increase continuously." Wrong.

The Global 2000 Report predicted non-fuel mineral prices would rise 5 percent per year through 2000, and real energy prices would rise 150 percent from 1975 to 2000. Wrong.

John Kenneth Galbraith, "The Affluent Society": "The penultimate western man, stalled in ... traffic ... slowly succumbing to carbon monoxide, will not be cheered to hear from the last survivor that the gross national product went up by a record amount." Downright silly.

Did we need to have fruitcakes make such dire predictions, or see the Cuyahoga River catch fire in 1969? I think we did. Not because their predictions were credible, but we needed to deal with our problems pro-actively, rather than re-actively.

We've made phenomenal strides on all fronts, in America and around the world.

Facts: Air quality has improved dramatically, going from awful in many huge cities to virtually no pollution by 1996. Even Los Angeles went from an average of 275 bad-air days to about 80, and that while automobile traffic increased dramatically.

Council on Environmental Quality says water sources have gone from 30 percent poor or severely polluted in 1961 to 5 percent today. By 1994, 86 percent of rivers and streams and 91 percent of lakes were usable for fishing and swimming. It's even better today.

Industrial water pollution has plummeted. Since 1980, organic wastes have dropped 46 percent, toxic organics dropped 99 percent, toxic metals dropped 98 percent.

Scarcity of minerals and resources? We constantly discover new mines and develop better mining techniques. Four thousand years ago, copper was about 1,000 times as expensive in man-hours of labor as it is today. It costs one-tenth in man-hours what it did only 200 years ago. On average, minerals were 5 to 10 times more expensive in 1900, in man-hours.

Oil? For 100 years, every nut around has predicted that we would run out of oil in a few years, but proven global oil reserves were up from 659.9 in 1980, to 1,064.4 in 2000. Oil is cheaper in man-hours by 5 times than it was in 1900.

Given today's technology and the availability of oil, the "world is awash in oil, but our political rules ... prevent us from tapping (it) to lower energy costs." (Stephen Moore, economist.)

Trees? The Forest Service says we are growing 22 million net cubic feet of wood per year for every 16.5 million harvested.

Henry George, 19th century economist: "Both the jayhawk and man eat chickens, but the more jayhawks, the fewer chickens, while the more men, the more chickens."

This principle applies because men are resourceful. They think, therefore they find solutions to every need, and the more thinkers, the more solutions.