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**British environmental policy and Europe: politics and policy in transition** edited by P Lowe, S Ward; Routledge, London, 1998, 326 pages, £50.00 cloth, £16.99 paper (US \$85.00, \$27.99) ISBN 0 415 15500 2, 0 415 15501 0

This edited volume concerns the relationship between Britain and the European Union (EU) with regard to environmental policy. The explicit reference to Britain in the title would seem to exclude Northern Ireland but, rather confusingly, Britain and the United Kingdom are used as equivalent terms. There are three main sections. First is coverage of the diplomatic game British politicians have played in the past. This includes pieces by a retired Under-Secretary of the former Department of the Environment, and the 'personal' views of an advisor in Directorate General XI. Second comes coverage of the 'institutional dynamics' of that game which could have been more accurately described as the tactics and strategy of the players. There are chapters here written by representatives of the World Wide Fund for Nature, Rutland County Council, and the Confederation of British Industry. Third is a mixture of mainly academic authors addressing specific environmental issues (such as waste management, nature conservation, and water quality) and methods of regulation and planning control. These three main sections are referred to and described in a variety of ways, in the introduction, by their titles and in the concluding chapter, which reduces the coherence. Perhaps this signifies some difficulty the editors had in maintaining a strictly segregated definition of their subject, although the various contributions generally hold together well.

As the contributions of Sharp and Hanley point out, the position of the British government has been one of complacency for many years. Both Labour and Tory governments of the 1970s were preoccupied with economic production cycles. Throughout the period of the Thatcher governments contempt for European meddling in domestic policy was nurtured and isolationism was encouraged. Despite the supposed awakening of environmental awareness in the declining years of Thatcherism little in the way of substantive policy was initiated. In Europe this meant following the lead of other nations with higher environmental standards. Environmental policy deemed to conflict with economic performance has been resisted and successive governments have typically adopted a defensive role in Europe. Such an approach has typified government attitudes to environmental problems from the dumping of nuclear waste into the Irish Sea, courtesy of Windscale/Sellafield, to the building of motorways without adequate assessment of the environmental impacts, in contravention of EU legislation (for example, Twyford Down).

The political focus on ever-increasing gross national product is a more general problem. Although sustainable development is claimed as a major goal of the EU, the reference is often rhetorical. The dominant perception of progress is as increasing material throughput and unlocking natural resources driven by unfettered technological development. The resulting tensions between being a part of an economic community concerned primarily with a narrow concept

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of productivity and sustaining environmental protection is brought out by Buller's contribution. Yet the danger here is in defining the relationship with Europe purely in governmental terms and the second major section of the book makes clear this would be misguided. Environmental groups, national agencies, and local government have all had to respond to the agenda in Europe.

An interesting chapter in this second section is by Wynne and Waterton on the role of information as controlled by the European Environment Agency, although it seems out of place amongst the other chapters here which concentrate on specific lobby groups. The essence of their argument is that the Agency by choosing the type, format, and general presentation of information, as well as access to it, can define the terms in which environmental policy is debated. The basis for this information control is given by the Agency as the provision of objective and reliable information, the filtering out of perceived as opposed to 'real' risks, and the need for scientific rationality in decisionmaking (page 119). As a result, Wynne and Waterton argue, a potentially important agency is losing contact with the social and cultural context which would give its information meaning to the general public and instead is limiting itself to serving and protecting the Commission. These are thought-provoking points which might have been debated more fully in the book's conclusions.

The final major section of the book concerns what might be termed case studies, that is, specific experience in different sectors. There seems to be no overall reasoning behind the choice of topics covered, such as might have been provided by explicitly focusing on key EC Directives on the environment. The appeal of the contributions here lies in the specific interests of the reader, although the collection does also provide a potentially useful source for teaching and reference.

In general, the book identifies Britain as a nation only slowly accepting the environmental policy changes coming from Europe and unready to initiate anything substantive at that level. The present government failed to campaign on an environmental ticket and therefore is unlikely to advance the issue in Europe (page 297). British concerns remain fixed upon European policy as an external influence from a competing power base rather than as a potential means of progressive international change. However, various players in the game (government, nongovernmental organisations, and business) have begun to expand into a pan-European network of like-minded organisations, and so are developing coalitions to pursue their own interests. This book explains how these changes are occurring and provides an interesting blend of perspectives with authors from academia, the civil service, politics, industry, and environmental groups. The collection will prove useful reading for those wishing to catch up with the story so far on the politics of European environmental policy development and the role and reaction of British institutions.

C L Spash

Department of Land Economy, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB3 9EP, England

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