

Greens in the balance

Jayde Lovell reviews

Eco-Freaks: Environmentalism Is Hazardous to Your Health!

by John Berlau
(Thomas Nelson,
2006, 256 pages)

Critiques of the environmental movement may have multiplied in recent years, but bookstores remain intent upon concealing them behind the 50 unsold copies of Al Gore's *Earth in the Balance* that grace the display shelves.

Yet, in contrasting to many of its cousins in the anti-environmental correctness genre, John Berlau's *Eco-Freaks* is both eminently readable and scrupulously footnoted. Unlike Michael Crichton's *Aliens Cause Global Warming*, which takes a light-hearted and satirical jab at the eco-fundamentalists, Berlau's lively retort is refreshing in its commitment to cold hard facts.

As Berlau, the director of the Center for Entrepreneurship at the US think-tank, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, shows rather adroitly, environmentalism today isn't so much about facts as it is a religion; a fluffy regard for nature as a kindly and benevolent force, one which has suffered at the hands of man with his high walls and big machines. In an effort to 'rewild' the developed world, technologies put in place by our grandparents have repeatedly been slandered and banned on the flimsiest of evidence, from DDT to dams and levees.

But when you take away lifesaving technologies, you're going to lose lives;

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as we tragically saw in the preventable flooding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, or the rapid collapse of the Twin Towers, which weren't properly fire-proofed in the midst of the anti-asbestos hysteria.

Berlau's underlying message is a reminder that disease, environmental catastrophes and wastelands all existed naturally, and in abundance, long before human pollutants, global warming or tree-clearing ever did. Environmentalists who yearn for 'the good old days' have forgotten the truth of the Hobbesian description of primitive life: nasty, brutish and short.

The doomsday scenarios about 'population explosions and massive cancer crises from pesticides' have been shown to be false, yet we're left with public policies based on environmental delirium. And in many cases, we've already lost what protected us from the wrath of nature, with 'public health hazards caused by environmental policies already on the scene'.

Unapologetic and direct, Berlau attempts to expose the media's fear-mongering and strip away the Green rhetoric that has penetrated public discourse. Berlau recounts the full story behind some of the most commonly misrepresented and misunderstood ecological fables.

In a delightful true story of Ronald Reagan's reverence for the American wilderness, Berlau shows us that the President so hated by environmentalists actually had a sound understanding of the

natural sciences and a respect for 'nature's harshness', as well as sincere gratitude for the technologies that humans had invented. Contrary to urban myth, Reagan genuinely loved the outdoors, and was so gentle a lover of nature that he went to great lengths to ensure that even the rattlesnakes on his ranch were protected.

This story stands in stark contrast to Al Gore's pompous pronouncements that humans are the root of all environmental evils, delivered in the auditoriums of luxury hotels around the world. While Gore will, in the blink of an eye, attribute every one of the world's ills to global warming, Reagan is revealed as a well-read President with a balanced approach to science policy—a far cry from the conservative caricature portrayed by the Left.

While Berlau is highly critical of the fuzzy environmentalism of today's activists, it would be a mistake to call this book 'anti-green'. Far from it. Berlau takes a common-sense approach to preserving the environment, without over-reacting or overcorrecting. While Reagan loved the American redwood forests, he was rational enough to realise 'if you've looked at 100,000 acres or so of trees ... how many more do you need to look at?'

Green opposition to development is not based upon any legitimate grievances against each individual initiative, but on a fundamentalist brand of environmentalism that views capitalism, prosperity, and the human pursuit of happiness as the height of depravity.

Perhaps if all who read *The Weathermakers* would also read *Eco-Freaks*, we might begin to see something resembling an informed and balanced discussion on environmental policies. But, in all likelihood, those who really need to read it will never turn the first page. Those who are already converted will enjoy the sermon.

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