



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 34

Issue 2 June - *Special Issue on Globalization,
Social Justice & Social Welfare*

Article 22

2007

Global Energy Shifts: Fostering Stability in a Turbulent Age. Bruce
Podobnik.

Terry V. Shaw

University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Shaw, Terry V. (2007) "*Global Energy Shifts: Fostering Stability in a Turbulent Age.* Bruce Podobnik.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 34 : Iss. 2 , Article 22.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol34/iss2/22>

This Book Note is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



and should be widely consulted by anyone interested in contemporary international events.

Bruce Podobnik, *Global Energy Shifts: Fostering Stability in a Turbulent Age*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006, \$22.95 papercover.

We are facing a global energy dilemma. Our primary source of energy—oil—is a finite and dwindling resource. The largest sources of oil are located in politically unstable regions where Western countries do not enjoy strong influence. Additionally, the negative consequences of the use of fossil fuels are apparent in global warming and negative health effects. Nevertheless, energy consumption continues to increase. Where do we look from here? In his book, *Global Energy Shifts: Fostering Sustainability in a Turbulent Age*, Bruce Podobnik suggests we look to the past.

The book consists of seven chapters examining the historical patterns of past energy shifts from one primary energy source to another. The author believes that these shifts can inform decisions in the future. The initial chapter explains the author's world historical perspective and outlines his main premise that in order to truly understand energy shifts we have to account for actors at the state, corporate, and social levels. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the ascendancy of coal as the primary source of energy and the conflicts that arose in the coal sector. Chapter 4 examines the rapid movement toward an oil-based energy system brought about by the two World Wars. Chapter 5 describes the shift to an oil-based energy system along with the rise in natural gas and nuclear power. This chapter also offers an interesting analysis of the emergence of energy consumption inequalities. Chapter 6 describes the changes in the global energy system caused by the oil crises in the 1970s and the increase in global competition for oil resources. Finally, Chapter 7 offers a summary of the research and the author's view of how the next transition toward a more sustainable energy system can be established.

Podobnik has gathered an impressive amount of data to

bolster his argument for the inclusion of an account of social conflict in the story of energy shifts. The use of data is very helpful in telling this story. The material is well laid out and is presented in a coherent manner which allows the reader to gain a greater understanding of the dynamics of global energy systems. The author has constructed a compelling argument for the need to examine social as well as political and economic factors when assessing energy shifts. Using this analysis, he offers an account of the factors necessary to move toward more sustainable sources of energy. The discussion, while intriguing, could have been enhanced by the inclusion of case studies detailing the interactions between political, economic and social factors. A more detailed discussion of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and hydro power would also have been helpful. While a bit dry for the general reader, *Global Energy Shifts* will be of interest to educators as an example of the use of historical narratives and the integration of social factors into the discussion of global energy. Additionally, social activists will be interested in the discussion of the role social conflict can play in moving toward a more sustainable energy system.

Terry V. Shaw, University of California, Berkeley

Will Paxton and Stuart White with Dominic Maxwell, *The Citizen's Stake: Exploring the Future of Universal Asset Policies*. Bristol: The Policy Press, 2006. \$ 35.00 papercover.

The notion of "stakeholding" was frequently bandied about in political debates in Britain in the 1990s. As a part of its commitment to privatization, Mrs. Thatcher's Conservative government facilitated the purchase of public housing by residents and encouraged greater participation of ordinary people in shareholder capitalism. In this way, the Conservatives argued, citizens would acquire a meaningful stake in the nation's economy. Labour politicians echoed these ideas by arguing that stakeholding should be extended to the welfare domain as well. On a visit to Singapore, Tony Blair was much inspired by the savings accounts that had been created by the country's government to fund retirement pensions, education