



## “Off-Ramp Ahead, One Way or Another”

a review by Dick Burkhardt of

## The Green New Deal & Beyond:

Ending the Climate Emergency While We Still Can

By Stan Cox (2020)

Stan Cox has studied the economics behind our escalating climate catastrophes and concluded that the world simply can't keep growing its GDP. That is, the global growth in GDP has been tied very tightly to the growth of fossil fuel energy for the past century and a half. A Green New Deal will be essential to wean us off fossil fuels in an equitable way but clean energy is in no position to replicate, let alone expand, the power and versatility of fossil fuels. The backdrop is that “a 2<sup>o</sup> C hotter world would clearly be catastrophic” (p xxix).

Cox calculates that conventional carbon taxes simply won't do the job. So he concludes that “eradicating emissions will require a statutory limit on all fuel extraction, one that lowers quickly year by year, along with a system to guarantee material sufficiency for all people and excess for none” This will mean an “economy that operates on less, not more, energy, and does not depend on over-exploitation of the earth's ecosystems” (p xxiv). He expects that all this will require “fair share rationing of energy” (p xxvi), as was done in World War II.

Cox proceeds to give a hopeful historical overview of the original New Deal, the measures taken in WW II, and the later Limits-to-Growth studies. Then he brings us up-to-date through 40 years of energy crises and political backsliding. Then, like most climate scientists and the IPCC itself, he misses important studies of fossil fuel reserves. Namely, the world is rapidly running through its reserves of cheap fossil fuels, especially the most versatile and valuable fuel - oil. The world peak for production of conventional oil was in 2006. Fracking expanded US production for about a decade but is now heading into decline and has never achieved a positive cash flow.

That is, fracked oil has been heavily subsidized by Wall Street. It is even possible that the world peak for all oil was in November, 2018. Coal and natural gas still have significant reserves but even maintenance of our current global economy will be difficult, maybe not even possible, with the decline of oil over the coming decades.

Thus some of the economic contraction that Cox sees as necessary will happen anyway, though not without a lot of turmoil. And in the worst case, wars over the remaining resources will bring it all crashing down. Cox's planned contraction could avoid much of the turmoil.

To replace GDP, Cox suggests Jason Hickel's "Sustainable Development Index" (p 85). And he proclaims that "I am hopeful the both democracy grief and climate grief can be transformed into an insurgent force capable of ridding us of their common source" (p 100). For an example how to navigate the "off-ramp ahead" he cites the 107 page "Climate Mobilization Victory Plan" (p 103).

Stan Cox's final word sums up the formidable tasks ahead: "We must block all pro-corporate cost-benefit analyses, nuclear enthusiasts peril-plagued prescriptions, ecomodernists' siren songs, and Silicon Valley's relentless technocratic boosterism...Expansion of the human economy is going to end, one way or another"(p 122).