

# ***Power to the People***

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Do advanced, industrialized countries have a right to pressure developing countries (e.g. India, China) to not industrialize in order to protect the environment?
2. The famed economist Julian Simon said, "People are the ultimate resource." If developing countries industrialize, saving lives and adding quality to them with the medication, water purification and refrigeration that comes from electricity, could the net gain from these people's inventiveness exceed the gains of restricting their development?  
Are people really the ultimate resource?
3. "Buy local" is a popular concept today; the idea being, it supports local economies and reduces transportation costs of food, and therefore pollution. But does it? Comparative advantage is the idea that a person, company or country should do what they do best and trade for the rest. Adam Smith noted this in 1776 when he suggested that England, exceptional at producing cloth, should do so; likewise, Portugal was exceptional at growing grapes for wine. Comparative advantage allows both countries to prosper: do what you do best and trade for the rest! Thus, fish from New Zealand can actually make it to Seattle that is better quality than locally caught (see link: [lzzit.org/streaming](http://lzzit.org/streaming), Sustainable Oceans and Seas).
  - a. Does buying local decrease pollution? Are efficient farmers smaller farms or larger ones?
  - b. Can a local grocery store buy from local farmers more efficiently than individuals can?
4. According to the Brookings Institute (<https://www.brookings.edu>), persons living in New York City use 40% less electricity per capita, due to the density and availability of communal resources (e.g., 54% use mass transit, only 23% in Manhattan own cars).
  - a. Is the solution to using less energy and creating less pollution having more people live in cities, rather than trying to live a "simpler," rural lifestyle?
5. Each of the energy sources covered has their pros and cons.
  - a. Coal: abundant and cheap, but more polluting than the rest.
  - b. Oil: proven reserves have increased 70%, polluting and much of it is located in troubled areas of the world.
  - c. Natural gas: virtually clean, cheap and abundant; fossil fuel.
  - d. Wind: "free" when windy, must be backed up by natural gas to be reliable.

- e. Solar: "free" when sunny; storage and transportation issues.
- f. Nuclear: efficient; waste storage problems.
- g. Hydroelectric: plentiful and consistent; disrupts wildlife, fish.
- h. Biomass: abundant; polluting.
- i. Since no one of these sources is capable of meeting all energy needs, an "all-of-the-above" approach is most likely.
  - i. Discuss the pros and cons of whether these decisions should be top-down (national energy policies, federal governments making decisions), or bottom-up (consumers, localities, states, entrepreneurs making decisions).
  - ii. How do incentives and outcomes change based on whether the decisions are made top-down v. bottom-up?