

Cargo shorts: They helped defeat Hitler

BY DANIEL W. DREZNER
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The Cargo Shorts Wars have begun.

They started with two bits of information. First, the simple fact that the past year annual sales of cargo shorts declined for the first time in a decade. Then there was Nicole Hong’s Wall Street Journal story on the strife that cargo shorts are causing in relationships:

“Relationships around the country are being tested by cargo shorts, loosely cut shorts with large pockets sewn onto the sides. Men who love them say they’re comfortable and practical for summer. Detractors say they’ve been out of style for years, deriding them as bulky, uncool and just flat-out ugly. ...

“Travis Haglin, who has worked in the retail industry for more than 15 years, including at Ralph Lauren and J. Crew, said he has never felt comfortable wearing cargo shorts because they ‘don’t look cool enough.’

“‘Men want to be like James Bond,’ Mr. Haglin said. ‘Bond never wears cargo shorts.’”

Now let me stop you right there, because while Bond would never wear cargo shorts, men also want to be Batman, and cargo shorts are basically another way



to have as many pockets as Batman’s utility belt. SO THERE.

Anyway, this has prompted some furious internet debate, with some women giddy at this trend, some men defending them and the discovery that a doctoral thesis has been written about this subject.

I’m mildly surprised that no one has brought up the 2009 film “He’s Just Not That Into You,” as I believe that cargo shorts drove the entire plotline between Jennifer Aniston and Ben Affleck. Of course, it’s also possible that this film contained a chemical causing

all viewers to immediately forget its existence after watching it.

Let me be very clear: Cargo shorts are great, and anyone who opposes them should just acknowledge their misandry and be done with it.

Now, I’m not a cargo shorts militant. Cargo shorts are inappropriate at fine dining establishments or swanky cocktail parties or what have you. On those occasions, men with the necessary means should be draped in nothing but linen.

Cargo shorts are not appropriate for all summer occasions. Of course, the same is true for yoga pants, and I’m not aware of any movement to ban that article of clothing.

But for ordinary summer wear? Hell yeah, cargo pants!!

I don’t expect women to get this, because when it comes to non-beach fashion, women have it easier during the summer. Sure, women have had to endure millennia of discrimination and violence and whatnot; I’ll manfully concede that point. During hot weather, however, women have a decided clothing advantage. They get to wear sleeveless blouses and summer dresses and skirts — articles of clothing that afford some ventilation when the weather makes such ventilation very necessary. As Sonny Bunch notes in the

Washington Free Beacon:

“Assuming you’re not striding down a runway in Milan — thus necessitating a clean, straight-leg profile — you’re probably wearing shorts because you want to stay cool. And if you’re a guy, you’re probably wearing shorts without carrying around a European man-bag. Which means you have a paucity of space to carry all your cargo.

“This is where cargo shorts come in.”

Indeed, as an occasional wearer of cargo shorts, I have found that said pants serve to hold not only my cargo but the cargo of my spouse, who often opts not to bring a large bag on our excursions and also owns no clothes that contain useful pockets of any kind.

This country is tearing itself apart right now because a short-fingered vulgarian decided to run for political office. There are few pleasures political commentators can enjoy during this summer of madness. For the love of God, do not make things worse by getting rid of cargo shorts. Any article of clothing that helped defeat Hitler is an article of clothing that should never go out of style.

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PERC

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new sources of trash to make up for this shortfall.

PERC argues it can offset its lost tonnage through contracts with commercial waste haulers, but it’s not certain there’s enough commercial trash to go around.

In 2018, PERC expects to scale down the load of trash it processes from more than 300,000 tons to 210,000 — a level at which PERC forecasts it can operate profitably, according to a financial projection it prepared.

Knudsen said commercial trash would make up the majority of this amount.

“We fully expected when we started this that the municipal side would be smaller than the commercial side,” Knudsen said.

He declined to specify the tonnage PERC has so far secured from commercial sources, citing confidentiality agreements, but he said it will be able to secure the tonnage needed to stay viable. In April, PERC announced an agreement with Casella to deliver commercial trash from across the region to its facility to cover capacity not met with tons from towns. But with its supply of municipal trash set to drop from 180,000 to 23,000 tons, PERC would need to expand the tonnage of commercial trash it processes above what it has processed historically.

In 2014, PERC took in 108,488 tons of commercial trash, according to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. About 50,000 tons came from out-of-state sources, most from Massachusetts.

It’s unlikely PERC will continue to take in out-of-state trash because PERC won’t be able to compete with the cost of trash processors located between Orrington and Boston after the expiration of its lucrative power-purchase agreement with Emera Maine, according to Knudsen. The power-purchase agreement guarantees PERC above-market rates for the electricity it produces.

That means that PERC will need to grab a larger share of the commercial trash supply from within Maine.

But PERC won’t be the only trash processor in the region competing for this business. Fiberight, its chief regional competitor, also is eyeing commercial tonnage in the region, and it would charge about \$70 per ton, according to Craig Stuart-Paul, founder and CEO of the trash-to-energy company.

PERC developed its financial projection under the assumption it would charge at least \$84.36 per ton of trash delivered to its tipping floor. This could limit its ability to compete with competi-

tors who offer lower tipping fees and hauling costs, especially in southern Maine, which has been the source of a growing amount of trash for PERC since the Maine Energy Recovery Co. incinerator in Biddeford closed in 2013.

“With commercial waste, it follows the money,” Stuart-Paul said. “Waste will always follow whoever has the lower tipping fee.”

What happens if PERC can’t get enough tons of trash from commercial sources?

Before town councilors in Hermon committed their town’s trash after 2018 to PERC, they questioned officials from the company about what would happen if it wasn’t able to secure enough tonnage from public and commercial sources to keep the trash-to-energy operation viable.

The loss of a major trash processor could leave towns such as Hermon with the need to find a new waste solution. In Orrington, where PERC is located, the town estimated in late 2014 that PERC’s closure could result in a net loss of up to \$1 million from lost tax revenue and having to pay for trash disposal, which it currently doesn’t pay for as the host community.

The revenue that PERC generates after 2018 is forecast to come from the trash processing side of its business rather than electricity production, according to its financial projection.

Knudsen said that the facility in Orrington can remain operational even in the “extreme circumstances” that the electricity side of the business is no longer viable. In response to questions from the Hermon Town Council, PERC said it had a contingency plan: continue to accept trash from towns but function instead as a mixed-waste materials recovery facility, also known as a “dirty MRF.”

Under this plan, PERC would separate remaining recyclables and other material that isn’t combustible from the waste stream. What is left over is a product that PERC could sell to other trash-to-energy plants, Knudsen said.

The sorting machine in the front of the facility already can separate out large materials that can’t be incinerated, glass and grit, and some metals. New equipment would be needed to remove soft metals such as tin and aluminum, Knudsen said.

Any recyclables recovered during the sorting process could be sold on the marketplace, while trash that can’t be sold as fuel to a trash-to-energy plant or to a recycler would be landfilled at either Juniper Ridge in Old Town or another Casella-owned landfill, such as one in Bethlehem, New Hampshire.

“One thing you have to remember is that a real ugly characteristic of trash is it doesn’t stop,” Knudsen said. “It just accumulates, and it has to go somewhere.”

ety. If a police officer, African-American or Muslim commits a crime, they should be held responsible. But rather than shouts for “denouncement” of the criminal from groups writ large who have some tenuous connection via a shared trait, let’s find and fix what caused them to do something wrong, whether it’s bias, drug use, or jihadist philosophy. Talk and tweets are cheap.

In short, with life imitating art again, it’s time for a little less talk — denunciations — and a lot more action.

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Nuclear

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online; more than 150 had been licensed by the end of the 1970s. If nuclear weapons filled midcentury Americans with thoughts of doomsday, nuclear power provided its opposite: the dream of a technology-fueled future that might help extend postwar prosperity indefinitely.

Eisenhower himself had put it this way in 1953, when announcing Atoms for Peace: “Experts would be mobilized to apply atomic energy to the needs of agriculture, medicine, and other peaceful activities. A special purpose would be to provide abundant electrical energy in the power-starved areas of the world.”

Problems emerge

Dreams depend for their vitality not just on what is said explicitly, but also upon what is left unspoken. In this case, the missing element was environmental awareness. It was not until the widespread hydrogen bomb testing of the 1950s that the true health and environmental costs of nuclear energy began to be uncovered; it would be another decade or more before concerns about power generation began to rival those of weapons development.

Diablo Canyon provides a case in point. Sierra Club officials had partnered with Pacific Gas and Electric to select the site in 1965, in the process helping to spare a different and more highly valued wilderness area. They were not particularly concerned about the nature of the proposed power plant. Their concern was simply with the intelligent management of natural resources, and Diablo raised questions about the proper balance of conservation and industrial development. While there may have been fears of a meltdown or other sort of accident, these were not nearly as pronounced as they would become in the next decade.

This cooperation between industry and environmentalists began to fray in the late 1960s. Activist networks in California targeted the plant, and new organizations formed that valued resistance over accommodation and negotiation. David Brower, the executive director of the Sierra Club, helped lead a well-publicized fight with his own board of directors; he would eventually resign to found the more radical group Friends of the Earth.

The country’s changing political climate played a role in this, as Brower and other activists evinced a Vietnam-era skepticism that saw the interests of industry and the public as inherently at odds. Corporations simply could not be trusted to adhere rigorously to safety standards, to value either human or environmental health at the expense of profitability.

Additionally, an evolving environmental movement was positioned to see nuclear power differently than its conservation-focused predecessors had. Indeed, by the 1970s, environmentalists were not simply seeking to manage the pace of modernization, but to question its premises altogether. Best-selling books such as “Silent Spring” (1962) and “The Population Bomb” (1968) had prompted readers to question whether or not unbridled growth was desirable, or even possible. High-profile disasters such as the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill drew attention to the fragility of the natu-



REGIS DUVIGNAU | REUTERS FILE

The cooling towers at the Golfech nuclear power plant in southwestern France.



MAINEYANKEE.COM

Some of the cylindrical steel-lined concrete containers that comprise the spent fuel storage facility at Maine Yankee in Wiscasset.

ral environment, as well as the disturbing possibility that accidents were inevitable rather than anomalous.

Nuclear power was already becoming suspect because of its association with Cold War institutions, as well as the fearsome potential of radioactive contamination — which the historian of science Spencer Weart has identified as perhaps the most distinct element of nuclear fear. By the 1970s, despite the energy shocks of the time, nuclear energy became for environmentalists what fossil fuels are today: a symbol of the mistaken choices of decades past, and a clarion call for rethinking the entire energy landscape.

Much of this was already true before the infamous Three Mile Island accident in 1979. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission would ultimately conclude that the health effects were minimal — certainly nothing like environmentalists had feared could happen. But the psychological consequences were considerable, owing both to the days of uncertainty immediately after the accident and to the eerie resemblance between actual events and a recently released movie, “The China Syndrome,” which depicted a cover-up of safety hazards at a nuclear plant. A few years later, these concerns would be amplified still further through easy association with the anti-nuclear weapons activism of the early 1980s.

Softening stance?

“The history of mankind,” H.G. Wells wrote in 1914, “is the history of the attainment of external sources of power.” In the age of environmental awareness, it has also become the chronicle of human attempts to come to terms with the consequences of this attainment. Early anti-nuclear activists — at Diablo and elsewhere — were quite conscious of this, believing that its productive capacity did not outweigh the risks

to nature and human health.

More recently, some environmentalists have warmed up to nuclear power. Stewart Brand, whose Whole Earth Catalog, first launched in 1968, made him an environmental movement icon, is one of the more prominent. “I’m so pro-nuclear now,” he told NPR in 2010, “that I would be in favor of it even if climate change and greenhouse gases were not an issue.”

Brand’s enthusiasm makes him something of an outlier, even among those environmentalists whose position has softened. What appears to have changed for them is not their assessment of the risks of nuclear, but an awareness that the environmental crisis is even worse than they imagined in early 1970s, in particular the threat of climate change from the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

What these more moderate proponents have in common — both with Brand and their still skeptical environmental brethren — is a recognition that questions of energy are not merely technical in nature. They reflect how people wish to organize their societies and their economies. These are the questions that anti-nuclear activists, among others, posed throughout the 1970s.

So it may well be that increased reliance on nuclear power will be part of the toolkit we need to survive climate change. However, that choice will come with risks — not just of meltdowns, but also of avoiding the kinds of hard questions that Diablo-era activists tried to ask: Can we power our society without resorting to industrial-scale technology with significant risks? It may not be possible — or desirable — to live with the trade-offs our appetite for energy demands of us.

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