

Reviews

Russia for the sale of plutonium. Clearly, more work needs to be done on this new wrinkle to the story of nuclear weapons disposal.

In conclusion, *Critical Masses* is an excellent book that should be required reading for those interested in nuclear policy, environmental issues, and social movements. Although I would have preferred to see the material integrated into a risk analysis framework and more on some of the international dynamics like the issue of MOX, the book handles a complex task with alacrity and grace.

Environmentally Sustainable Economic Development, by Asayehgn Desta, Westport, CT: Praeger (1999), 236 pp.

Reviewed by Robert K. Schaeffer, Sociology, San Jose State University.

According to Asayehgn Desta, economic development and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive goals. Instead, each depends on the other. If economic development is to be sustainable, he writes, "the environment needs to be protected. Similarly, it is axiomatic that without development there is no chance of environmental protection." (p. 12)

Proceeding from these assumptions, Desta explores a wide range of topics, showing how economic development and environmental protection can be linked to foster what he calls "environmentally sustainable economic development" (ESED). The book explores economic issues and environmental problems, examining markets, capital formation, poverty, population, women, education, multinational enterprises, technology, trade, and debt and their relation to the environment. Each chapter begins with a discussion of different theoretical approaches to these issues and argues that ESED would address many of the problems that theories and policies have encountered. Desta concludes each chapter with a case study that illustrates an important theme.

Overall, Desta provides concise, balanced, and accurate summaries of the intellectual debates and relevant literatures. The case studies are carefully chosen to make issues transparent to undergraduate readers and facilitate classroom discussion. His presentations of the Gini coefficient of inequality, China's one-child policy, the Grameen bank, AIDS in Thailand, and debt-for-nature swaps are particularly helpful, providing crucial details and historical context. This clearly organized and readable account of the issues and debates makes a real contribution to the literature on ESED, a rapidly growing field.

Throughout the book Desta maintains that ESED is both necessary and possible. Once business leaders and government officials recognize that environmental protection and economic development are joined, Desta expects that they will readily adjust their practices and policies to make it a reality. In his rather optimistic view, capitalism can be easily greened, its institutions and practices readily modified to pursue the goal of sustainable development.

Of course, environmentally sustainable economic development is a desirable goal. But some

Reviews

of the assumptions made by Desta and other practitioners in the field deserve critical scrutiny. Returning to his central argument, does economic development actually depend on environmental protection? Not necessarily. In Western Europe and the United States, economic development was accompanied by massive deforestation, and only a fraction of the original forest cover remains. In this instance, economic development was not appreciably undermined by environmental loss, a point repeatedly made by Brazilian officials, who now argue that their own economic development requires environmental loss (deforestation in the Amazon) of a similar sort. The point here is not to endorse deforestation in either setting but to observe that economic development does not always or inevitably depend on environmental protection, though perhaps it should.

Turning to his second assertion, can the environment be protected without economic development? Yes, in some cases. Small-scale agricultural systems have demonstrated both their economic viability and environmental sustainability over long periods without any appreciable economic development. The agricultural systems developed in India and China, and in indigenous communities, were able to support populations large and small for generations, though only at a rudimentary level. In some instances, of course, economic development has provided the wherewithal to protect the environment, as is clearly the case in the United States. The point here is that the relationship between economic development and environmental protection is more contingent than Desta allows. It is important to recognize that the relation between economic and environmental problems vary in different settings.

If ESED is an important goal, as Desta argues, why is it that businesses and states have done little, as yet, to promote global economic development or environmental protection? His book would have benefited from a more credible critique of the existing system, explaining why capitalist firms and states have not readily embraced ESED. The declining terms of trade for Third World producers, the growing gap between rich and poor countries, the marginalization of entire regions, and the degradation of natural environments indicates that capitalist institutions and economic processes have created real obstacles both to development and environmental protection. For instance, by insisting on economic development at any price, dictatorships have done little to protect the environment and much to harm it. But Desta neglects to discuss how postwar dictatorships restrained economic development and destroyed environments. Readers would never know from his accounts of economic and environmental policies in South Korea, China, and Indonesia that they were imposed by dictatorships, a serious omission. Nor does Desta identify the social forces and political movements that might challenge existing institutions and promote ESED on a large scale. Without a critique of the obstacles to ESED or an analysis of its proponents and prospects, his argument that it is necessary and possible seems less plausible.

More generally, the problem for Desta and others is how to improve living standards, promote equity, and protect the environment. Desta regards these as important goals, though he says little about how they might be achieved. Before ESED can be realized, several things need to occur.

First, people need democracy, as much as development, if they are going to protect the environment. Democratic governments generally do a better job protecting the environment than dictatorships, though debt burdens and structural adjustment programs often limit the capacities of democratic governments. Where democracy exists, environmental movements can organize to demand that governments provide the financial resources and adopt legislative measures that can help protect the environment. It is difficult to organize a constituency for environmental protection or sustainable development where activists risk arrest and prosecution. The democratization of 30-plus countries in the last 25 years has greatly improved the prospects for environmental protection in many settings, though dictatorships, warlords, and mafias still burden people and environments in many countries, particularly in China, much of Africa and the Middle East. Democracy in these regions is a prerequisite both for sustainable economic development and environmental protection.

Second, people need economic opportunities. They need access to land and natural resources. Land reform is essential for the development of sustainable agricultural systems. People also need

Reviews

access to capital and credit and freedom from the coercive economic powers of private monopolies and global financial institutions. There is plenty of capital that could be used to promote real economic development and environmental protection. But it is in the wrong hands (it is controlled increasingly by transnational corporations, stock and currency markets, and global financial institutions) and is made available only with onerous conditions (high interest rates and exceptional rates of return). These institutions should play a smaller role in the distribution of capital, and credit should be made available under more reasonable conditions. In the past, private and public institutions have provided capital and credit under conditions that provided economic opportunities and promoted real development. In the United States, for example, private Savings and Loans and government loan programs for farmers and students provided real economic opportunities for poor and working people. In South Asia, the Grameen banks have made capital available to poor people. In both settings, long-term, low-interest, fixed-rate loans provided the kind of capital that poor people and small businesses needed. If capital is not distributed in a more equitable fashion, it will be difficult to promote any real economic development.

People also need access to technology to assist economic development and protect the environment. It is important, however, not to embrace technology as a universal panacea, as Desta does, but adopt it selectively. In the Third World, for instance, people need water treatment, health care, and communications technologies. The need for pesticides, automobiles, land mines and other environmentally degrading technologies is less evident.

At a minimum, then, ESED depends on empowering people politically and economically. Moreover, it is important to recognize that there are a lot of different ways to promote democracy, distribute capital resources, and apply technology. Approaches that relied on singular models and uniform approaches that could be universally adopted have failed repeatedly in the postwar period. Given this history, which Desta notes, it would be unwise to suppose that a universal ESED model should be pursued. Indeed, it may be that the successful pursuit of ESED may depend on the creation of specific policies tailored to particular histories, geographies, resources, and opportunities. Because Desta identifies some of these approaches, his book contributes to this wider project.

The Ultimate Resource - 2 (revised edition). By Julian L. Simon. 1996. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 734pp.

Reviewed by Peter Harries-Jones, Department of Anthropology, York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

This re-issued and revised volume of a book originally published in 1981 is bound to touch a hot spot of any interested environmentalist. Simon's major expertise lies in the field of population economics and one of the main motivations for his original volume was a profound academic disagreement with the conclusions of Paul and Anne Ehrlich, together with the United Nations and their supporters, over interpretation of population and resource issues. In the earlier edition Simon predicted correctly, entirely against UN evidence at that time, a slowing rate of population growth in the world, especially Third World. A major theme of this revised edition is to rephrase and reverse Malthus' equation between subsistence and population. Simon's Law is as follows: