

STEVE HALLETT WITH JOHN WRIGHT

LIFE
WHY WE MUST SHIFT
WITHOUT
TO A NEW ENERGY FUTURE
OIL



Prometheus Books

59 John Glenn Drive
Amherst, New York 14228-2119

CONTENTS

Prologue. The Invisible Hand	13
Existential Threat, Root Cause, Core Problem	14
Failure to See, Failure to Act	17
Adam Smith Was Wrong	22
What Should We Do? What Should We Save?	25
 PART I: A BRIEF HISTORY OF PROGRESS	 27
Chapter 1. Seeds of Civilization	29
In the Beginning . . .	29
First Attempts to Harness Energy	33
The Mother of Invention	34
Putting Down Roots	36
The Age of Empires	38
 Chapter 2. The Ghosts of Empires Passed	 41
The Impossible Moai	41
Where Did All the People Go?	47
The Legacy of Eighteen Rabbit	52
Forests to Precede Civilizations, Deserts to Follow	57

8 CONTENTS

The Scourge of God	60
Recurring Themes	68

Chapter 3. The Fossil Fuels Savings Bank 73

Black Gold and the British Century	75
Black Gold and the American Century	81
The Global Economy	85

Chapter 4. Divorced from Nature 89

Can the Leopard Change His Spots?	90
Are Humans Innately Racist and Violent?	94
The Tragedy of the Commons	97
Holding onto Disastrous Values	99
Holding onto Disastrous Ideologies	104

PART II: THE PETROLEUM INTERVAL 111

Chapter 5. The Great Energy Transition 117

American Prophet	117
Predicting Global Peak Oil	121
Why Is Nobody Warning Us?	125
The Red Queen and the Last Drop of Oil	128
The Many Lives of Methane	134
The Problem with Natural Gas: It's a Gas	135
Hubbert's Peak for Natural Gas	139
Descending from Hubbert's Peak	140
All Aboard the Carbon Express!	141
The Gifts That Keep on Giving	146
The Nuclear Option	163

Energy: For Here or to Go?	170
The Platter of Options	176

Chapter 6. The Ecological Debt 179

The Global Commons	181
There Are Plenty of Fish in the Sea	183
Missing Mountains and Plastic Oceans	186
The Great Corn Lawn	189
Death by Overpopulation	192

Chapter 7. The View from Mauna Loa 197

It's a Small World after All	200
Thresholds and Feedbacks	203
The Long-Range Weather Forecast	206
Impacts on the Landscape	207
The Human Landscape	209
Mitigate, Adapt, or Suffer	212

PART III: THE WEALTH OF NATIONS 215

Chapter 8. Collision Course 219

The Harsh Light of Morning	219
Disruption in Supply	222
Shock and Aftershocks	227
Oil Skirmishes, Oil Wars	231
The Global Economy as an Ecosystem	236
Diminishing Marginal Returns	243

Chapter 9. Around the World in Eighty Depressions	247
The Next Half Century	247
The Oil Producers	248
The First-World Consumers	258
The New Consumers	279
Left Behind	290
 Chapter 10. End of Empire	 295
A Multipolar World	295
Shortening the Interregnum	299
 PART IV: A GENERAL THEORY	 303
 Chapter 11. Ecology Is the Foundation of Economics	 307
Phoenix	309
The Fundamental Need for Growth	311
There Is No Such Thing as a Free Lunch	314
The Jevons Paradox	320
 Chapter 12. A New Foundation	 323
The Low-Hanging Fruit	324
A Nuclear-Hydrogen Economy?	326
A Renewable Energy Economy?	330
Food That Doesn't Cost the Earth	331
A Land Ethic	341
Breaking the Fertility Trap	343
Lifeboat Ethics	351

Chapter 13. Reconnecting **353**

Is Socialism Dead, and Is Capitalism Doomed? 355

The Triumph of the Commons 360

Community of Nations, Nations of Communities 364

A Call to Arms 367

Acknowledgments **373**

Notes **375**

Index **407**