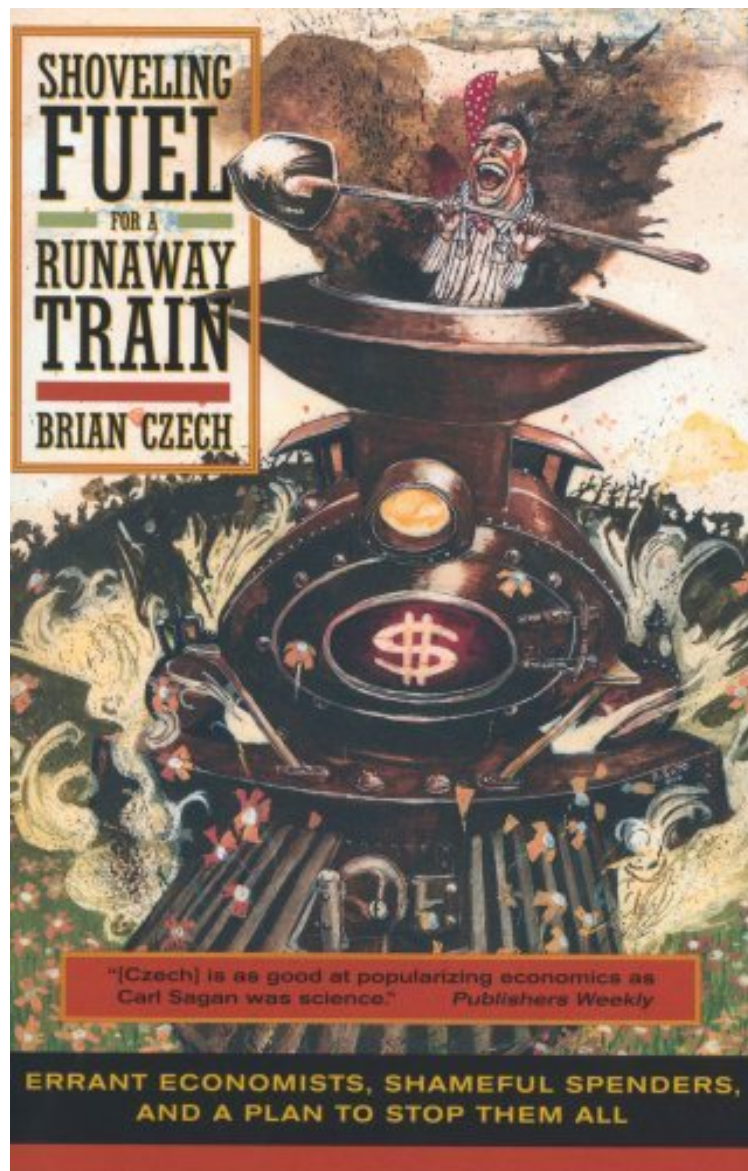


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## Shoveling Fuel for a Runaway Train: Errant Economists, Shameful Spenders, and a Plan to Stop them All

Brian Czech

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**Brian Czech : Shoveling Fuel for a Runaway Train: Errant Economists, Shameful Spenders, and a Plan to Stop them All** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shoveling Fuel for a Runaway Train: Errant Economists, Shameful Spenders, and a Plan to Stop them All:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Rambling and somewhat awkward treatise on the ills of economic

growth, particularly conspicuous consumption. By ian710A somewhat odd write up criticizing mainstream neoclassical economics and its focus on endless growth as a legitimate goal for society. Odd because it does not delve into numbers or facts as one would expect, but is predominantly written in a philosophical manner that borders on moralizing, especially in the latter half when the author proposes how we should start a social revolution by making excessive/conspicuous consumption socially unacceptable. He takes specific aim at growth proponent Julian Simon, devoting an entire chapter to critiquing his book and the supposedly fallacious arguments in it. I have not read Simon's work, but it seems a little off topic or at least excessive for the purposes of this book. To conclude, this book spends too much time saying how wrong consumption is without sufficiently explaining why spending and investing money is. Even just leaving your savings in the bank is no good as bankers will make loans to growth hungry corporations with it. Of course, most people already know materialistic consumption is bad, but at least one should try writing more convincing arguments to sway the mainstream. Just repeating that it is wrong and urging people to castigate the wealthy will not work. As the author explains himself, the need to flaunt one's riches is biologically ingrained in all of us, as a way to move up socially. Tall order it is indeed to compel individuals to ignore this natural urge, with grim implications for humanity.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. College required text. By Bria J. Used at Western Washington University in 2011. This book was very different from most books used in my business classes so it was somewhat refreshing. Definitely thought-provoking, and great for group discussions about economics and the role we play in the future of our society. Being a marketing student, it added an additional dimension of learning how marketing can be responsible or not - and how that influences others. Like most people, I rely on honest product reviews to make purchase decisions. Because the experience of others has been so helpful to me, I try to provide honest, helpful reviews to assist other shoppers in selecting the right products for them. I hope my review has been helpful to you!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Czechmate. By watzizname. On page 192 of his very excellent book *The Long Emergency: Surviving the End of Oil, Climate Change, and Other Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-First Century* James Howard Kunstler favorably mentions Brian Czech's "Shoveling Coal on a Runaway Train," so I looked for "Shoveling Coal on ...," but instead found "Shoveling Fuel for ...," so I bought and read that, and I am glad I did. I have to agree with the reviewers who found part 1 of *Shoveling* much better than part 2. Part 1 makes a very good case that, nearly all professional economists to the contrary notwithstanding, unlimited economic growth is not possible, and the growth of the American economy and the World economy must end, either gradually and smoothly (what he calls K-selected, see p. 89) or suddenly and painfully (r-selected, see p. 90). \* His argument is irrefutable, but unfortunately it is ignorable, albeit we ignore it at our peril. Why do nearly all economists continue to make the unsupportable claim that growth can continue forever? Czech tells us on page 51: "Economists, academic and bureaucratic, are hired to toe the line for economic interests. Rarely explicitly, but almost always effectively." As long as the controlling executives perceive the doctrine of unlimited economic growth to be to their benefit, economists who want jobs will continue to give lip service to unlimited growth, until the laws of nature (exhaustion of resources) brings the whole economy down. (see Kunstler's portrayal of America after the r-selected collapse, as he envisions it, in *World Made by Hand: A Novel*) Czech is perfectly correct that it will take a revolution in popular thinking to bring about the necessary change in our goal from steady economic growth to a sustainable steady-state economy. "If it is not to jeopardize the lives of the grandkids, its growth must taper off at or below carrying capacity in K-selected fashion . . . . This will require nothing less than a revolution, a social revolution . . . ." (page 111). But wisely, Czech does not call for a violent revolution. He quotes M. B. Brown: "Most revolutionary social changes have involved very little violence. . . . It is the social breakdown that follows a failure to change that engenders violence." But he (unfortunately correctly) adds that "Americans are exhibiting some highly r-selective traits, portending a failure to change that engenders violence." Most of the rest of part 2 consists of Czech's suggested program for producing the needed non-violent social revolution. Sadly, it is unrealistic; it won't work because it won't be adopted. The general public will persist in denial until the r-crisis is upon us, and it is too late. Just one example: he calls for women (and men) to disdain and reject big spenders (he calls them liquidators), and some already do, but as long as there are big spenders, there will be a plentiful supply of beautiful-looking gold-diggers to prey on them, and there will be plenty of handsome gold-digging men to flatter and prey on female liquidators. Part 1 is worth the price of the book, and clearly deserves five stars, but so much of part 2 is based on wishful thinking that it is generous to allow it three. A weak four stars. watzizname@gmail.com \* K stands for "carrying capacity," the population the world can continue indefinitely to support; r is the rate of population growth. Why K is capitalized and r isn't, Czech doesn't make clear, at least to me.

Americans have been conditioned to appreciate, cheer, and serve economic growth. Brian Czech argues that, while economic growth was a good thing for much of American history, somewhere along the way it turned bad, depleting resources, polluting the environment, and threatening posterity. Yet growth remains a top priority of the public and polity. In this revolutionary manifesto, Czech knocks economic growth off the pedestal of American ideology. Seeking nothing less than a fundamental change in public opinion, Czech makes a bold plea for castigating society's biggest spenders and sets the stage for the "steady state revolution." Czech offers a sophisticated yet accessible critique

of the principles of economic growth theory and the fallacious extension of these principles into the "pop economics" of Julian Simon and others. He points with hope to the new discipline of ecological economics, which prescribes the steady state economy as a sustainable alternative to economic growth. Czech explores the psychological underpinnings of our consumer culture by synthesizing theories of Charles Darwin, Thorstein Veblen, and Abraham Maslow. Speaking to ordinary American citizens, he urges us to recognize conspicuous consumers for who they are; bad citizens who are liquidating our grandkids' future. Combining insights from economics, psychology, and ecology with a large dose of common sense, Czech drafts a blueprint for a more satisfying and sustainable society. His ideas reach deeply into our everyday lives as he asks us to re-examine our perspectives on everything from our shopping habits to romance. From his perspective as a wildlife ecologist, Czech draws revealing parallels between the economy of nature and the human economy. His style is lively, easy to read, humorous, and bound to be controversial. Czech will provoke all of us to ask when we will stop the runaway train of economic growth. His book answers the question, "How do we do it?"

From Publishers Weekly Economic growth is as American as apple pie and as popular as pizza. It has also, according to conservation biologist Czech, reached its limits and had led to "economic bloat," doing irreversible harm to the environment and literally destroying the future for the next generations. The main culprits here are mainstream, "neoclassical" economists (and also the political and economic elite supporting them) who through arcane theorization insist there are no limits to growth. Czech does a marvelous job of skewering the assumptions behind this notion and of introducing and synthesizing the perspectives of the opposing field, "environmental economics," which offers in the place of unbridled growth a "steady state" economy of low production and consumption and stable population. Moving through sometimes difficult ideas like "substitutability," "trophic levels" and "carrying capacity," Czech is always clear but never condescending, serious but not without humor. Agree with him or not, he is eminently clear. Yet it all falls apart when he discusses what might be done. Given the severity of the ecological crisis Czech finds us in, his recommendation that public opinion should shame conspicuous consumers among the rich into changing their ways is both vague and tepid. Missing are analyses of public policy options and considerations of political strategies that are as focused and nuanced as his critiques. Too bad, for when he's on his game in the first part of the book he's as good at popularizing economics as Carl Sagan was science. (Sept.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. [Czech] breaks down complex concepts . . . into easy-to-understand and informative terms.