

THE POLITICS OF POWER

by John Chamberlain

The Greeks had a word for it: "Nothing in excess." Centuries later, Edmund Burke used the word prudence. He believed in a conciliatory approach to Britain's relations with America on the one hand and Ireland on the other. Thus it could be seen that Russell Kirk has had good literary forebears for his book, *The Politics of Power* (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Bryn Mawr, Pa., 304 pp., \$19.95 cloth; \$8.95 paperback).

Kirk has a genuine passion for order: He has orderly listings of ten conservative principles, ten conservative events, and ten conservative books. It would have offended his sense of order to have had to settle for nine or eleven books, or six or twelve events.

Kirk is against the Behemoth State in any form whatever. It forces centralization in decision-making. Variety disappears. As a disciple of the Swiss-German economist Wilhelm Roepke, Kirk is an enemy of the "cult of the colossal." Roepke says we must find our way back to the humane scale in both economics and politics.

A Michigander, Russell Kirk is well acquainted with the gigantism of the automobile industry. Henry Ford thought that his Model T would restore the humane scale. It would allow a worker to go to work in the morning and return home to raise soybeans or whatever in the afternoon.

But the Model T failed in its mission.

The great set piece of Kirk's book turns out to be what happened in Detroit, Kirk's hometown before he moved to Piety Hill in a rural area. He grew up near the railroad tracks leading out of Detroit. All his life he has had to go in and out of the automobile city. The decline of the automobile business had its reflex: the city, struggling with joblessness, became a mugging center with murders common every corner. Only the foolhardy dared to go out.

Kirk has a scunner on the word "ideology." To become an ideologue is to him, equivalent to making a pact with the devil. It may be admitted that ideology is not a pretty word. But most people use it loosely, as an object of search. To have settled with a philosophy, putting ideas together in a bundle does not mean that one can never change one's mind.

Luckily, Kirk is a prime storyteller. He recreates the atmosphere of Tennessee agrarianism with a beautiful character portrait of Donald Davidson, who refused to go through New York City on his way to his summer home in Vermont. His picture of Detroit in decay is hereby recommended to Jack Kemp, the man who wants to bring business to the inner city.

One can forget the semantics of Kirk's approach while delighting in his storytelling power. So read him for this and the searing section on Detroit's collapse. Don't worry about the book's title. □

Green Delusions: An Environmentalist Critique of Radical Environmentalism

by Martin Lewis

Duke University Press, Durham, N.C. • 1992
• 288 pages • \$24.95

Reviewed by Doug Bandow

George Bush wanted to be the environmental president, but even his heavy-handed regulatory policies did not satisfy the environmental lobby. Now we have the environmental vice president, for whom conservation seems to be a religious duty, and a bevy of left-wing Clinton appointees, for whom cost appears to be no object. The result is likely to be a concerted attack not only on business, but on the entire market system.

Indeed, what makes future prospects so frightening is the fact that an important segment of the environmental movement is fundamentally antagonistic to modern society. These eco-radicals, as Martin Lewis, a professor at George Washington University, calls them, “concur in one central proposition: that human society, as it is now constituted, is utterly unsustainable and must be reconstructed according to an entirely different socioeconomic logic.”

Lewis, a mainstream environmentalist, doesn't much like “anti-environmentalists” like Julian Simon and Dixy Lee Ray, who “present a comforting vision to those who shudder at the thought of the sacrifices that will be necessary to ensure the ecological health of the planet.” But he also recognizes the existence of “a much less visible ideological threat at work as well, one that masquerades under the mantle of environmentalism itself.” Thus, Lewis devotes *Green Delusions* to explaining and debunking several important strains of radical environmentalism.

There are, for instance, the Deep Ecologists. The “moderates” merely want to radically downsize human activity; the true radicals, whom Lewis calls “primitivists,” are characterized by “blatant misanthropy and glorification of violence.” A bit more

positive towards humanity are quasi-classical leftists—the eco-anarchists and eco-Marxists. They differ from traditional Marxists in believing that economic growth cannot continue forever even under Communism, but still focus more on economic than environmental issues. Then there are the eco-feminists, many of whom, writes Lewis, “are actively reviving the goddess-centered cults that they believe once allowed humans to live in harmony with nature.” Despite the presence of Marxists, many members of this odd amalgam are neither left nor right, but instead are simple authoritarians who are not just unconcerned about human freedom, but actively oppose it.

Lewis ably dissects the logical fallacies behind all of these philosophies. The radical position that primal peoples exemplified the proper harmony with nature, Lewis writes, is “so exaggerated as to verge on intellectual fraud.” Moreover, he argues, small can be ugly as well as beautiful. Even more important, he recognizes the virtues of free choice. For instance, although he doesn't care for urban living, he acknowledges that “there is nothing intrinsically wrong with such a personal decision.”

Similarly, Lewis is no technophobe, pointing out that scientific advances can help better protect the environment. Nor does he see population growth in the Third World as an unmitigated disaster. And he dismisses environmentalist tirades against capitalism by pointing to the environmental devastation in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. “As is now abundantly clear, Marxism's record is dismal on almost every score, be it economic, social, or environmental. These failures cannot be dismissed as errant quirks; Marxian regimes have come to power in numerous countries, and everywhere the results have been disheartening.”

For all of the strength of Lewis' analysis, he remains committed to an activist state to combat what he believes to be very serious environmental problems. What he wants is “guided capitalism,” where “a new alliance of moderates from both the left and the