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Acid Rain in Europe and North America: National Responses to an International Problem by Gregory S. Wetstone & Armin Rosencranz

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BOOK REVIEW

ACID RAIN IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA: NATIONAL RESPONSES TO AN INTERNATIONAL PROBLEM. By Gregory S. Wetstone and Armin Rosencranz. Washington, D.C.: The Environmental Law Institute, 1983. Pp. 244.

*Reviewed by Karen Mingst**

The length of time between the discovery of an environmental problem by the professional research community and the problem's subsequent placement on the political agenda largely depends on the complexity of the problem and the difficulty of its resolution. If the problem's environmental implications are uncontestable, its economic effects, marginal, and the affected areas, local, this political response time is likely to be relatively short. If, however, the environmental implications are complex or ambiguous, the economic effects, substantial, and the affected areas, transnational, the political debate is apt to be highly charged and glacially slow in its development of a consensus concerning the nature of the problem and its appropriate remedy. Gregory S. Wetstone and Armin Rosencranz in *Acid Rain in Europe and North America: National Responses to an International Problem* document the difficult economic and political problems posed by acid rain. In light of their findings, it is no surprise that acid rain is only now becoming a priority on the political agenda, even though scientific work on the subject dates from the mid-1950's and began in earnest in the late 1960's.

Divided into three sections, *Acid Rain in Europe and North America* presents a comprehensive summary of the state of the

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scientific controversy on acid rain and the various national and international political measures that have been proposed to alleviate this problem. The book is based on a detailed examination of the extant literature, interviews with over 100 persons from different national and professional backgrounds and the experiences of each author.¹ Each of the book's three sections addresses a different aspect of the acid rain problem. This review evaluates each of these sections.

The opening section presents a comprehensive discussion of the scientific explanations of the causes of acid rain. The section accomplishes the difficult task of thoroughly describing the chemical processes resulting in acid rain, the rain's probable environmental effects and the available control technologies without burdening the reader with chemical formulas or overly technical abstractions. This section, in fact, could stand alone as an excellent primer on the nature of acid rain. The section's only shortcoming is its failure to treat more skeptically the scientific studies conducted by others. The authors should have emphasized at the outset the technical difficulty of designing and implementing controlled long-range environmental experiments. Aside from this minor fault, however, the opening section is a sound presentation of necessary background information.

The second section summarizes briefly the national policies of selected Western European countries (Sweden, Norway, Britain, and West Germany) and Japan, and discusses extensively the policies of the United States and Canada. In comparing and contrasting the acid rain policies of these countries, the authors focus primarily on the following factors:

- 1) the sophistication and types of technical control devices adopted to suppress sulphur and nitrogen emissions;
- 2) the level of public awareness of the acid rain problem;
- 3) the role of non-governmental public interest groups in the policy process;
- 4) the relationship between government and industry;
- 5) the strength of governmental policies;
- 6) the methods of policy enforcement; and
- 7) the impact of international agreements and the policies and needs of other countries on national authorities.²

As the length of this list indicates, the authors have identified and discussed a host of important comparative characteristics. Focusing

1. Both educated as attorneys, Mr. Wetstone is Director of the Air and Water Pollution Research Program at the Environmental Law Institute and Mr. Rosencranz is Executive Director of the Pioneer Foundation in Inverness, California.

2. Although the authors focus their discussion on these seven factors, their analysis does not compare these factors systematically.

on these factors, the authors present—notwithstanding some minor flaws—a lucid, comprehensive analysis of the important issues.

Emphasizing that the nature of each country's policy process largely determines the make-up of its acid rain policies, the analysis of this section is decidedly political. By describing the political structure of each country's policy process, the authors indicate the extent to which each nation can promulgate new and revise existing acid rain policies. The authors fail, however, to explain fully how conflicts between acid rain and other policies may be resolved outside the confines of the policy process. Scant attention is paid to the judicial and administrative mechanisms employed by each country to resolve such disputes. As a result, this section presents an incomplete picture of the limitations and potentials of each nation's acid rain policies. This section will, thus, be of only limited value to comparative legal scholars.

The American and Canadian experiences with acid rain are subjected to careful scrutiny. An overview of the pertinent environmental history of each nation is presented, including a detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of certain items of legislation. In analyzing American legislation, the authors chart the impact of changes in presidential administrations on U.S. environmental policy, giving particular attention to the differences in environmental policy between the Carter and Reagan administrations.³ While the case is well-drawn, a comprehensive approach would require that administration changes be analyzed for other countries. For example, did Canadian policy change when the Liberals gained control from the Conservatives? Did British policy change when the Labor party succeeded the Tories? Have changes in West Germany's chancellorship significantly affected that country's environmental policies? Without a description of these political dynamics, the reader gets a more static view of the non-U.S. cases. Despite this flaw, however, this section's analysis of American and Canadian policies is informative and insightful.

In the final section, the authors discuss the extent to which the acid rain problem may be dealt with through international law and international agreements. These mechanisms of control are worthy of study because air pollution of one country often contributes to the acidity of a neighboring country's precipitation. Of the many international organizations which could help develop international con-

3. In reading this portion of the book, this author detected what she believes to be a clear anti-Reagan bias.

trols, the European Community is the one which the authors forcefully argue is "most likely to eventually succeed in establishing international [sulphur dioxide] control programs in response to Europe's transboundary pollution problem."⁴ Although the authors competently discuss ways in which the European Community and other organizations could help control acid rain, the analysis in this section is unduly cursory. The authors fail to discuss the many precedents of international cooperation where other transnational pollution problems have been resolved.⁵ A discussion of these precedents might have served as a useful point of departure to hypothesize about the likelihood of success for future efforts at international control of acid rain.

Finally, in an abbreviated conclusion, the authors state their own remedial prescription: even though the economic and political costs may be high, solutions must be found. In their words:

The precedent established in the international response to today's comparatively straightforward acid deposition issue will set the tone for crucial efforts to head off these and other international environmental problems in coming years. To press forward with current energy and pollution control policies with no regard for their environmental repercussions, is to risk stumbling into what may prove an environmental tragedy of historic proportions.⁶

It is within the context of this conclusion that the major strength and weakness of the book may be found. To their credit, the authors do a commendable job of analyzing the political constraints and opportunities in the various countries considered. It is this transnational policy perspective that is the major strength of the book and the reason why it warrants serious study by students of comparative policy. The authors, however, pay too little attention to economic considerations, particularly the costs of different control alternatives. Although control technologies are discussed in considerable detail in a technical appendix, the costs of employing these technologies are never discussed. An evaluation of the cost/benefit

4. G. WETSTONE & A. ROSENCRANZ, *ACID RAIN IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA: NATIONAL RESPONSES TO AN INTERNATIONAL PROBLEM* 149 (1983).

5. For a discussion of these precedents, see generally J. CARROLL, *ENVIRONMENTAL DIPLOMACY: AN EXAMINATION AND A PROSPECTIVE OF CANADIAN-U.S. TRANSBOUNDARY ENVIRONMENTAL RELATIONS* (1983); D. KAY & H. JACOBSON, *ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION* (1983); J. SCHNEIDER, *WORLD PUBLIC ORDER OF THE ENVIRONMENT: TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL ECOLOGICAL LAW AND ORGANIZATION* (1979).

6. G. WETSTONE & A. ROSENCRANZ, *ACID RAIN IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA: NATIONAL RESPONSES TO AN INTERNATIONAL PROBLEM* 170 (1983).

arguments is needed because these are some of the most hotly contested arguments in the acid rain policy debate. The book, thus, presents an important, but incomplete, analysis of acid rain policies.

Participants in acid rain debate will benefit from reading this work. While the book's technical analysis might appear superficial, the scientist will gain an understanding of the political implications of scientific research. Although the material on specific countries is abbreviated, the national policymaker will gain a critical perspective of the overall problem from the book's transnational comparisons. For the lawyer, while there is a dearth of legal citations, the book provides a general overview of the broader policy process. For the political scientist, the book offers much needed case studies from which theories of international cooperation may eventually be constructed. For the public, while sections in the book may appear overly technical, the book presents an excellent explanation of an important public policy issue. In short, this book has something to offer all persons interested in the acid rain controversy. By reading this book, such persons will become more informed and, consequently, the political response time between the continuing emergence of this environmental problem and its eventual resolution will, hopefully, decrease.