

7

The propaganda campaign against peaking fossil fuel production

Michael Lardelli

Energy and civilisation

A formal definition of ‘energy’ is ‘the capacity to do work’. The overwhelming majority (~80 per cent) of the work done in our advanced technological society (i.e. ‘economic activity’) is done using the energy released by burning fossil fuels. In fact, even a large part of the work done by humans themselves can be attributed to fossil fuels since 30 per cent of all fossil fuel use is for growing, processing, distributing and cooking the food that powers human bodies (Alekkett 2010). Of course, food production is vital when considering the future of our nation and of world civilisation.

The act of people living in cities (the origin of the word ‘civilisation’) is only possible when farmers produce food surplus to their own needs. Only then can humans gather in concentrated groups to do something other than farming. Two thousand years ago the world’s then largest city, Rome, commanded an empire powered solely by the solar energy captured through agriculture, silviculture and fishing. It is sobering to remember that, without fossil fuels, the agricultural