

FROM HERESY TO DOGMA: An Institutional History of Corporate Environmentalism

Andrew J Hoffman. *The New Lexington Press, San Francisco, USA.*

www.newlex.com

Price: \$25

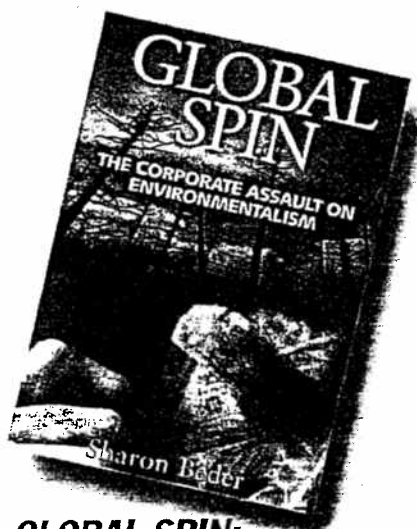
Hoffman's book is a bit of an odd duck. The work began as a doctoral dissertation in organizational behavior and its academic roots show, but not all over—the earlier and later chapters are rather heavy going, while the ones in the middle are much more conversational and accessible. This mild case of stylistic schizophrenia aside, there is an important story to be told, and Hoffman tells it well. *From Heresy to Dogma* recounts how corporate environmentalism has evolved over the course of the past four decades, from 'industrial environmentalism' (1960-1970) through 'regulatory environmentalism' (1970-1982) and 'environmentalism as social responsibility' (1982-1988) to 'strategic environmentalism' (1988-1993), where his story ends. It is an intriguing narrative, a combination flashback and narrative analyzing how environmentalism clambered up the ladder of corporate hierarchies to reach the much more prominent position it occupies today.

Hoffman's main preoccupation is with why change happens. The so-called 'rational actor' theory proposes that reason and logic are the primary if not sole drivers of corporate conduct. Hoffman takes issue with this computeroid model of change. Corporations also operate 'mimetically,' he argues, i.e., they imitate the behavior of perceived leaders. Business see, business do. Overall, Hoffman offers a consid-

ered and useful analysis of the complex dynamic between external factors (the 'institutional field,' in academic-speak) and corporate will.

Personally, I'm skeptical about some of Hoffman's conclusions. For instance, does 'strategic environmentalism' really define the character of corporate environmentalism as it was ten years ago? Many would argue that strategic environmentalism is still more idea than reality. But these are details. If you're interested in learning how corporate environmentalism got to its present state, get hold of a copy of Hoffman's book. This duck should have its day.

—Carl Frankel



GLOBAL SPIN: The Corporate Assault on Environmentalism

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The hard-won successes of environmentalists in winning the hearts and minds of public and politicians led to the rise of the contrarians, that select band fighting for industrial interests or just for the publicity. This excellent publication reveals that it's not just a select band—it's a whole industry with a range of strategies and tactics to downplay, refute or besmirch environmentalism. Despite the emotive subject matter, Sharon Beder analyses the protagonists and processes objectively, eschewing polemic and referencing meticulously. Some large corporations (surely no TOMORROW supporters!) fund think-tanks, intimidate campaigners and public by using SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation) and use all the methods of media relations and manipulation.

Most examples are drawn from North America, where the green backlash first emerged. This should not deter those from other countries from reading this book—all examples illustrate specific points in Beder's dissection of motives and techniques. At one level Beder demonstrates how vested interests can avoid addressing the real issues when undermining opponents—but at another level, she shows how pervasive and powerful these interests are. The media, itself an industry, can be cajoled and manipulated, often as a willing partner of PR and advertising.

This publication is the best among several to cover this terrain. Exposing these practices is the best way to counter their effects—buy this book!

—Paul Scott

CLIMATE CHANGE: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom

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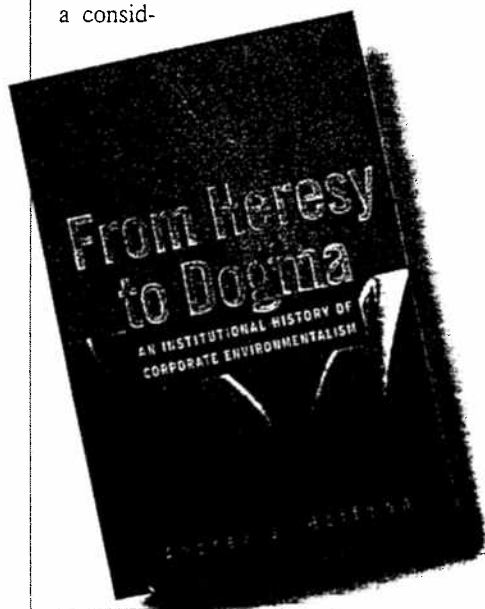
Price: £12

Frankly, I'd expected better. The IEA's Environment Unit is fast taking on the mantle of contrarian powerhouse, pumping out hefty challenges to anything approaching environmental consensus. That's undoubtedly a useful role, since any consensus can quickly become suffocatingly cozy, in urgent need of the odd chill wind of skepticism.

In this book, however, the IEA largely alternates between shooting down the flimsiest of paper tigers and training both barrels at its feet.

Let's remind ourselves just what this dubious 'conventional wisdom' consists of. There's overwhelming evidence that human activities are contributing to global warming, and thus altering the climate. How much, and with what results, we simply don't know. But since there's a real danger that the effects *might* be highly disruptive, even catastrophic, it makes sense to take action now to prevent disaster in the future.

Against this, the IEA book comes up with a set of muddled, and at times contradictory, arguments. On the one hand, it assembles the scientific doubts on human-induced climate change: maybe the world won't get warmer after all? Elsewhere, though, it draws on distant historical precedent to claim that a warmer world will be "better"; and then again, that even if there are problems, we'll adapt (after all, that's what we're



David Malin Roodman in his new book, *The Natural Wealth of Nations*.

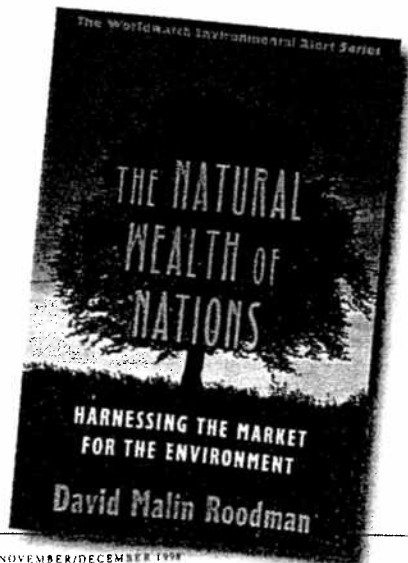
This latest title in the Worldwatch Institute's Environmental Alert series explores how market forces can be used to help the environment, rather than harm it. For instance, Roodman advocates explicitly accounting for the value of natural resources and healthy environments, halting subsidies for resource-depleting industries and practices, and also taxing pollution and resource waste.

On the surface, this approach probably sounds like anathema to supporters of neoliberal economics. However, it does contain some elements that conservatives might like. For instance, Roodman contends that positive cash flows yielded by 'polluter pays' policies could help cut taxes on income, wages, and even capital gains. Similarly, 'free marketers' generally detest the prescriptive, paperwork-laden regulatory approach to environmental protection. Environmental policy that relies more heavily on market forces would allow more creative, customized, streamlined solutions, says Roodman.

This book examines basic economic issues that often are overlooked—such as the goals of taxation, and the nature and purpose of subsidies. In this sense it is almost philosophical. Fortunately, the book also is bolstered by a wealth of statistics and examples from around the world.

The way this book discusses the role of politics and power is rather disappointing. This book does not offer convincing, realistic options for making market-based environmental reform a political reality—which is a far thornier problem. Without that, the entire concept could prove little more than academic.

—Amy Gahrn



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