

- Funtowicz, S. O., and Ravetz J. R. (1990). *Uncertainty and quality in science for policy*. Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Hajer, M. (1995). *The politics of environmental discourse: Ecological modernization and the policy process*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon.
- Lee, K. N. (1993). *Compass and gyroscope: Integrating science and politics for the environment*. Washington, DC: Island.
- Offe, C. (1990). Reflections on the institutional self-transformation of movement politics: A tentative stage model. In R. J. Dalton and M. Kuechler (Eds.), *Challenging the political order: New social movements in Western democracies*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Van der Heijden, H. A. (1997). Political opportunity structure and the institutionalisation of the environmental movement. *Environmental Politics*, 6, 25-50.

Having begun her academic life as a biochemical engineering student, Katharine Farrell now has degree qualifications in political science, urban policy analysis and management, and environmental engineering and is preparing her Ph.D. thesis, "Making Good Decisions Well," at the Institute of Governance, Public Policy and Social Research, Queen's University Belfast. She has worked as a waste minimisation consultant to businesses and with civil society, state, and semistate environmental organisations in the United States and Ireland.

Sharon Beder. *Global Spin: The Corporate Assault on Environmentalism*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2002 (revised edition).

Despite *The New York Times*'s claims to the contrary, there is no such thing as "all the news that's fit to print." The media, by definition, sifts through events each day, deciding what is "newsworthy" and what is not. This agenda setting implies that the media does not tell us what to think, but it does tell us what to think about—and, by the process of elimination, what *not* to think about. Moreover, as Sharon Beder makes alarmingly clear in her updated edition of *Global Spin: The Corporate Assault on Environmentalism*, powerful corporate entities often encourage or coerce the media to apply a more aesthetically pleasing filter to their corporate financial interests, both in deciding what is and what is not newsworthy in the first place as well as what to emphasize in the final story itself. This "global spin" is at times subtle and other times overt, but in all cases, when it comes to environmental issues, it is disturbing and a legitimate threat to our treasured democratic institutions.

Through a series of detailed descriptions of inside players and their targets, Beder's *Global Spin* hammers home this point by packing one chapter after another with intriguing details about how large corporations shape public opinion, making the larger argument that the very foundation of our democratic system is at risk. This revised edition of the original 1997 publication includes 17 chapters with an extensive 23-page bibliography and a useful 13-page index. It also contains new chapters on Greenpeace Australia succumbing to "greenwash" in Sydney's bid for the 2000 Olympics as well as a new chapter on the relentless corporate campaign to postpone legislation curbing global warming. In many respects, this manuscript fits well within the context of James Fallows' text, *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*, and Jim Hightower's monthly newsletter, *The Hightower Lowdown*, as well as Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber's *Toxic Sludge Is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry*.

Beder's introductory chapter begins by examining the origins of corporate activism as a sort of "war of ideas," in which a "counter-intelligentsia" in the words of Olin Foundation head William Simon, countered anti-business research in academia (p. 19). The world Beder describes is one in which there is anything but a free discussion of ideas, largely because the mainstream media refuses to bite the hand

that feeds it. Whether the focus is network television or national daily newspapers, in the United States or Europe or Australia, Beder contends that the mass media is firmly committed to protecting the status quo. She outlines how corporations countered gains by environmentalists in late 1960s, largely employing a corporative activism that consciously “adopt[ed] the strategies that public-interest activists had used so effectively against them,” with the added bonus of “huge financial resources and professional advice” (p. 16).

Subsequent chapters then explore the various strategies employed. First, Beder discusses front groups in chapter 2, a subject to which she later returns in chapters 7 and 8 by lambasting the multibillion dollar PR industry and its strategy of “greenwashing.” These front groups boast cleverly chosen names that conceal real interests and seek, primarily, to “create confusion by magnifying uncertainties” (p. 28). Using words such as “reasonable,” “sensible,” and “sound,” these groups even resort to portraying themselves as environmentalists. One need look no further than the names (and corresponding acronyms) they choose for themselves; for example, Coalition for a Reasonable Environment (CARE) is a group whose membership includes investors, lawyers, developers, and builders (p. 30). Beder has a name for these groups, one that can be printed. This label is “astroturf,” named after synthetic grass and referring to artificially created grassroots support for corporate causes. One minor suggestion towards further improving this section would be to add a comprehensive listing of the various industry front groups discussed, both alphabetical and according to issue area, for the reader is easily bogged down in the detail provided.

Chapter 4 focuses on strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPS) that, by design, seek to deter public involvement. SLAPPS undeniably create a “chill effect” (p. 65), but Beder downplays the extent to which courts have also offered a unique outlet for environmental groups seeking redress, particularly since the expansion of the concept of legal standing in 1971 to allow interest groups to sue on behalf of affected communities. Chapters 5 and 6 address conservative think tanks such as The Heritage Foundation and The Cato Institute. Acting more like interest groups than academics, these groups do “not usually carry out original research but adapt and apply existing research” (p. 77). Their primary purpose is to foster doubt about the severity of major environmental problems today such as global warming, ozone depletion, and species loss. In Beder’s words, they seek “paralysis by analysis,” a task not too difficult to achieve in the United States Congress (p. 97). The planned obsolescence of advertising is addressed in chapter 10, which highlights the practice of targeting youth, and chapter 11, which addresses specific strategies and the overall influence of advertising. Here Beder asserts that advertisers equate citizenship with consumption (p. 162) and consciously exploit the ripple effect that children have on their parents due to the “nag factor” (p. 163).

Chapters 12 and 13 focus on influencing the media, highlighting the prime directive of journalistic objectivity. This means unbiased reporting must incorporate both depersonalization and balance. Yet the problem with balance, of course, is that the appropriate time or space to achieve it rarely exists. Television sound bite times have experienced remarkable erosion over the last 30 years, from 42.3 seconds in 1968 to 9.8 in 1988 (pp. 207-208), and balance can never be adequately established to all competing perspectives. Even when several sides are discussed, rarely is the appropriate weight assigned to the various camps of disagreement. This means six or seven renegade scientists with direct financial ties to the fossil fuel industry are given “equal billing” as the 700 members of the National Academy of Sciences that urge action on global climate change (Gore, 1991, p. 182.).

Notable case studies that remain from the original edition include one on the Wise Use Movement in chapter 3 and an entire chapter devoted to the debate about dioxin in chapter 9. Two aforementioned new additions in the case study vein are chapter 14 on global warming and the critique of Greenpeace in chapters 15 and 16. The initial Greenpeace chapter is a particularly interesting read as it relates how this activist environmental group was hoodwinked into supporting the Sydney Olympics bid despite intentions to build those Olympic facilities on a toxic dump at Homebush Bay. Greenpeace Australia was enticed to sign aboard by being promised the opportunity to set eco-friendly guidelines for both building and maintaining Olympic facilities, blueprints that were later jettisoned for more traditional energy-intensive construction. Following this discussion, Beder critiques the evolution of Greenpeace International as it attempts to work more with state governments instead of merely “bearing witness” as a challenge to state sovereignty. Beder’s concluding chapter then suggests that democracy is declining in the West and that environmental NGOs must adapt if they are to reverse this trend.

Perhaps my only significant disagreement with Beder’s work rests in her critique of market-based mechanisms and green consumerism. I could not agree more that relying solely on green consumerism to foster more sustainable development is foolhardy. But to argue the other extreme, that “green consumerism backfires in that it reduces an individual’s power to influence society” (p. 180) to operating only through purchasing power is a bit too much. Yes, dangerous pitfalls exist, and Beder sounds an important warning bell in calling out environmental NGOs that risk compromising their mission by getting too cozy with business.¹ But let’s not throw out the baby with the bath water so to speak. Sometimes baby steps are needed, and when it comes to the power potential of the wallet, it is at best naive and at worst utopian to turn a cold shoulder to the dominant capitalist system of today. This is precisely why environmentalists such as Paul Hawken insist on using business to save the environment in his “restorative economy” (Hawken, 1993). To ignore this potential is analogous to the heavy-handed critique of recycling as having no impact whatsoever on sustainable development, as simply buttressing the treadmill of production (Schnaiberg & Gould, 1994).

Finally, one minor quibble rests with the References section. Beder’s text is painstakingly well researched, but, as noted earlier, perhaps a bit too much of this research remains in the text itself. At least this reviewer would like to see more detail moved into the References or Notes section. This editorial change would make the manuscript itself more reader friendly. Not being a fan of endnotes in general, this reader would much prefer footnotes to preempt the need to constantly flip back and forth for follow-up source information. One case in point where a footnote would be helpful is the reference to the 1978 U.S. Supreme Court case that decided against regulating the “amount of money that corporations could spend on propaganda” (p. 279). For those who would like to follow up on this juicy detail, it would be helpful to have the citation of the actual case as well as the name of the dissenting judge. Another example where it would be useful to have more information in a footnote is the actual Web site referred to regarding Dave Morris and Helen Steel’s pamphlet on “What’s Wrong with McDonald’s” (p. 69). Still, all told, these are minor points in the grand scheme of the work.

In the final assessment, Beder makes a worthy contribution to literature. She asserts that mainstream public relations spin not only encourages the hyperconsumerism gripping society today, thus fostering pervasive ecological degradation worldwide. She also suggests that this well-oiled (pun intended) public relations engine threatens the future of democratic governance. In that sense, the

overarching theme of her text is stated succinctly in its subtitle: the corporate assault on environmentalism. *Global Spin* also goes beyond the United States to be a truly international work, but it remains largely grounded in the English-speaking world of the United States, Great Britain, and Australia. It is a riveting exposé on the role of public relations in the environmental issue arena, from toxic waste to global warming. Scholars in political science (from public policy making to democratic theory), environmental studies, and communications will find it of interest as will graduate students in these disciplines and environmental NGOs themselves. This book is well worth the read.

—*Michael M. Gunter, Jr.*
Rollins College

NOTE

1. Beder cites WWF, The Nature Conservancy, Defenders of Wildlife, NRDC, Environmental Defense, Audubon, and National Wildlife Federation as accepting company support from those who also sponsor anti-environment groups (pp. 130-131). As the richest environmental interest group today, The Nature Conservancy, in particular, turns a number of heads whenever it strikes a new business partnership, and the group was the focus of a three-part, front-page series in May 2003 in *The Washington Post*. The first of these was Ottaway and Stephens (2003, p. A-1).

REFERENCES

- Gore, A. Jr. (1991). Steering by the stars. In C. L. Lamay & E. D. Everette (Eds.), *Media and the environment*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Hawken, P. (1993). *The ecology of commerce: A declaration of sustainability*. New York: HarperBusiness.
- Ottaway, D. B., & Stephens, J. (2003, May 4). Nonprofit land bank amasses billions. *The Washington Post*, p. A-1.
- Schnaiberg, A., & Gould, K. A. (1994). *Environment and society: The enduring conflict*. New York: St. Martin's.

Michael M. Gunter, Jr. is an assistant professor in the Political Science Department at Rollins College. He holds a Ph.D. in political science and an interdisciplinary certificate in environmental systems from the University of Kentucky. His research interests include biodiversity protection, NGOs, and sustainable development—and are the focus in his forthcoming book with University Press of New England, Building the Next Ark. E-mail: mgunter@rollins.edu.