

Review of European Community & International Environmental Law

Focus on: Hazardous Substances and Activities

International Control of Persistent Organic Pollutants: The UN Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, and Beyond

Kirsten Hillman

The Shipment of Ultrahazardous Nuclear Materials in International Law

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Transfer of Biological Resources under the Biodiversity Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention

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Decisions in the Desert: Report of the 10th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol in Cairo

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Talk and Log: Wilderness Politics in British Columbia by Jeremy Wilson, published by University of British Columbia Press, Canada, 1998; 468pp.; Cdn \$85.00, hardback.

More than any other political economy, British Columbia has seen an extensive social welfare system constructed around revenues from the conversion of temperate rain forest ecosystems to the impoverished landscapes called, euphemistically, in the 1980s, 'working forests'. The Government of British Columbia controls a great deal of ancient forest. Roughly 94% of the province's 93 million hectare land base is publicly owned. Roughly half of these public lands are considered productive forest. Roughly a third of these lands ever supported the more spectacular sorts of temperate rainforest. At least half of these ancient forests have been liquidated largely through clearcut logging. From this conflicted territory has originated such global organizations as one of the leading corporate advocates of clearcutting, MacMillan Bloedel, as well as Greenpeace (which only after a decade and a half in existence moved its headquarters from Vancouver to Amsterdam). *Talk and Log* is the first province-wide history of this political economy of widespread loss of ancient forest and only modest wilderness preservation and habitat protection. Wilson painstakingly chronicles legislation, agencies and advisory bodies. He begins to evaluate the application of various, often aborted, laws. At the end of Wilson's saga of debacles from 1965 to 1996, 150,000 hectares of forest, the great majority being previously undisturbed, are still being clearcut annually.

Perhaps the most important contribution of *Talk and Log* is in sketching the post-war construction and normalization of this bizarre political economy. British Columbia has a strong cabinet/weak legislature form of parliamentary democracy with typically higher levels of government secrecy and lower levels of legislative scrutiny than in the neighbouring United States. Decisions over the land base have suffered from relatively high levels of ministerial discretion. Wilson examines the state of health of local democracy and describes poorly implemented reformist

legislation and subsequent back room deals that emasculate challenges to corporate control of the land base. Since the Cold War, 'we see a powerful industry engaged in an increasingly complicated struggle to contain a rising environmental movement' (xxvi). To achieve this 'hegemony' for the ancient forest 'liquidation-conversion project', one provincial ministry, that for forests, has dominated other interests notably fisheries, wildlife, and recreation. Forestry became totally framed in terms of large-scaled operations that often required outside capital. The author also analyzes over half a century of resistance. For example, the United States-based union, the International Woodworkers of America, was actively discouraging working-class-oriented critiques of unsustainable forestry as early as 1955 (pp 115 - 116).

Federal government interventions in such a land base so controlled by provincial agencies have often been greeted with hostility. For example, federal policy in national parks on the West Coast only became activist three decades ago under ministerial leadership of today's prime minister, Jean Chrétien. The neocolonial nature of this political economy of destruction of ancient forest becomes apparent in considering how much of the recent liquidation has been on land that various First Nations governments consider theirs. The Crown Colony of British Columbia joined Canada in no small part to avoid making the treaties on which London insisted. This unresolved legacy has played out as multinational corporations continue to insist on high rates of cutting in unlogged rather than 'second-growth' forests that in coming years could well no longer be under their control. Nearly all of the major wilderness preservation victories in British Columbia have involved areas with Native land claims and have been won in coalition with aboriginal bodies increasingly organized as local governments. However, the author curiously avoids full coverage of aboriginal perspectives on, and priorities for, forest, fisheries and wilderness conservation. Certainly, this is stuff for a subsequent book that complements *Talk and Log* but the critical reader will be uncomfortable with Wilson's inference of wilderness activism as a primarily non-aboriginal movement. European, colonial and neo-

colonial notions of wilderness and conservation have dominated conservation discourses in British Columbia even though many related ideas and spiritual values have a long association with local Native cultures. But the tensions between various frameworks for setting objectives for conservation are only slightly illuminated in *Talk and Log*.

Talk and Log begins to answer some riddles about the curious staying power of many grossly unsustainable land uses. As an almost 'worst case scenario' for the relatively affluent 'North' this review of British Columbia has relevance to broader theoretical work in environmental law. Why, for example, with so many innovative initiatives going back to the Environment and Land Use Committee Secretariat, of the 1970s, has resource management continued to be dominated by the requirements of unhampered liquidation of ancient forest? Why have the many efforts for local control of public forest lands, stretching back to at least the Slocan Valley in 1974, been so effectively stymied? Why after nearly 30 years of proposals and abortive programmes, increasingly in response to the 'Brazil of the North' accusations, was the still not functional Forest Practices Code gutted in 1997 by the same social democratic government that established it? *Talk and Log* takes the reader down decades of grey bureaucratic corridors to illustrate, time and time again, how liquidation of forests of great local and global significance can continue in the face of widespread public resistance because of industry intimidation and agency obfuscation.

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EC Institutions and Legislation by John A. Usher, published by Longman Group, European Law Series, London, 1998; 186pp.; \$15.99 paperback.

Understanding the key issues of EC institutional Law is essential when working with EC environmental law and policy. This book by John Usher provides a basic, step-by-step guide to EC institutions and legislation. The book is part of the Longman European Law Series which publishes

