Review: The Solar Economy: Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Global Future

By Hermann Scheer

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Hermann Scheer. *The Solar Economy: Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Global Future.* London: Earthscan Publications, 2002. 347 pp. ISBN 1-85383-835-7 (hardback). US$29.95

This book was originally published in German in 1999 under the title *Solare Weltwirtschaft.* Andrew Ketley has translated it into English. The author, Dr. Hermann Scheer, is a member of the German parliament. In addition, he is president of EUROSOLAR-the European Association for Renewable Energies-and general chairman of the World Council for Renewable Energy. He has been awarded several prizes in recognition of his work and achievements, receiving the Alternative Nobel Prize in 1999, the World Solar Prize in 1998, and the World Prize for BioEnergy in 2000.

In this book, Dr. Scheer begins by describing a scenario of transforming the global economy by changing from fossil fuels to solar power. 11 chapters divided into four parts, each encompassing a different topic, follow this. Part one compares the supply chains for different fuels and energy resources. The supply chains for renewable resources have been found to be much shorter than those of fossil or nuclear energy. Scheer points to an interesting fact that, every year, the sun delivers 15,000 times more energy than is consumed by the entire human population.

Part two discusses the politics of fossil fuel resources. These resources are being consumed at an alarmingly high rate. It is claimed that we might run out of oil by 2035, natural gas by 2040, and coal before the end of 21st century. Uranium reserves are also expected to last just about as long as oil. This would lead to resource wars. The distorting effects of fossil supply chains on our society and economy are discussed next, followed by the mythology of fossil energy.

Part three begins by examining the options for off-grid energy and discusses technologies for autonomous power generation. Storage technologies for renewable energies, both pre- and post-conversion, are elaborated on very well. Scheer gives an account of the untapped wealth of solar resources and suggests replacing fossil fuels with these environment-friendly resources. He tackles the objections raised about the economic viability of renewable

resources and proves them to be misleading.

The last part (part four) explains the inevitable transition to a solar economy and discusses various strategies that would help speed up the process. There is an extensive list of references and a short index at the end.

This is strictly a policy-oriented book with minimal technical information. The author has been successful in dealing with the myths associated with the use of renewable energies. Strong arguments have been made throughout. Policymakers, politicians, media persons, and policy students can benefit from reading this book.

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