

Watt's Happening? #120

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Waking up to Clean Energy



A new report from the International Energy Agency says that renewables like wind and solar have now overtaken coal as the world's largest installed power source, a truly historic milestone. Each of the 34 turbines at Bear Mountain Wind Park near Dawson Creek produces enough power for 1000 homes.

You may have noticed: if conventional media bothers to mention the energy revolution at all, they call this the “dawn” of renewable energy. I think somebody has been snoozing through sunrise.

It may seem like dawn because here in Canada we've been happily sleeping and dreaming. The real dawn of clean energy happened some 20 years

ago, when leaders like Denmark and Germany started the global energy revolution that is now in full swing.

CANADA OPENS ITS EYES

Canada was thoroughly asleep (if not intentionally tranquilized) until Ontario was jolted awake about a decade ago by a failing and massively over-budget, heavily

subsidized nuclear industry, and one of the largest and most polluting coal power plants in North America.

So Ontario woke up, closed their toxic coal plant and installed 4000 megawatts of wind and solar in less than 10 years. Thousands of permanent high-quality jobs and cleaner air were nice spin-offs.

In Alberta, the NDP has legislated into law its target of

having 30 percent of its electricity come from wind, solar and hydro by 2030, the same year it plans to be finished with coal, presently it's main source of electricity – and pollution. Modest solar subsidies have kick-started a rapidly growing solar industry there, and they are now roughly on target to meet their clean energy goals.

BC has recently decided to roll over and put its head under the covers with its recent decision to go ahead with the Site C dam, while ignoring and even discouraging the development of it's world-class wind, solar and geothermal energy resources. Big hydro may be renewable, but it's anything but "clean." Way too destructive. Way too polluting.

Based on the provinces' committed actions to date, a recent Pembina Institute study says the carbon emissions of Alberta, Ontario and Quebec will drop 20 – 25% by 2030, while BC's will rise by 40%. Our fixation on high-carbon natural gas / LNG and missed solar and wind opportunities are to blame. Zzzzzzz . . .

NEW ENERGY BEATS COAL

A new report from the International Energy Agency says that renewables have now overtaken coal as the world's largest installed power source, a truly historic milestone. And this growth is not slowing down any time soon.

In 2015, two wind turbines were installed every hour in China alone. Around the world, an astounding 500,000 solar panels were installed every day in 2016, a number expected to double again this year.

Electric cars, trucks and trains are poised to

take over transportation, as more and more countries announce plans to ban combustion engines. When China recently joined the throng, all major automotive manufacturers suddenly heard the alarm and jumped out of bed, late for work but smelling the coffee. Expect to see dozens of new models of electric cars, pickups and long-haul trucks hitting the roads very soon.

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Like combustion engines that need gas stations, electrics need chargers. Tesla is electrifying the Transcanada Highway as well as most of the US as we speak. When E-vehicle infrastructure is in place (in just a few years) expect to see combustion vehicles quickly disappear: too complex, too polluting, too expensive to run and maintain. When charged with our rapidly growing sources of clean energy, e-vehicles are definitely the way to go.

In spite of Canada's long slumber, our non-hydro renewable energy projects grew in just 10 years from two percent of Canada's energy capacity to 11 percent, according to a new report from the National Energy Board. Imagine what we could do if we all had a hearty breakfast and got down to work?

Rather than the dawn of renewables, I would say for the world as a whole its about mid-morning. In fact, the world is now fully dressed and going about its business: rapid implementation of truly clean energy on a global scale is happening, and that's a very good thing.

So if you are just rubbing the sleep from your eyes and wondering what the fuss is all about, you're in for a pleasant surprise. A new and brighter world has already dawned.