Review: *The Environmental Crusaders: Confronting Disaster and Mobilizing Community*

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To those hopeful about the prospects for a truly international environmental protection regime, the accord struck at Kyoto, Japan in December 1997 was an unprecedented step in the right direction. Environmentalists all around the world cheered as a total of 159 nations agreed to the first legally binding international protocol to fight global warming. Under the Kyoto accord, the United States pledged to reduce its "greenhouse gas" emission levels to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012, while the figures for the European Union and Japan were 8 and 6 percent, respectively. Other countries followed suit with similar emission reduction plans. Within the afterglow of such a momentous accord, it seemed that, in the absence of the security threats that marked the Cold War era, countries across the globe finally had the time and resources to begin to tackle such pressing environmental issues as global warming.

Perhaps even more surprising than the consensus achieved at Kyoto has been the response to the proposal by a number of multinational corporations, particularly among a collection of large oil companies. Representatives from Sun Oil, Shell, and British Petroleum have all voiced their support for an emissions-reducing proposal, with Shell chairman Mark Moody-Stuart announcing that "We are convinced that the oil industry must be part of the solution to emissions, not part of the problem." In September 1998, British Petroleum group chief executive Sir E. John P. Browne pledged that his company would strive to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 10 percent below 1990 levels, a commitment to emissions reduction that far exceeds the goals set at Kyoto. Outside of these oil companies, environmental issues have become a key component of the increasingly popular corporate "code of conduct," a global phenomenon that crosses all industry lines. As the private sector begins to play a larger role in international affairs, it

appears that many corporations are embracing a socially responsible view of their relationship with the environment.

Yet a closer look reveals that this sense of consensus among both countries and corporations is misleading. Within the United States Congress, key Republican leaders have called the Kyoto accord "dead on arrival." Such a pronouncement is not surprising, as the U.S. Senate voted in 1997 95 to 0 to oppose any treaty that forwarded environmental goals at the expense of the American economy. Developing countries object to being included in any Kyoto-style proposal, as they believe that any cap placed on their emissions levels would unfairly hinder their nation's economic growth. Russia and other post-Communist countries have no system in place to adequately monitor levels of emissions. Within the private sector, it is clear that people like John Browne, with their commitment to sound environmental practices, are the exception rather than the rule. The efforts of such anti-Kyoto organizations as the Global Climate Coalition (GCC) have effectively mobilized large segments of the American business community to stand against the proposal on purely economic grounds. Such efforts by industry and Republican politicians have caused the Clinton administration to withhold submitting the Kyoto proposal to Congress until it can build more support for the accord. Meanwhile, global emission levels continue to rise, and the United States, as well as other regions of the world, has recently suffered through its hottest summer on record.

If the citizens of the world cannot rely on either the public or private sector for effective environmental regulation, whom can they rely on? According to Penina and Myron Glazer, one answer is a group that is often overlooked within current discussions on global environmental accords – citizens themselves. *The Environmental Crusaders* highlights individuals in the United States, Israel, and the former Czechoslovakia who banded together to address environmental hazards within their own communities. While it is not startling that citizens across the globe have organized in response to environmental disasters in their communities, it is surprising how effective such citizen groups have been. The Glazers do an admirable job of documenting how these grassroots groups have been at the forefront of such issues as emissions reductions, hazardous waste site clean-up, and safe nuclear waste facilities. Through their decades-long persistence, these groups have exposed countless numbers of threats to the environmental health and safety of their communities -- threats that often went ignored by other sectors of society. To use the language of the day, these grassroots groups, often without charters, constitutions, or even office space, have become a

type of nongovernmental organization (NGO), highly effective in holding both governments and corporations accountable for their environmental policies and mishaps. By forcing governments and companies alike to be more open in their environmental policies, as well as by encouraging citizens to take a more active role in environmental matters, the Glazers argue that such groups have contributed to the growth of transparency and democracy across the globe.

While such an argument may sound like a grandiose overstatement, there is more truth to this claim than one might imagine. As the Glazers show, environmentalists in the former Czechoslovakia challenged the secrecy of Communism and exposed the widespread environmental damage that this ideology had led to, playing a crucial role in the fall of the Soviet authoritarian regime. Here we see *The Environmental Crusaders* at its best, when it focuses on the bigger picture. While the personalities and the community struggles chronicled in this work are quite engaging, what is even more fascinating is the context in which these struggles have taken place. The three countries presented in this work are, by design of the authors, meant to show how grassroots environmental groups develop in differing social and political situations. Yet more interesting than the evolution of these groups is the environment in which this evolution has taken place. Despite their obvious differences, the three countries presented in this work share a number of key similarities in their attitude toward environmental policy. The policymakers of all three countries, often with the support of the private sector, have maintained that certain issues hold greater importance than matters of the environment. In all of these nations, there has been some form of tradeoff between environmental concerns and other domestic policies.

One example of such a tradeoff is the precedence of national security over environmental regulation. The Glazers are at their most convincing when they describe the history of these tradeoffs, and how this history has important ramifications for current environmental policy. Such a tradeoff is obvious in the case of Israel, where matters of national security have always taken precedence over matters of environmental security. Yet this discussion of the struggle between security and environmental issues must not be limited only to current examples. In a key section of their work, the Glazers call attention to the environmental damage done to a number of small communities in the United States, in eastern Washington, at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, a site that produced nuclear weapons throughout the Cold War. In the name of national defense, the citizens in the vicinity of the Hanford plant were exposed, sometimes deliberately, to large levels of radiation throughout

the past fifty years. Citizens in the former Czechoslovakia were also exposed to similar levels of radiation due to Soviet era defense policies. By documenting the environmental damage throughout the United States and the Czech Republic that was a direct result of Cold War security measures, one sees the impact that trading national security for environmental protection can have. This damage did not disappear with the fall of the Berlin Wall. As the Glazers illustrate, destructive environmental polices carried out during this period of history continue to wreak havoc among communities, and therefore must be considered in any discussion of current environmental policy.

This present-day preoccupation with issues of national security in Israel, along with the lingering environmental damage of Cold War policy in the United States and the former Czechoslovakia, makes it clear that the end of the Cold War does not necessarily constitute a fresh start for any sort of international environmental protection regime. Yet the post-Cold War era does find many countries struggling with another set of concerns, where again there seems to be some sort of environmental tradeoff. Economic growth has begun to take precedence over environmental protection, as countries struggle to find a place in the "globalized" economy. Nations around the world are adopting the rhetoric of open markets and deregulation, rhetoric that often leaves very little room for environmental discussions. This is especially true in the Czech Republic, where environmental matters have taken a backseat to the process of economic reform and the move toward a more consumer-oriented society. The government has paid little attention to the development of a strong regulatory infrastructure designed to effectively monitor the quality of air, water, and soil of this region. Among the citizens of the Czech Republic, the desire for a consumer-based economy has hindered the growth of voluntary environmental organizations that are often helpful in calling attention to environmental hazards.

One sees a similar commitment to economic development in Israel, but one with a much longer history. In an important section of their work, the Glazers illustrate how the ideology of Zionism has evolved to stress economic growth as the key component in building a strong Jewish state. Israeli encouragement of the extensive migration of Jews from a number of other Middle Eastern countries, and more recently from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, has "demanded national attention and taxed the resources of the society." This rapid population growth has caused a shift from the once predominant romantic attachment to the land to a program of industrialization and urbanization. Economic development would provide housing and jobs for the new citizens, while at the same time helping to achieve the ideological goal of a powerful

Zionist nation. While there has been a growing Israeli recognition of the damage that such an ideology can have on the environment of a country, there are still many in Israel who believe that the nationalistic goal of "civilizing" the countryside must be placed above all other concerns, environmental or otherwise.

The clashing of concerns has always defined the international environmental struggle, and the end of the Cold War has done little to alleviate this tension. By calling attention to such realities, the Glazers skillfully highlight the myriad of conflicting forces that many countries must face when considering any type of international environmental agreement such as the Kyoto accord. While economic objections, themselves not entirely new, may have replaced issues of national defense as the major stumbling blocks in environmental negotiations, security concerns, whether past or present, have not ceased to influence environmental policy. One is left to wonder if the battle between all of these opposing forces will lead to a type of "environmental paralysis" among the governments of many nations. At the same time, the push toward open market policies and integration into the global economy with the full support of the private sector, continues within countries across the globe, slowed only somewhat by the current financial crisis. Yet something must be done, as emissions levels continue to rise and waste continues to accumulate. Put simply, globalization equals more trash. By documenting the successes that these global grassroots organizations have achieved in combating such hazards and in questioning the necessity of environmental tradeoffs, the Glazers illustrate how the international environmental movement may be able to adapt to the new global economy. Perhaps a decentralized approach to environmental action is what is needed as we prepare to enter the 21st century. The power, as the old adage goes, may very well rest with the people.

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