H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Gary Haq, Alistair Paul. *Environmentalism since 1945.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012. xvi + 124 pp. $105.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-60181-8; $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-60182-5.

Reviewed by Christine Keiner (Rochester Institute of Technology)
Published on H-Environment (May, 2012)
Commissioned by David T. Benac

Environmental Governance Goes Global

In *Environmentalism since 1945*, human ecologist Gary Haq and policy advisor Alastair Paul synthesize over two hundred scholarly, journalistic, and policy-oriented sources to provide an introductory survey of the modern environmental movement. Actually, as they explain, there is no single unified environmental movement, for "Environmentalism has evolved in complex and sometimes contradictory ways to span conservative, reformist and radical ideas about what the world should look like, as well as how change should be brought about" (p. 2). Because the United States and United Kingdom constituted the two earliest sites in which environmental concerns gained political currency, Haq and Paul focus on U.S. and U.K. case studies to illuminate the development of scientific, economic, and mainstream attitudes, concepts, and values regarding the environment. At the same time, the authors justify the generalized title by emphasizing the international context in which environmental governance emerged in the decades after World War II.

The book opens with a necessarily selective timeline of environmentalism from 1945 to 2014. The list includes many events of great familiarity to U.S. environmental historians, such as the first Earth Day celebration (incorrectly stated as April 22, 1972 rather than 1970), the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill (1989), the Rio Earth Summit (1992), and the publication of such works as Aldo Leopold's *A Sound County Almanac* (1949), Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), and the Brundtland Commission's *Our Common Future* (incorrectly stated as 1986 rather than 1987). Importantly, the timeline references numerous British and western European events, laws, institutions, and publications not commonly addressed in the U.S.-based literature, from the U.K. Beaver Committee's 1954 assertion of unacceptable levels of air pollution to the 1971 United Nations *Founex Report on Development and Environment* to the 1981 establishment of Sweden's first green political party. While the relevance of some entries is not immediately obvious, discussing such issues with colleagues and students would likely make for thought-provoking dialogues (e.g., "How did the end of food rationing in Britain in 1954 influence environmental advocacy?").

The first two chapters provide concise overviews of the book's scope and the growth of U.S., U.K., and European environmental campaigns and nongovernmental organizations. The discussion of how the World Wildlife Fund, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Environmental Defense Fund, and other activist groups expanded during the 1970s upon local single-issue campaigns to engage international constituencies in transboundary concerns sets the stage for chapter 3, "Global Environmental Governance." Haq and Paul persuasively argue that "The post-war era of global environmental governance would not have been possible without the initial commitment to multilateralism shown by world powers when they created the UN in 1945" (pp. 26-27). Long before the pioneering 1972 Conference on the Human Environment took place in Stockholm, the United Nations provided opportunities for highlighting links between resource conservation, peace, and the sovereignty of developing nations. However, the convergence of the environment and development agendas did not gain traction until the late 1980s and 1990s, with the rise of international initiatives cross-promoting sustainable development, poverty eradication, and reductions in the developed world's emissions of greenhouse gases.

Three middle chapters constituting about 50 percent of the book summarize trends primarily since the 1960s with respect to the role of scientists and scientific evidence in environmental thought and policymaking; the development of economic concepts regarding resource availability and indicators of capitalist productivity and progress; and the ways in which institutions of mainstream Western culture and consumerism have influ-

enced public attitudes toward environmental issues. The authors cover a remarkable amount of material in just fifty pages, yet inevitably overlook some crucial developments (such as U.S. changes induced by the 1973-74 OPEC oil embargo) and analytical sources (such as Robert Gottlieb's *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* [1993], Adam Rome's *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* [2001], and Samuel P. Hays's *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* [1989]).

In the conclusion, the authors comment on the successes and shortcomings of contemporary environmentalism and speculate upon its future. Drawing upon recent critiques by Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger (the authors of the controversial 2004 essay "The Death of Environmentalism") and the prominent environmentalist nuclear advocates James Lovelock and Stewart Brand, among others, Haq and Paul argue that in order to counter the increasingly powerful forces of conservative environmental skepticism, environmentalists need to engage in some serious soul-searching and self-evaluation. Addressing the huge challenges of climate change and convincing voters to follow suit–in short, transitioning to "a new ecological age on the scale of the industrial revolution"–demands deemphasizing the alarmist, anti-technology attitudes associated with 1960s- and 1970s-style environmentalism (p. 97). In their words, "The environmental movement needs to decide which technologies it is going to support so that it has a positive story to tell" (p. 95).

And yet while seeming to support nuclear power and other (centralized, top-down, expertise-driven) technology-based solutions, Haq and Paul conclude that the "new form of environmentalism" needed to face the coming era of resource scarcity and climate change requires a decentralized, grassroots-generated approach promoting self-sufficiency and community resilience (p. 99). Can twenty-first-century environmentalism really evolve to encompass such disparate agendas? By inspiring readers to grapple with this fundamental question and conduct further research on their own, *Environmentalism since 1945* should fulfill its role as an effective introductory text.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Christine Keiner. Review of Haq, Gary; Paul, Alistair, *Environmentalism since 1945.* H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. May, 2012.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=35205

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.