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WHERE WE AGREE— A REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COAL POLICY PROJECT

Edited by FRANCIS X. MURRAY
Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1978

This two-volume report of the work of the National Coal Policy Project culminates a noble and surprisingly successful attempt to narrow the policy differences separating environmentalists from the producers and consumers of coal. Given the perceived needs of environmentalists and the nature of the production and consumption processes involving coal, conflict was bound to occur. In fact it has occurred throughout coal's turbulent history.

Gerald L. Decker, formerly with Dow Chemical, a heavy coal user, saw the need to reduce the areas of disagreements among the competing factions surrounding the coal industry. He was instrumental in forming a group of coal producers, coal users, and environmentalists who in one year, with financial aid from foundations and industry, hammered out a "consensus on important national policy issues related to the use of coal in an environmentally and economically acceptable manner." A measure of their success is the record of the Mining Task Force composed equally of industry and environmental representatives. This group agreed on over 150 recommendations concerning future coal production and failed to agree on only two major issues. The batting average was lower in other areas studied. Indeed, this report is quick to acknowledge the areas of outright disagreement and partial agreement, as well as issue areas that remain unresolved due to a lack of time or resources to study them thoroughly.

The project was organized into five major areas, each of which was the responsibility of a task force composed of industry and environmental members. The groups include Mining, Air Pollution, Conservation and Fuel Utilization, Transportation, and Energy Pricing. Volume one covers the last four areas (plus a short report on the work of an Ad Hoc Emission Charge Task Force), and the second volume is devoted solely to the Mining Task Force report.

Some of the task force reports are more complete than others. The Mining Task Force report is excellent. It covers a wide range of issues including reclamation, impact of coal mining on water quality, socio-economic impacts of coal development, and regulation standards. It also approaches the issues from another dimension by making re-

gional assessments of the impact of coal mining on the environment and by recognizing correctly that conditions in the coal industry vary sufficiently from one region to another to warrant a geographical orientation.

Weaknesses appear in the report of the Transportation Task Force where some issues get superficial treatment. In addition one wonders why the study focuses on *energy* pricing when the investigation is supposedly centered on coal. The discussions of marginal versus full cost pricing for electricity are not unique to coal-based electric power. A discussion of the effect on pricing of the existing industry structure and of the government's coal leasing policy might have enriched this section.

An overall assessment of this ambitious project leaves one with mixed feelings. The progress made in narrowing differences between traditionally antagonistic groups is admirable. The project is effective in demonstrating the possibilities for substituting negotiation and explanation for the adversarial process as a means of conflict resolution. One suspects that the parties agreed on many issues because, for the first time, they listened to what the other side had to say. Since the project remains in existence, its leaders might try to find a way to marshal support in Washington and in the state capitals for implementation of their recommendations.

What misgivings does the report foster? First is the concern that coal industry representation on the Task Force may have been inadequate and not representative of the entire industry. "Industry" representatives sometimes took positions affecting coal production without the concurrence of coal operators, the industry members being coal *consumer* representatives. Thus, in the chapter on "Fuel Utilization and Conservation" the report concludes that "use of coal should be viewed as an intermediate step toward the use of long-term, sustainable resources." It is hard to imagine a coal operator agreeing with that conclusion, and in fact, making of the recommendation by the Task Force was devoid of coal industry representation.

The second major area of concern in an assessment of the overall project is the question of the durability of the Task Force recommendations. Each member of the study group represented himself or herself and did not represent the organization with which he or she was affiliated. Would the same problems addressed at a later date by different representatives of the same interest groups be resolved as they were by the members of the National Coal Policy Project.

These are not trivial objections. Nonetheless, they should not ob-

scure the enormous value of this pioneering study. These volumes can serve as a ready reference for the reader interested in learning the status of the environmental conditions surrounding coal in the late 1970s. Useful bibliographies and glossaries accompanying many sections aid both the lay and professional reader. This work's greatest value, however, is not necessarily its informational content. Rather, it is perhaps most important for its delineation and sharpening of issues separating environmentalists and industry representatives and for its creation of a model for conflict resolution, the adoption of which could profit other adversarial groups.

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