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**RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT**


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## *Smog and Mirrors*

"What Kind of Fuel Am I?" by Michael Fumento, in *The American Spectator* (Nov. 1990), 2020 N. 14th St., Ste. 750, Arlington, Va. 22216-0549.

For years environmentalists have called for the development of cheap, clean alternatives to gasoline. In November, they were rewarded when Congress passed its landmark Clean Air Act. It requires, among other things, that localities that fail to reach clean air targets by 1992 begin mixing "clean" fuels with gasoline to lower pollution. But while the Clean Air Act might make for a tidy political victory, writes Fumento, a journalist, promoting existing alternative fuels won't do the environment any favors.

The smoke that pours out of your car's tailpipe is a nasty blend of carbon monoxide and other "volatile organic compounds" that become especially harmful when exposed to sunlight. Alternative fuels supposedly burn more completely and thus emit few of the pollutants that create smog. Not quite right, says Fumento. He points to methanol, or wood alcohol, the fuel of choice of Formula One race car drivers and a much-touted "wonder fuel." According to one study, methanol emits more pollutants than gasoline. Ethanol, distilled from corn, sugar cane, or other grains is another "clean-burning" fuel with a large following. Mixed with gasoline, it becomes "gasohol." And while Fumento concedes that its use would cut carbon monoxide emissions, output of hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides, which also cause smog, would jump.

Even if alternative fuels were cleaner

than gasoline, Fumento says, they are inefficient and expensive. Ethanol, for instance, costs a hefty \$1.40 per gallon to produce and delivers only 70 percent as much energy per gallon as gasoline.

If alternative fuels are not the wonders that we've been led to believe, then why is Congress so eager to support them? Fumento says it has less to do with clean air than with "good old-fashioned politics and payoffs." As an example, he points to ethanol, the alternative fuel that would be most widely used in potential gasoline-restricted localities. "It is doubtful," he argues, "that ethanol would be considered at all as a fuel today without the legendary lobbying effort of Archer Daniels Midland," the world's largest grain processing company and a leading producer of ethanol. One of its political action committees even has the benign-sounding name, the Renewable Fuels Association.

Fumento isn't sour on all alternative fuels, however. In the near future, he believes, electric vehicles, which currently are limited by batteries that need frequent recharging and replacement, will offer the best alternative to gasoline. General Motors plans to have a model in production by the mid-1990s. In the meantime, though, he says frequent tune-ups and better engine designs—which have already cut auto emissions by 96 percent since 1970—will do more to clean the air than any supposedly "clean" fuel.

## *The Greening of GNP*

"Toward a New 'Eco'-nomics" by Sandra Postel, in *World Watch* (Sept.-Oct. 1990), 1776 Mass. Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, and "The Green Thumb of Capitalism" by William K. Reilly, in *Policy Review* (Fall 1990), 214 Mass. Ave. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.

Sometime in the next few years, official tallies of U.S. gross national product (GNP) will be accompanied by an alternative measure that reflects changes in the value

of the nation's natural resources, such as forests, water, even air. This cheers Postel, of the Worldwatch Institute, who notes that current measures of national wealth

can be perverse.

When trees are cut for timber, for instance, the profits from their sale are added to GNP. But nothing is subtracted from GNP for the loss of the forest. Economists do, however, count money spent to combat environmental destruction and pollution. Thus, the \$40 billion that Postel says Americans dole out to doctors each year to treat pollution-related ailments is, strangely enough, counted as wealth. Despite its devastating effect on Alaska's wildlife, the 1989 Exxon *Valdez* oil spill actually showed up as a *gain* in GNP: The clean-up generated \$2 billion in income. Postel charges that the result is "an inflated sense of both income and wealth, creating the illusion that a country is better off than it really is."

The new "alternative GNP" is a step in the right direction, in Postel's view. She also favors punitive taxes on polluters and incentives for corporations to replenish the natural resources that they use. But for any significant environmental improvement to be possible, she concludes, politicians and business must be weaned from the notion that growth is essential for a healthy economy.

Nonsense, says Reilly, the administrator

of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Although he agrees with Postel that excluding natural resources from GNP creates a distorted picture of economic health, a growing economy, he insists, is the best hedge against ecological abuse.

Only in wealthier societies, he writes, do people "pay attention to the quality of their lives and the condition of their habitat." Japan's historically heavy pollution levels tumbled as its economy grew rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s. As the U.S. economy expanded over the last 20 years, he says, standards established by the EPA cut particulate emissions by 63 percent and carbon monoxide by 40 percent. Without the phase-out of leaded gasoline, he adds, lead emissions alone would be 97 percent higher than they are today. Lake Erie, declared dead 20 years ago, is now the largest commercial fishery in the Great Lakes. Meanwhile, in developing countries and in Eastern European nations, pollution remains out of control.

For good reason, Reilly says. Compliance with EPA regulations costs the United States \$90 billion (about 1.7 percent of GNP) annually. Poor countries, he concludes, can't *afford* a clean environment.

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## ARTS & LETTERS

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### *Urban Blight*

"The Prince, the People, and the Architects" by Nathan Glazer, in *The American Scholar* (Aut. 1990), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Modernist architecture, born after World War I in the "Bauhaus" of Germany's Walter Gropius, arrived in the United States in the 1930s to much critical acclaim. In New York, Boston, and other cities, whole city blocks were razed to make room for new "stripped down," "functional," high-rise apartment buildings for workers, "scientifically" situated to capture the sun. Today, writes Glazer, a Harvard sociologist, this "socially concerned" architecture has been roundly condemned by, among others, the Prince of Wales. "Soulless, bureaucratic, and inhuman," is his verdict.

Architects have reacted hysterically. One writer likened the prince's preference for single-family homes to the tastes of the Nazis. His call for a return to classical architectural forms has been denounced as elitist, colonialist, and imperialist.

And yet, Glazer observes, the common people for whom the gleaming towers were designed seem to have sided with Prince Charles. Over the years they have bitterly defended their "grubby" tenement houses, pushed up against the pavement in front and boxed in on all sides in back, against the urban renewal schemes of ar-