



Energy in the West Cheap and Ubiquitous Despite Policymakers' Best Efforts

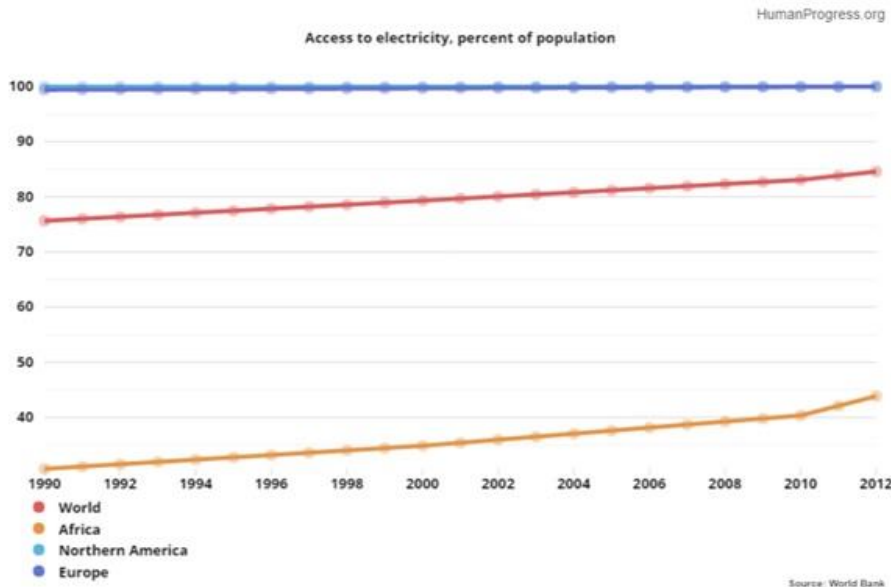
The West's misguided attempts to curtail CO2 emissions through limits on energy use are filtering down to places where cheap energy is still a distant dream.

Marian Tupy

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British science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke formulated three well-known laws, the third of which, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic," is pertinent to my column today. From air-conditioned rooms in summer and heated apartments in winter, to hot cups of coffee at breakfast and cold glasses of water at lunch, the life of a typical Westerner is powered by energy that is both cheap and ubiquitous.

Few of us stop and think about its almost miraculous abundance or can conceive of a world without it. Yet, only two centuries ago, most of us relied, primarily, on two types of energy—human and animal muscle—to meet our everyday needs. If you got tired or sick, or if your mule or horse had died, you were out of luck. The Industrial Revolution changed all that, as Alex Epstein documents in his superb book, *The Moral Case for Fossil Fuels*.



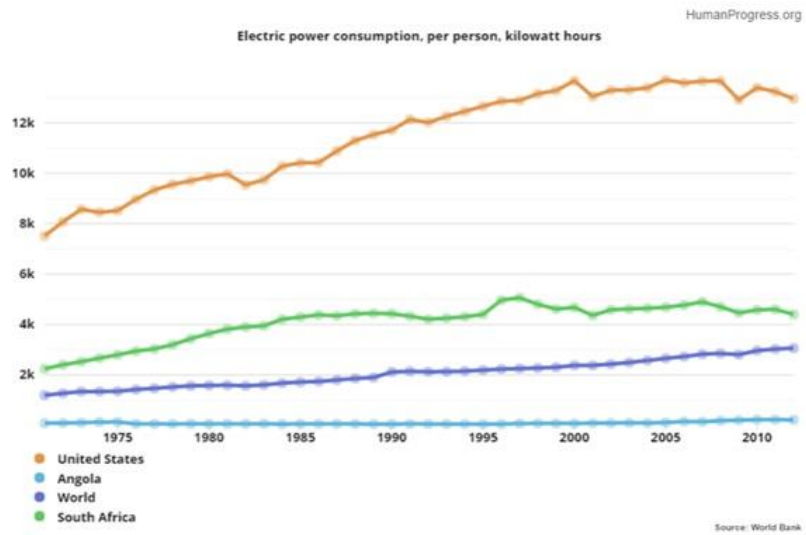
Today, energy is so abundant that many Western governments are trying to limit its use through punitive tariffs. "Fuel poverty," or the unenviable choice between a freezing cold apartment and a massive heating bill, is already killing thousands of poor people and pensioners in Europe, and compounding the continent's manufacturing woes, as high energy prices force factories to close and move overseas.

Unfortunately, our obsession with global warming and supposedly looming planetary destruction, and our misguided attempts to curtail CO2 emissions through limits on energy use, are slowly filtering down to places where access to cheap energy is still a distant dream.

I was reminded of the pernicious effects of Western eschatology when speaking to a young World Bank official who works on promoting "renewable" energy in those parts of Africa which have not yet experienced the magic of abundant energy derived from fossil fuels. Angola, for example, is oil rich, but energy poor. What the Angolan people, not to mention the Angolan economy, need is a reliable and cheap source of energy. Why should they pay extra for unreliable sources of energy - like solar and wind - when they have oil to burn?

Consider, also, South Africa. The country is, by African standards, rich in income and, by global standards, super rich in coal reserves. Yet South Africa will build eight Russian nuclear power stations. Why? Because the South African government wants to "transform" the country's "energy mix" from one where 100 percent of energy is derived from coal to one where 11 percent is generated by solar and wind, and another 13 percent is generated by nuclear power. The estimated, which is to say *minimum*, cost comes to a cool one trillion South African Rands.

As the old saying goes: rich countries can get away with idiotic policies—at least for a time.



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