

Review: Shoveling Fuel for a Runaway Train

By Brian Czech

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Brian Czech. *Shoveling Fuel for a Runaway Train*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000. 210 pp. ISBN 0-520-22508-2 (hardbound).

Shoveling Fuel is a contributing voice in the growing literature that argues that our current economic system is leading us down a path where we probably do not want to go. Czech takes a novel and critical look at traditional economic theories and integrates them with other theories from biology and psychology to prove his point. References to economists such as Malthus, Ricardo, Smith, Veblen, and Julian Simon are found alongside references to non-economists such as Paul Ehrlich, Thomas Kuhn, Darwin, and Maslow. Even several passages from the Bible are cited to help build the eclectic and convincing case that, indeed, the train is runaway.

Perhaps one of the most appealing points about this book is Czech's clear argument that solutions to the runaway train problem lie squarely in the domain of social psychology. He argues that changes in how we interact at an inter-personal level are a necessary first step before changes in the political and economic structures of society will follow suit. While social change is surely going to be a gradual and iterative process, it must build upon changes at the social psychological level--individuals must change their behavior and then form groups of similarly behaving people in order to pressure the larger structures in our society to change.

Czech makes an excellent personal appeal. The obvious intention of this book is to convince the individual reader of the need to make changes at a personal level. The presentation is thorough, convincing, and motivating. The audience that would appreciate this book is people who have already begun to see the shortcomings of our current economic system and are actively seeking information that confirms this suspicion. For these people, *Shoveling Fuel* will serve as excellent corroborating evidence.

Unfortunately, opponents and critics will probably scoff at Czech's plan, which could be summarized as "castigation of the liquidation class," or the richest percent of the population (p.180). Since most of us do not fraternize at the Royal Yacht Club of Monaco or otherwise hobnob with the glutinously wealthy, there is not much we can do to help the cause. Using mate selection theory, Czech successfully argues that we can help control the runaway train by essentially breeding out such "liquidators;" however, for

readers looking for specific actions that they can take to help build a sustainable world, there is far more to do than simply not marry an Arabian Prince.

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