

First world blames third

Nothing challenges our contemporary notions of progress more thoroughly than the dual deterioration of the environment and the third world. Periodically, we try to exorcise these demons—on Earth Day, at glamour rock concerts such as BandAid, or at the recent international summit in Rio de Janeiro. Yet, for all the media attention and public concern, the problems remain. Worse, they get worse. The globe becomes increasingly dirtied while the Southern Hemisphere falls further behind its Northern, more prosperous half.

Until recently, these two modern crises were relatively unconnected. The traditional programs for third-world development, from both the Right and the Left, were predicated on growth that either trickled prosperity down or spread it more evenly around. Ecological purists, on the other hand, scorned the dismal science's emphasis on growth, arguing that small is beautiful, that humans must do as little as possible to disrupt nature's fragile balance, that the planet might indeed do better without us and our incessant need to consume and expand.

Lately, the lines separating Greens and development thinkers have blurred considerably. Nowhere has this merger been more pronounced than in the debate on "sustainable development." At its most radical, this conceptual framework provides for both incremental improvements in the developing world and the preservation of threatened ecosystems, and challenges as well the unholy trinity responsible for global toxicity and third-world decay: corporations, multilateral banks, and wasteful governments. At its least radical, sustainable development manages to incorporate some of the more original insights without posing any serious threats to the very institutions responsible for the

THE NATURE OF DEVELOPMENT

Roger Stone
Alfred A. Knopf, \$23, 286 pp.

INTERNATIONAL BANKS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Raymond Mikesell and
Lawrence Williams
Sierra Club Books, \$30, 302 pp.

John Feffer

appalling condition of the present world order.

Roger Stone falls into this latter category. A former banker and more recent Green devotee, Stone is uniquely poised to fuse development economics and ecogism in a manner palatable to the rightward-drifting mainstream. His recent book, *The Nature of Development*, is an attempt to fashion a new hybrid orthodoxy that does for sustainable development what Bill Clinton has done for the Democratic party—a moderate make-over for the 1990s.

Not that his book, produced under the generally stodgy auspices of the Council on Foreign Relations, is without merit. Employing an elevated *National Geographic* style, Stone takes us on a tour of several exotic locales, giving evocative snapshots of unusual fauna and even providing miniprofiles of a dozen or so committed activists around the world. He paints many vivid and satisfying portraits: the vigilant motorcycle patrols around Thailand's Khao Yai National Park by park ranger Nihom Putta, the often quixotic attempts to cultivate sea moss by the Savannes Bay fishermen on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia, the commitment of British zoologist John Parrott to Cameroon's Korup National Park.

In a field burdened by jargon and the most wooden of prose, it is certainly re-

freshing to encounter a book to be enjoyed and not simply cited, to read of particular struggles and impassioned actors instead of abstract policy prescriptions. It is more refreshing still that Stone takes seriously the advice of the grassroots activists he interviews. Following from this advice, he even goes so far as to criticize the crushing problem of the debt crisis, the pitfalls of harmonizing downward through GATT and other trade liberalizations, and the woeful temporizing of recent U.S. administrations on foreign-aid questions. Finally, Stone does not shrink from the hard questions, the either/ors and double binds and Gordian knots confronting the projects he visits. But after exploring the classic growth versus ecological protection trade-off, he offers instead "synergies" by which both goals are accommodated.

Truly is Roger Stone a penitent banker, the financial world's equivalent of the "penitent butchers" who first bagged and stuffed game and then only later, in a fit of remorse, formed Britain's Fauna Protection Society. Yet, for all his penitence—demonstrated by liberal handwringing over ballooning debt and declining aid—Stone remains a banker at heart, wedded to certain assumptions concerning how the world is and should be.

Chief among these assumptions is a residual blame-the-victim mentality. In *The Nature of Development*, farmers tear up virgin forest to plant soil-exhausting crops, fishermen overtax their waters, and rural dwellers constantly procreate, thus condemning their offspring to ever-diminishing natural resources. The third world, then, deserves the lion's share of the responsibility for its own predicament.

While the nations, institutions, and peoples of the third world are by no means blameless with regard to either their economies or their ecosystems, they

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can operate only within structures determined to a large degree by the industrial powers, multinational corporations, and international banks. Stone certainly acknowledges the sins of the first world (although with less emphasis on U.S. failings). But these sins he locates primarily in the past: banks have since become more committed to smaller development projects, corporations have discovered eco-friendly policies, and even former Mobil attorney William Nitze makes an appearance near the end of the book as an enviro-convert. Sure, mistakes are still being made, but the first world is making good faith efforts, all according to sound market principles. In return, guided by their own thousand points of light, the already sacrificing peoples of the third world must make further economic sacrifices for the sake of the globe.

No surprise, then, that Stone treats contemptuously third-world claims that the new environmental voices coming from the North are simply the old colonial hegemony in new garb. Regardless of the stated intentions of first-world leaders—and

for the sake of argument, let us assume, the Bush administration aside, that these leaders are sincere—the new environmental policies being dictated to the third world must coexist with the disastrous terms of trade disparity between the hemispheres and the enormous hard currency transfers northward required by debt repayment. With these economic realities left untouched by the modest changes in the banking and corporate sectors, perceptions of Green neo-colonialism will continue.

Stone is by no means alone in his conservative, market-oriented approach. A good portion of the mainstream environmental movement is moving in the same direction. Take, for instance, the Sierra Club's latest offering in the field, *International Banks and the Environment*. Laden with appendices and leaden in presentation, this book by economist Raymond Mikesell and environmentalist Lawrence Williams provides much of the technical background that Stone's work lacks. Yet, it too fails to offer more than a minimal response to what are proving to be the post-cold war era's most

pressing issues.

Outlining the new approach to the environment by multilateral lending banks—generally the World Bank and its regional counterparts (the IMF has remained remarkably resistant to environmentalism)—Mikesell and Williams give colorless but useful descriptions of current bank-funded undertakings from the Narmada River Project in India to the Polonoreste Resettlement Project in Brazil. Most of these efforts have had considerable negative impact on the environment because the World Bank has, for the most part, lacked the proper staff for handling environmental questions, neglected to require environmental impact assessments, and consistently failed to incorporate "social costs" into its accounting methods.

Mikesell and Williams inevitably fall prey to the same prejudices as Stone. Here too free markets are an economic panacea, the peoples of the third world are mostly to blame for their predicament, and the first world has no special responsibility for re-designing the current multilateral institutions to distribute power more evenly

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around the globe. Reading the Sierra Club's account and nothing else, one would never know that structural adjustment programs—designed by the banks and predicated on trickle-down precepts—brought enormous suffering to the third-world in the 1980s, precipitating riots in Venezuela, Argentina, Peru, Egypt, and elsewhere.

Why the kid gloves, the reluctance to bank bash, the hesitation to criticize the powerful? Roger Stone and the Sierra Club authors are not, after all, Pollyannas. Stone does not try to argue that third-world development has progressed much in the past couple decades. Mikesell and Williams certainly do not attempt to place the World Bank and its affiliates in the ecological vanguard. Yet, in both cases, the authors have muted their criticisms and made much of the third world's own inadequacies. Is this simply the politesse of the pundit set? More telling perhaps are the links between the mainstream environmental movement and multinational corporations. The World Wildlife Fund, for instance, where Stone is a Senior Fellow and past vice-president, received donations in 1991 of over \$50,000 from both Chevron and Exxon, two noto-

rious polluters. In *The Nature of Development*, corporations such as Scott Paper, Coca-Cola, and DuPont receive favorable reviews; no multinationals are criticized by name.

For all their reluctance to challenge powerful vested interests, Stone, Mikesell, and Williams have nevertheless brought a good deal of thought to bear on the intersection of development and the environment. And such thinking is sorely needed if our deteriorating communities and tattered ecological fabric are to be mended. If there is to be any meaning left to the notion of progress—measured by the improved prosperity of the world's people and the improved health of the people's world—then we must indeed, to use Stone's language, think synergetically.

But if the institutions that have made a mess of the previous world order are not remade radically to reflect these new synergetic principles, then the messages of Stone and company—however appealing the grassroots rhetoric—will simply represent antiquated development thinking: recycled, repackaged, and still brought to you by the same old sponsors. □

ers' vision in the twentieth century, is the main theme of John Judis's rewarding book and the "grand illusion" of its title. A veteran journalist, Judis has examined the political perceptions of fourteen leading politicians and intellectuals, including *New Republic* founder Herbert Croly, Walter Lippmann, Whittaker Chambers, William Fulbright, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush. Each is the subject of a mini-biography, including not only an intellectual and political profile but a psychological one as well. A liberal perspective unites these varied topics; conservatives will find much to criticize. And, in my opinion, they have their work cut out for them.

While Judis analyzes domestic policy to some extent, foreign policy is the heart of the work. The central topic therein, of course, is the rise and decline of the cold war, and how our leaders have answered all the subsidiary questions involved: What is the nature of the Soviet Union? What are the interplay and relative strengths of nationalism and communism in the third world? As they recover from World War II, what roles will Japan, Germany, and Western Europe take in geopolitics? What will the post-cold-war thaw mean for the United States?

Some leaders had 20-20 vision. In a 1971 speech in Kansas City, for example, Richard Nixon floated five global propositions: the cold war is ending; economic competition will replace military competition among nations; the United States is declining from its postwar predominance; the bipolar world is giving way to a multipolar one; and as international economic competition grows, U.S. relations with its cold war allies will become uneasy.

Prophetic, no? Nixon and Henry Kissinger eventually faltered over Vietnam, of course, but at least they saw the world clearly. Much the same can be said about Lyndon Johnson. But, Judis says, this is emphatically not so with Ronald Reagan and George Bush, who won and retained the White House with an "imperial nostalgia" that has blinded the nation to new world realities. Knowing the power of wishful thinking, Reagan and Bush simply denied that America was on the decline. This grand illusion—some might say delusion—led to absurdities. As Mikhail Gorbachev was dismantling the Warsaw

INNOCENTS AT HOME & ABROAD

GRAND ILLUSIONS

Critics and Champions of the American Century

John Judis

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$25, 344 pp.

Francis Flaherty

A test. Which president said this and when: The United States "possess[es] the strength and the will to bear the burden of world leadership....Through strength of example and commitment we lead....Our example reshapes the world." And, shortly later: "I have no doubt America will transform the world. We begin with the free market, the powerhouse

of ingenuity. Free markets and free people breathe life into the American dream."

Is this Teddy Roosevelt, speaking as the United States dawned as a world economic power? Is this Harry Truman, asserting our nation's premier place in the postwar world?

Neither. It's George Bush, speaking in 1991 as if the cold war hadn't ended, as if the U.S. economy were not in indisputable decline, and as if the bipolar superpower world were not now multipolar. Castigated for his famous dismissal of "the vision thing," George Bush in fact is caught in the throes of a compelling vision. The problem is that the vision is out-of-date: The captain of our ship of state has an obsolete map, and in such cases the nation will surely founder.

This, the frequent failure of our lead-