

Book Reviews

Getting Down to Cases

Congress and the Environment. RICHARD A. COOLEY and GEOFFREY WANDESFORDE-SMITH, Eds. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1970. xx + 284 pp., illus. \$8.95.

The bulk of this book is a series of case histories of congressional action on various environmental and conservation issues and proposals, ranging from the preservation of the Indiana dunes to international control of the ocean floor to control of junked automobiles. The papers grew out of a seminar on environmental policy at the University of Washington, and most of them were prepared as assignments by graduate students in geography. There is little depth in most of them, the presentations being of the superficial kind that can be gleaned from printed congressional hearings or debate; little use has been made of background information that might have been made available by congressmen, committee staffs, or conservation lobbyists. But the collection of studies is nevertheless valuable, for environmental issues are very inadequately reported elsewhere, even in the great national newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, to say nothing of the papers that do not attempt to cover Congress fully.

The book raises many questions about Congress's handling of environmental issues but offers few answers. There is considerable rhetoric, typified by the comment on the jacket that "the specific question here is whether or not the American political system—and particularly Congress—can cope with the economic, esthetic, and moral problems raised by the steady deterioration of the human environment." The question is a good one, but it is obscured by an editorial tendency to make judgments on the basis of a self-determined morality. (For instance, one of the editors has to admit to embarrassment over Senator Henry Jackson's being

"right" on many conservation issues while being "wrong" on many defense issues.) The editors raise their questions as if they were the first to discover defects in the organization and operation of the Congress, and they offer few practical solutions for improving its procedures. Obviously a reorganization of the committees dealing with environmental problems would be beneficial, but the very diversity of the subjects dealt with in this book indicates how wide is the conception of environmental issues and how difficult, therefore, the problem of coordinating their consideration in Congress or the executive departments. What could be left out of the environmental tent? An immediate point in illustrating the problem might be the supersonic transport plane. Most environmentalists with the degree of commitment shown in this book would regard the SST as an environmental issue, but the majority of the Congress and possibly the general public would probably take another view.

In downgrading the capacity of the Congress to act, the editors overlook the fact that much of the current awareness of environmental problems has been developed by leaders using convenient congressional pulpits to dramatize the issues. They also overlook the fact that the long tradition of establishing conservation issues in moral terms, going back to the controversies of the Theodore Roosevelt era, gives the environmentalists a national base from which to operate that is often lost to their opponents. The capacity to develop national public attention to an issue, backed by aggressive, intelligent lobbying, can shape congressional attitudes better adapted to environmental needs. The congressional system needs much improvement, but the environment is going to be a continuing loser if the most dedicated environmentalists spin their wheels fulminating against the system, when there are specific issues and attitudes that can be made

to yield to a better-informed public opinion. Attempting to make a moral issue of every question will have no more success than it had during the Roosevelt-Pinchot era, when it was succeeded within a few years by a complacency that accepted Teapot Dome.

The drawback of assuming an omniscience about environmental issues is illustrated in the way this book skirts around the conflicts between recreationists and preservationists. The conflicts between these two major elements of the environmentalist movement are going to be sharply escalated during the remainder of this century, as a population increasing in both size and affluence comes to grips with the problem of how to achieve enough open space so that people can utilize it instead of merely watching environmental programs on television.

As discouraging as the Congress can be about many vital issues, a better response can be achieved if there is really an aroused and better informed public opinion.

FRANK E. SMITH

*Tennessee Valley Authority,
Knoxville*

Into the Ecology Breach

An Introduction to Mathematical Ecology. E. C. PIELOU. Wiley-Interscience, New York, 1969. x + 294 pp., illus. \$14.95.

Ecologists at the present time appear to be divided into two groups. On the one hand there are those who believe that ecological phenomena can be abstracted and modeled in such a way that mathematics can be brought to bear in their analysis. "Mathematics" here is taken to include numerical analysis through electronic computation. On the other hand, there are those who believe that the complexity of the phenomena is so great that no mathematical model can be successful and those who ignore all biological research which contains any mathematics. As a result of this polarization the latter group has ceased to be able to evaluate the relevance or importance of the work of the former. With this valuable and timely book, Pielou has attempted to provide a basis for the resumption of communication between the two groups. It is probably the first text on mathematical ecology directed to the biologist with minimal mathematical background who wishes to learn what model analysis can