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COAL AND CRISIS: THE POLITICAL DILEMMAS OF ENERGY MANAGEMENT

WALTER A. ROSENBAUM

New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978. Pp. 107.

This book undertakes the ambitious task of reviewing the major policy issues surrounding the role of coal in the nation's future energy supply. The author approaches his subject from the perspective of the political scientist, with emphasis on the influence of existing political formulas, political management strategies, and the opinion climate on policy development and evolution. The work thus serves as a broad overview of the major forces and issues shaping the nation's policy on coal production and utilization and should be of value to readers with a wide range of interests.

The introductory chapter outlines major policy issues associated with expanded coal utilization and surveys the opinion climate, political formula, and political management strategies which likely will influence the outcome. The next three chapters then address three major dimensions of the coal policy debate—potential patterns of coal production and utilization, potential environmental implications of increased coal use, and the influence of national security considerations on coal development policy. The final chapter contains the author's conclusions and recommendations.

The treatment of future coal production patterns (Chapter 2) begins with a review of the National Energy Plan proposals for increased coal utilization. The implications of these proposals for mine siting, coal transportation, and energy research and development are then examined. Of particular interest to policy analysis are the author's hypotheses regarding political implications of projected coal production changes. For example, the author suggests that: "Together, Appalachia and the Rocky Mountain states would become economically, socially, and politically the nation's new coal bloc."

Discussion of the environmental costs of coal development (Chapter 3) focuses on strip mine reclamation and air pollution. The federal Strip Mining Control and Reclamation Act is examined with emphasis on the pattern of federal-state relationships it establishes and the patterns of regulatory politics which may emerge. Environmental issues of concern to the western states, particularly reclamation of arid lands and competition for scarce water supplies, receive special attention.

Turning to the relationships between foreign policy and domestic energy development (Chapter 4), the author emphasizes the stimulus

which national security considerations provide for expeditious development of domestic resources. Tradeoffs between the two major future domestic energy sources, coal and nuclear power, are then discussed. The author suggests that the environmental groups opposing nuclear power may face difficult choices as shortfalls of nuclear capacity will increase pressures for accelerated coal development.

Alternative futures for coal utilization are treated in the final chapter. The basic conclusion appears to be: "If the nation is to err in its coal policy, it should err on the side of excessive restraint." Citing the ecological risks posed by large-scale expansion of coal utilization, the author urges that our national growth policy be re-examined, that "soft-path" energy technologies be encouraged, and, above all, that energy technology development be structured to keep our future energy options as open as possible.

The book's major contribution is its provision of a broad, yet concise, overview of the issues and forces shaping national coal policy. Because of the scope of the issues addressed, some readers will likely consider the treatment of certain dimensions to be too shallow and some generalizations to be too broad. The discussion of hard vs. soft technologies is subject to criticism as the pitfalls of the "hard path" are examined in detail whereas the limitations of the "soft path" are not examined with equal rigor. Overall, however, the book provides an excellent introduction to the complex issues surrounding national coal policy and should stimulate productive dialogue among policy makers and analysts.

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