"Et tu, Government?"

Frank Wijen, Kees Zoeteman, Jan Pieters (eds.), *A Handbook of Globalisation and Environmental Policy* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2005)

A Review by William C. Frederick, May 2007

It's not just corporations, jobs, local communities, national economies, and the environment that are threatened by globalization. As this book shows, governments too are feeling the pressures of large-scale global change. Historically dominant, nation-states and their governing institutions watch as new power players wield their influence on public affairs. Private corporations operating in a plurality of governmental domains encroach on regulatory territory, playing off one state's rule-making stance against others to their own advantage. Non-governmental institutions (NGOs) can and do mount media campaigns (read protest movements) that are more effective and faster than the slower-moving, and at times special-interest-captive, legislative and regulatory processes. Global capital flows, linked with the Internet's instantaneous transmission, can easily undercut and reshape a single government's fiscal stance along with its currency. Cross-boundary trade agreements may interdict government policy goals on employment or environment. Once-clear public policy regimes yield to intergovernmental, supranational arrangements—the Kyoto Protocol an example—whose goals, purposes, methods, and enforcers take on a muddiness and uncertainty not readily subject to clear-cut review. Entirely private international codes, standards, and compacts pledging corporate signers to environmentally-friendly and humanly-just policies and practices—extending far down the supply-chain network—take on a life independent of government permission or even cooperation.

This hefty volume (735 pages) addresses the rapidly and radically transforming face of governmental authority. Its editors and most of the authors are Dutch or have Dutch affiliations, plus a sprinkling of other European and American scholars and experts on environmental public policy. Although called a handbook, it raises questions and provides new perspectives rather than providing answers or giving instructions to governments on what to do about all of the changes going on.

"Race to the bottom" as well as "race to the top" global economic trends are spiritedly presented and argued. Vigorous arguments for sustainable development are made by such disparate groups as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and WWF International, the latter so sure of its identity that its authors do not decipher their original acronym of the World Wildlife Fund (nor is it listed in the index), now extended to embrace wider environmental issues than wildlife *per se*. Unilever weighs in with its sustainability programs and successes. Case studies (mainly Dutch) of logging, energy conservation, crop protection, and agricultural trade project a picture of "can do" optimism. Other sections highlight the impact of European Union and OECD policies in controlling environmental degradation.

Well, what to do about it all? The answers range from a proposal by two Yale University faculty members to draw together all present approaches to sustainable development into a new global environmental mechanism (GEM) that would presumably

work more efficiently than scattered efforts of separate governments, to the more modest (and more radical) idea of creating in the Netherlands a kind of "Silicon Valley" home for the world's activist environmental NGOs to be supported by venture capitalists and Dutch government policy as a way of keeping the pressure on all institutions—corporate and governmental, worldwide—whose actions and policies threaten the planet's long-term sustainability.

Once again, this collection of thoughtful, imaginative essays and reports demonstrates the vitality and timeliness of European scholars and experts who continue to lead the way toward greater understanding of the impacts of governments, private enterprises, and diverse global communities on the planet's ecological systems.