the Indian thinker Benoy Kumar Sarkar invoked a 1,500-year-old text, the *Arthashastra* (or “science of wealth”) to advocate for policies designed to industrialize the subcontinent. In Latin America, Mexican foreign minister José Manuel Puig Casauranc’s push to combine protective tariffs with international cash contributions to developing nations eventually helped shape the post–World War II Bretton Woods system.

A grand work of scholarship, the book easily accomplishes its goal of disrupting Western and List-centric readings of neomercantilism. While the final two sections do leave the reader wanting more, whether there is more to be had is a real question. Perhaps this can serve as a starting point for other scholars to fill out the story. Similarly unfair, given the scope of the book, is the desire to see an expanded version of the final chapter on neomercantilism’s post–World War II legacies.

Combining a close reading of neomercantilist texts with insights drawn from relevant primary and secondary sources, *The Neomercantilists* should prove a valuable resource for scholars interested in post-Napoleonic global governance and the world economy. It will also interest those studying the history of ideas and their global circulation. However, any reader will find within a valuable reminder of the barren nature of contemporary debates about the world economy and, perhaps, some inspiration to transform them going forward.

Peter Newell
*Power Shift: The Global Political Economy of Energy Transitions*
*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 283 pp. $51.95 (paper)*
ISBN: 978-1-108-96582-8

Reviewed by: Joshua K. McEvoy (joshua.mcevoy@queensu.ca), Queen’s University

The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on the impacts of global warming stated that carbon emissions need to be reduced by 45 percent relative to 2010 levels within twelve years, and to “net-zero” by mid-century, to have any chance at limiting warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.¹ The report invoked a sense of urgency in its call for “rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy” and other sectors to ensure “no or limited overshoot” of the Paris Agreement targets.

In the timely and welcome *Power Shift: The Global Political Economy of Energy Transitions*, Peter Newell takes the urgency of environmental despoliation seriously. In response, Newell sets out to understand (a) how a rapid energy transition can be achieved and (b) the tensions such an endeavour produces vis-à-vis issues of equity, democracy, and social justice. Uniting a concern for what is to be done with how to do it fairly,

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¹. IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers,” in *Global Warming of 1.5°C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming 1.5°C above Pre-industrial levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions Pathways*, 2018.
Newell’s central claim is that energy transitions are not only a matter of technological substitution, but are fundamentally historical, ecological, and power-laden political processes. For Newell, energy is both a shaper of, and shaped by, contemporary social relations. Therefore, transforming energy systems means challenging and displacing incumbents—those whose power is present and derived in contemporary fossil capitalism—and answering the question “[w]ho and what is energy for?” (11).

The book is motivated by the idea that climate change represents a legitimacy crisis for global capitalism and, more profoundly, the project of industrialism itself (9). Newell argues that the increasingly overt contradictions between growth and sustainability require those whose power and wealth are derived from fossil capitalism “to demonstrate that the expanded extraction, production and use of their energy sources is beneficial for all, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary” (222). To make sense of how incumbent power is responding to these challenges, Newell draws on the neo-Gramscian concept of trasformismo, wherein threats to the legitimacy of a system are accommodated by absorption and cooptation (36). For example, Newell points to how the “just transition” discourse concerning compensation and other supports for workers in fossil energy has been absorbed and deployed as a bulwark against rapid change by corporate actors. What is often obscured in this discourse, as Newell points out, is the way capitalism ties the wellbeing of these and other workers, through wage labour, to an unsustainable project in the first place. Energy, then, is a site of struggle in the “broader terrain” over the legitimacy of contemporary economic and governance systems (9).

Over the course of seven chapters, Newell develops a comprehensive account of how the political dynamics of energy have been shaped historically, where power and resistance to it reside in the present conjuncture, and what pathways exist for change. The first substantive chapter (chapter two), which also acts as a literature review, focuses on theories of energy transition. Here, Power Shift makes a significant contribution by bringing critical global political economy (GPE) into conversation with the burgeoning field of “sustainability transition research,” also referred to as “transition studies.” Although not the first attempt to do so, Newell’s constructive critique concerning the young, interdisciplinary field’s blind spots and how a GPE lens can address them is especially compelling. For instance, Newell calls for more globalized analyses to temper transition studies’ tendency toward methodological nationalism and to place greater emphasis on the political and social aspects of “sociotechnical” transitions more generally.

The remainder of the book is organized into thematic chapters, each analyzing a particular aspect of the energy transition: production (chapter three), finance (chapter four), governance (chapter five), and mobilization (chapter six). These chapters function to historicize different dimensions of contemporary energy systems, focusing on the (re)production of power configurations. The scope and empirical focus of these chapters, interspersed with Newell’s accounts of his personal experience in environmental organizations and activism, lends them favourably to use as standalone, accessible, and engaging readings for teaching purposes.
These four empirical chapters serve as the foundation for discussing the type and extent of change possible, a discussion that begins in earnest in the final empirical chapter on mobilization and is the focus of the conclusion. Here, the book displays a clear commitment to praxis. This necessarily involves experimentation, iteration, and sometimes failure. It also means recognizing the specificity of the particular constraints and opportunities different contexts present. It should come as no surprise, then, that Newell does not advance a singular theory of change or a roadmap for transition. Instead, he argues for a multidimensional approach, noting that “while green transformations can be more state-led, market-led, technology-led or citizen-led, in reality they converge, compete and reinforce one another in different combinations across diverse contexts” (217). The central tension that arises from this conclusion is a familiar one as it is the persistent subject of debate and inquiry in all explicitly normative traditions: to what extent do the incremental measures open to us today advance or forestall the radical transformations ultimately required? Although, as one might expect, no definitive answer is given, the book goes much further than most in sketching the contours of the pathway(s) to rapid decarbonization and the tensions that arise from its pursuit.

*Power Shift* is an important book that deserves to be read widely for its cogent analysis of the stakes involved in energy transition and its concrete engagement with the questions of what should and can be done, and how to do so equitably. As Newell points out, it is no longer just activists calling for an “energy revolution” but organizations like the IEA and The Climate Group. “The question is revolution in which parts of the system and whose revolution is it?” (240).

Michael Brenes

*For Might and Right: Cold War Defense Spending and the Remaking of American Democracy*
Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020. 272 pp. $29.95 (paperback)
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For most of the twentieth century, and entirety of the twenty-first, the United States of America has spent more than any other country on its military. Yale historian Michael Brenes aims to answer two central questions about this outlay in *For Might and Right*: first, why did it occur? And second, what effect did it have on the United States? Although his answers are not particularly controversial—the United States spent so much on its military because a shifting political coalition always believed it was in its interest to do, albeit at the cost of partisan polarization and heavily racialized economic inequality—Brenes’ research provides a fast-paced, enjoyable introduction to a crucial period in American economic, political, and military history. It also raises further questions that are worth investigating by political scientists and historians alike.