

Dreaming of a better future

UK environmentalist Jonathan Porritt maps out his vision for a world that has broken its reliance on fossil fuels – and that vision has its merits. Book review by Damon Evans

AT FIRST glance, *The World We Made*, by British environmentalist Jonathan Porritt, would scare the life out of most oil companies if they took it seriously.

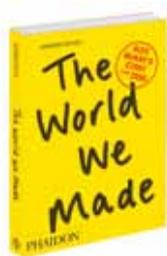
But it's a compelling look at what a world without fossil fuels could be. It charts a very complex and difficult 40-year journey towards a more sustainable world through the words of Alex McKay, a history teacher looking back from 2050.

In Alex's world, the age of oil is all but over. By the middle of the 21st century, oil production is down to around four million barrels a day.

And it's a world in which 90% of our energy comes from renewable sources and 30% of our electricity from solar power.

Porritt, a co-founder of the non-profit sustainable consultancy Forum for the Future, offers an upbeat dynamic view that explores how the world we live in today could evolve over the next 50 years.

Instead of portraying the future of planet earth as a polluted, over-populated hellhole, he shows it as a place where everybody would love to live; exciting, aspirational, high-tech, fair and hopeful.



The World We Made, Phaidon Publishing, Paperback 320 pages £24.95/€35

dependency on fossil fuels to 90% dependency on renewable energy.

The world's dependence on oil, coal and gas is virtually eliminated by 2050, but natural gas, which is a much more carbon efficient fossil fuel, is crucial to the transition process.

Porritt believes the world can shed its addiction to coal very quickly. He foresees that coal is dead in China and the US by 2040, displaced by gas, which is subsequently killed off by advances in renewables. Of the big three coal-burning countries, just India will be left.

Looking ahead

The book highlights the potential of today's emerging technologies and depicts them with striking illustrations and images.

From large-scale solar farms in the deserts of North Africa that power Europe's emerging super-grid, as well as bring stability and prosperity to Morocco, Egypt and Libya.

To hybrid-electric planes and ocean-going carriers propelled by bio-based fuels, helped with sky sails and solar panels.

In some areas, the book seems a touch optimistic. Porritt has the electric vehicle market going to scale by 2025, much quicker than most analysts.

But he concedes that the internal combustion engine is fighting back as car-makers increasingly focus on boosting fuel efficiency and bringing biofuels into the mix.

Meanwhile, in Alex's world, the Philippines is the world's first all-renewables country.

And perhaps the first where the air is coconut-fragranced from car fumes – as the cost of importing oil is so punitive coco-biodiesel is the fuel of choice by 2020.

While some of the case studies seem ambitious, the technology to achieve them already exists in one form or another.

So it really is all about the potential. This is why, aside from technology-loving futurists and ethical investors, that Big Oil should take note of Alex's world.

Despite the increased availability of reserves today – thanks to new technology unlocking unconventional hydrocarbons – the world's carbon balances have not changed.

And as the International Energy Agency's chief economist, Fatih Birol, keeps reminding the industry, that if companies do not start playing a role in the de-carbonisation process, eventually governments will be forced to go after them through very aggressive carbon tax or carbon trade systems.

This would lead to stranded assets and the write-down of billions of dollars for the oil and gas industry, Porritt tells *Petroleum Economist*.

The World We Made is full of inspiration and as Alex writes at the beginning, it has one single aim "to tell the story of how we got our world back from the brink of collapse to where we are now in 2050".

Lets hope he's right and that we start to move on from the status quo of 2013 towards a more sustainable and better world for future generations.

The book is definitely an apt demonstration of what could be. ●



Future visions: A selection of concept artwork from Jonathan Porritt's book

It's a visually stunning book, divided into 50 snapshots, covering topics such as the end of the age of oil, solar revolutions, electric motion, as well as incredible edible cities. To his credit, he genuinely gets you excited and inspired about the power of technology to underpin a sustainable economy.

To boot, it's no work of science fiction. Rather than being "way out there or crazy" it is based on technology that is on the drawing board today, Porritt, who was formerly the chair of the UK Sustainable Development Commission to Tony Blair's government, told *Petroleum Economist*.

With a landmark report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warning the world has about 30 years left before temperatures rise to risky levels if we continue to burn fossil fuels at present rates, the book's launch is timely. Alex's world is underpinned by the need to de-carbonise our economies. However it takes a full 35 years to get from 90%