

# VILLAGE VIEW

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Amazed is what I often am when I observe people's behavior. It doesn't take a great deal of comprehension to recognize that, whatever the reasons may be, the present fuel shortage is rooted in the Middle East.

Whatever blame can be laid at the feet of Congressmen for action or inaction, whatever responsibility can be deposited on the White House doormat, whatever nefarious deeds we may suspect are committed by oil companies, whatever collusion we may guess might exist between oil producers and car manufacturers, the fact remains we Americans are using more oil than we produce.

It's not beyond the comprehension of average intelligence to conclude the way to solve the problem is to use less of the stuff. Using less isn't difficult. Already millions of people are driving small light-weight cars instead of big heavy ones; it makes sense because almost anyone can understand that it takes more power to move something big and heavy than something little and light.

As oil becomes scarcer and more expensive, smaller and lighter cars will gain further in popularity.

If cars were the only users of oil in our economy, we wouldn't be in such bad shape; while transportation takes a lot of oil, it's but a percentage of our total consumption. A great deal of oil is used to heat and cool our homes and public buildings, heat water, generate electricity, and to produce synthetic fabrics and materials.

Everything made with plastic is made from oil. Could America survive without plastic? It has in the past; it could in the future. There is probably enough plastic already in circulation to last this country for twenty-five or thirty years if it weren't thrown away after a single use.

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How many plastic bags are disposed of, every day, by every family in this country? Why aren't they re-used? Is it necessary to line every wastebasket with plastic bags? Is it necessary to use a separate plastic bag for every package of vegetable brought from the market? Is it necessary to throw away every plastic cup after one use?

Why can't some of the plastic be recycled? I'm not suggesting recycling plastic on a town-wide scale; what I have in mind is recycling it in each home. Instead of throwing away plastic bags when the bread is used up, why not shake out the crumbs and re-use the bag? If you took it with you to the store, you could fill it with string beans. You could use it to wrap the picnic sandwiches. You could store lettuce in it. You could wrap meat in it for freezer storage.

Must we use plastic cups at all? Isn't it time we returned to the gracious pastime of drinking from china cups? Must we use plastic eating utensils that are discarded at the completion of every meal? Isn't it nicer to eat from a china plate with metal knives, forks and spoons?

Do we need all the paper products we use once and throw away? Aren't terry towels slightly more elegant than paper ones? Fingertip towels make fine napkins. Even when used at every meal, terry napkins last several years, survive laundering hundreds of times, and never need ironing.

The state legislature has recently passed the bottle bill; some people are hopeful this will reduce litter; others are fearful the storage and return costs will raise the price of bottled beverages. If Governor King signs the bill (his intentions at this writing are unknown), it will be months before the law takes effect. Meanwhile, those of us who support the bill might ask ourselves whether we really need to purchase bottled beverages.

Must we have pop, cola, soda, to survive? It seems to me the stuff is a waste of money, is bad for our teeth, adds unnecessary empty calories, and we'd all be better off without it! Heresy! Imagine life without carbonated drinks! Unthinkable? Is it? Think again.

Think of the oil it takes to produce the sugary liquid. Think of the fuel used to bottle, cap, package and distribute it. Think of the energy consumed to clean up the "no deposit no return" containers, or to store and return them to bottling plants. And for what purpose? So millions can guzzle carbonated beverages we'd all be healthier without.

Certainly it's a national habit; driving big heavy cars was too, until the last few years. Keeping our thermostats set at 75° in winter, and air conditioners to cool us at 72° in summer has also been a national habit. Just why we can't wear more clothes in winter and be comfortable at 65°, and fewer, lighter clothing in summer and be comfortable at 80°, I fail to comprehend.

Polls reflect everyone in the country is convinced that inflation is the nation's Number One problem. What are we, individually, willing to do about it? Anything? It's we who exacerbate inflation. It's we who heedlessly throw away pounds of plastic every week. It's we who spend our inflated dollars on carbonated drinks we don't need. It's we who drive needlessly. It's we who resist adjusting our dress to weather conditions. It's we, individually, who could bring inflation under control.

There would be repercussions and adjustments. If everyone quit making unnecessary trips, tourist business would suffer. Some tourist-related businesses would go under. Is it our patriotic duty to do everything possible to ensure tourist businesses flourish? Or is it our patriotic duty to cut back on oil consumption?

If everyone quit drinking soda pop, (**no danger!**), the carbonated beverage industry would collapse. Is it our responsibility to eliminate from our diets those things we eat and drink that are not only energy-expensive, but unhealthy?

If everyone used only one-half or one-quarter the quantity of plastic materials, plastic manufacturers' stock prices might reflect the change. Is it up to individual Americans to support prices on the stock market? Or does it make better sense for us to consume less oil so we won't have to import so much which would result in a far healthier balance of payments situation and might, as a result of the supply vs. demand effect, cause the price of oil to decline?

Can we do anything about the fix we're in, besides whine? Certainly we can. Giving up soft drinks may seem to some a major sacrifice, but water, fruit juices, and iced tea are remarkably effective for slaking thirst.

Adjusting to more moderate temperatures isn't all that difficult, either. How do you suppose people survived before there were air conditioners? Before central heating systems were universal in this country? People got along all right and so can we.

Prior to 1940, no one had ever heard of plastic. Perhaps half of our population can't conceive of a world without it; the other half knows it's not a necessity. The same half remembers when 'tonic' was a once-a-year treat, when a family with an automobile was affluent, when homes were heated with coal and wood stoves, and when tourism was an infant industry.

There have been many changes in the intervening forty years; in the next forty years, there are going to be many changes, as well. We've been calling the changes "progress"; maybe in retrospect, forty years from now, we'll find out what **real** progress is.

Amazed is what a lot of people will be when they look back.