

many conservative and libertarian analyses degenerate into polemics or choir preaching. By aiming at a broad, skeptical audience and carefully addressing its fears and objections, Magnet accomplishes a very difficult feat: honestly confronting a subject charged with racial overtones, without sounding either mean-spirited (as conservatives often do) or patronizing (as liberals often are).

The weakest areas of the book, and these are quibbles, are Magnet's dismissal of the libertarian view of poverty and a brief excursion into programmatic remedies. He attacks the libertarian idea of "economic man" as a "rational calculator" with its notion that welfare's perverse incentives trap people and that their behavior is a reasoned response to government policies. It is an argument he ascribes primarily to Charles Murray, author of the seminal welfare-policy critique *Losing Ground*.

Although he acknowledges Murray's work as "brilliant," Magnet nonetheless tries too hard to distinguish himself from someone from whom he actually borrows quite heavily. In fact, the two share vast expanses of common ground. Magnet cannot, and hardly tries to, refute the simple truth that incentives matter. One suspects that his zest to differentiate himself from Murray is driven more by a desire to stake out original territory than by any real disagreement. After all, Murray himself emphasizes the vital importance of community in his later book, *In Pursuit: Of Happiness and Good Government*.

Then there is the neck-snapping digression in which Magnet attempts to offer programmatic "solutions" to the cultural breakdown. In a highly contradictory passage, he suggests alternatives to welfare: expanding Head Start to socialize underclass children and offering group shelters (rather than private apartments) to unmarried mothers to make illegitimacy less attractive.

The flirtation with programs is mercifully short-lived. In his conclusion, Magnet wisely returns to his thesis that we should try to "repair the damage that has been done to the beliefs and values that have made America remarkable and that for two centuries have successfully trans-

formed huddled masses of the poor into free and prosperous citizens....The principles on which our society was built must once again inform our public life, from social policy to school curricula: that everyone is responsible for his or her actions; that we believe in freedom under the rule of law and that we enforce the law scrupulously in all neighborhoods; that the public, communal life is a boon, not an oppression; that everyone has equal rights, and rights belong to individuals, not groups; that we are free to shape our own fate."

Magnet brings to bear the intellectual and journalistic equivalent of overwhelming force against cultural beliefs now so deeply embedded that we scarcely notice that we have absorbed them. As he makes so clear, ideas do have consequences. His book articulates truths and makes the intellectual case that must serve as the foundation of change.

There are others who have also begun the long task of piercing modern shibboleths; ironically, such voices often rise from the ground up, from those who live the realities that theories produced. Welfare mothers themselves will tell anyone who asks that the dole is a trap.

Yet until the Haves regain their faith in the tested values that are our heritage, such values cannot be restored to those who live at society's margins. Let us hope that we rediscover our higher vision of a truly free and civilized nation.

The danger, of course, is that in anger and frustration we abandon the liberal vision Magnet propounds for a backlash as ugly and depraved as that which it denounces.

Carolyn Lochhead, Washington correspondent for the San Francisco Chronicle, has written extensively on poverty issues.

Embarrassing Questions

BY RONALD BAILEY

Science Under Siege: Balancing Technology and the Environment
By Michael Fumento, New York: Morrow, 448 pages, \$27.50

Technophobia is sweeping across America, and reading this book is a great antidote to its insidious spread. Every time viewers turn on the boob tube, they are assaulted by a relentless series of stories about how modern technology is causing cancer, birth defects, and miscarriages, poisoning people, and making modern life a living hell. This is nonsense, but few reporters, politicians, and scientists have the nerve to say so. Michael Fumento, a reporter for *Investor's Business Daily*, does say so as he meticulously debunks many of late 20th century's most prominent technoscapes.

Think for a moment: How many people got cancer because of toxic waste at Love Canal? How many children died from consuming apples sprayed with Alar? How many residents died as a result of dioxin contamination at Times Beach, Missouri? Given the press play and the costly regulatory response to these once-famous con-

tamination crises, you'd naturally think at least scores of people were harmed, right? Remember that the feds evacuated the residents of Love Canal and Times Beach and banned the ripening agent Alar.

In fact, *not a single person* died as consequence of ingesting chemical contaminants in any of these great media-genic panics.

Fumento lays out in detail the chemophobia that inspires these frenzies of fear. One of his most valuable chapters deals with how substances are tested for carcinogenicity. Researchers feed lab rats the "maximum tolerated dose" (MTD) of a substance and then see if tumors start growing in the animals. That means rats are forced to consume chemicals just shy of the amount it would take to kill them by poisoning. For example, Alar causes cancer in mice when they are given a daily dose 266,000 times the amount consumed by the average schoolchild in a



day. This is a realistic test?

Already, scientific support for MTD testing is slipping fast. In January, the National Academy of Sciences issued a report by a panel of cancer experts calling into question such testing. "The scientific data from hundreds of tests have come in and they are trying to lead us away from the use of the MTD," said panel member Richard Reitz. The NAS panel concluded that MTD should be used only until better methods are validated.

"The day will come, not too long from now, when dosing animals with massive amounts of chemicals and then declaring that this predicts cancer in humans at low doses will be literally laughed at, in the same way we now laugh at witch doctoring and entrail reading," writes Fumento.

Fumento reveals another secret: We are surrounded by carcinogens in our environment, and *they are almost all natural*. Plants are filled with natural pesticides to ward off insects and other predators. Fumento cites calculations by FDA scientists showing that food itself accounts for 98.8 percent of food-related cancer risk. Natural spices make up nearly 1 percent of the remaining risk. A total of 99.8 percent comes from natural sources. In fact, once *all* synthetics are taken into account, not just those in food, only about 500 of the more than 500,000 cancer deaths each year can be attributed to synthetic chemicals. This is a crisis?

Fumento also deals body blows to the quack science practiced by techno-scaremonger Paul Brodeur. Brodeur has made

a career out of claiming that the weak electromagnetic fields generated by power lines and household appliances are causing cancer. Fumento surveys hundreds of studies and finds that the vast majority show no relation between the typical electromagnetic fields people encounter and the incidence of cancer.

The most recent outbreak of microwave madness revolved around claims that cellular telephones cause brain cancer. A Florida man claimed on CNN's *Larry King Live* that his wife got brain cancer from her cellular telephone. This is a classic example of the "victim as epidemiologist" phenomenon.

"Being a victim of a disease does not make one an expert in how that disease is contracted," observes Fumento. There is no credible evidence which shows that the microwaves emitted from cellular telephones cause cancer. But never mind, the crisis is on.

Fumento offers a quick primer on the art and science of risk assessment and shows how the press, public, and politicians often misunderstand (sometimes deliberately so) how to calculate real risks. He takes apart other popular technoscapes, showing that the claim "dioxin is the deadliest man-made substance known" should be changed to "dioxin is the deadliest man-made substance known for killing guinea pigs." Hamsters, on the other hand, can practically season their chow with dioxin. It takes a dose 1,900 times higher to do in hamsters. (This vast difference in toxicity should give people pause about extrapolating test-animal re-

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sults to human beings.)

In addition, Fumento thoroughly debunks asbestos scaremongers, anti-food irradiation activism, and the sleazy political deals that have led to requiring that gasohol be used in some cities during the winter months. My only complaint is that Fumento didn't have the space to deal with the "acid rain" fiasco. Ten years and \$500 million dollars of study have shown that acid rain is not harming lakes, forests, crops, or people in Canada and the north-

eastern United States.

Fumento is to be congratulated for having the nerve to ask the technophobes: If modern life is so dangerous, how come we're all living healthier and much longer lives?

Contributing Editor Ronald Bailey is the author of Eco-Scam: The False Prophets of Ecological Apocalypse (St. Martin's Press) and the 1993 Warren T. Brookes Fellow in Environmental Journalism at the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

Crazy Like Fox

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

Murdoch, by William Shawcross, New York: Simon & Schuster, 492 pages, \$27.50

A few months before William Shawcross's biography of Rupert Murdoch appeared in the United States, *The New Yorker* fired a warning volley. The blast took the form of a personal assault, an unsourced story accusing Shawcross of journalistic compromises of the most unsavory sort. The hermetic world of publishing was atwitter. Some cynics saw an act of pre-emptive revenge: In his book, Shawcross draws an unpleasant portrait of a former Murdoch colleague who happens to be married to Tina Brown, *The New Yorker's* editor. Brown demurred. Although the book would not appear in America for several months, she insisted the attack had news value. And why? Because *Murdoch* "was much discussed in the Hamptons this summer."

A curious standard of news judgment, this Hamptons chatter. Will *The New Yorker* now run stories about Ben Bradlee's tennis elbow and Mort Zuckerman's war against stinkweed? It would be a shame, in any case, if *The New Yorker's* sleazy slam obscured the value of Shawcross's book, for he has written a fair-minded, comprehensive guide to one of the great figures of the age, a media mogul who bestrides the world like a combination of Colossus and Dennis the Menace.

Murdoch's empire stretches across four continents. Several hundred million people are within reach of either a news-

paper or a television station that he alone controls. And many people, not all of them married to Tina Brown, think this is a very bad thing.

Shawcross himself is admirably ambivalent. His talent for excoriation—which he brought ferociously to bear on Henry Kissinger in *Sideshow*, his controversial account of the war in Cambodia—seems to have been silenced by the sheer magnitude of Murdoch's achievement. *The New Yorker's* ideologues notwithstanding, his book is the better for it. For any honest observer has to admit: Rupert Murdoch is a difficult fellow to figure out.

His father Keith was a famous newspaperman in Australia, and Murdoch watchers from the 1950s onward have seen Rupert's career as an ambitious son's attempt to one-up the old man. His entrepreneurial gift showed itself early; as a boy he sold water rats and manure from the family farm, good training for the future publisher of the *New York Post*. While still a student at Oxford, Rupert inherited from Keith a provincial Australian newspaper, the *Adelaide News*. It became the kernel of his empire.

Murdoch's motto, like Oprah's and our president's, has been "expand or die." From the start bankers were solicitous. Their money in pocket, he gobbled up papers first in Australia and then, beginning in the '60s, in England. His

excellent cash flow carried him to the United States, where he at last built his ultimate dream: Fox Television, America's fourth network.

Contrary to popular image, Murdoch fitted his papers to the tastes of his desired audience, whatever they might be. His tendency has always been down-market, but he understood that the bare-breasted "Page Three Girl" of his tabloids would never do for the *Sunday Times*, unless she was Mrs. Thatcher. His politics were similarly changeable: The Oxford Leninist evolved into a conventional leftist during the Laborite ascendancy of the '60s, and the rise of the conservatives shaped the right-wing populist so reviled by the forces of virtue today.

What excited him, above all and always, was the deal, the acquisition, the steady expansion of his reach

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and power. His methods were his own. As a rule, for example, newspaper conglomerates seeking new properties look for the easy buy-out in a one-paper town. Murdoch lusted after secondary papers, wheezing old organs like the *Boston Herald* or the *Chicago Sun Times*, in hopes of attracting the readers that their competitors, fat with journalism-school pomposity, had neglected or disdained. His approach to magazines, satellite TV, and publishing houses was similarly unorthodox. Some gambles paid off, others didn't. Their cumulative effect—a debt the size of Ecuador's—almost sunk him in 1990.

But Murdoch keeps bobbing along. It is a remarkable odyssey, filled with some