

## Science on Capitol Hill

**Toward the Endless Frontier.** History of the Committee on Science and Technology, 1959–79. KEN HECHLER. U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., 1980 (available from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C.). xxxvi, 1074 pp., illus. Paper, \$11.

It has become common for congressional committees to commission and issue their own histories as committee prints on landmark occasions. It is thus hardly surprising that the House Committee on Science and Technology has marked its 20th year in this fashion. But the size of the volume—over 1100 pages—and, in some respects, its quality are more unusual. For both, one must credit Ken Hechler, member of the House and of the committee from 1959 to 1976. Involuntarily retired from his position as representative of West Virginia's Fourth District, Hechler agreed to write the committee's history when asked by Chairman Olin Teague, and apparently he spent a good part of 1978–79 on the project.

Hechler's credentials for such a task could be matched by few members of Congress. He was a respected political scientist and author of a book on the politics of the Taft era before he took an appointment at Marshall College in West Virginia in 1957 with politics on his mind. (He was in Congress within two years.) But as former Representative Charles Mosher notes in his introduction, the apprehensions committee leaders expressed about turning the project over to Hechler had to do not with any fear that he would take an overly academic approach but with his reputation when a member as something of a maverick. The committee establishment needn't have worried: Hechler writes as a true son of the Congress. His preoccupations and assumptions reflect a peculiarly congressional perspective on the world, and this accounts for many of the book's strengths and deficiencies.

Hechler's notion of what is significant about a committee's activity centers on the words that are exchanged, the information that is gathered, and the statutes that are crafted in the committee's meetings. I suppose that as an official chronicler he felt constrained to name lots of names for the sake of giving proper credit and to give each member's pet concern its due. But he goes far beyond the call of duty in this regard. Lengthy exchanges in hearings and the arguments members gave in defense of disputed positions are elaborated at the expense of analyses of

their motivations, the forces to which they were responding, or their relative influence. Hechler is not much inclined to step back from the day-to-day flow of committee business. One leaves this 20-year retrospective wishing he had proposed and defended some broader generalizations regarding the main thrust of the committee's activity, the quality of its policy product, and its impact in relation to other actors and forces shaping science and space policy.

Hechler's account is personality-centered. He is unusually candid in his descriptions of the attitudes of members toward one another, although he seldom fails to qualify and blunt his own assessments. Legislative outcomes, Hechler often seems to assume, depend mainly on the skills of the individual protagonists and the strength of their arguments. His case-by-case account of committee activities, with a focus on who argued what, when, and where, discourages any search for patterns of action and inaction or for explanations that go beyond the agency of individuals. The book's early chapters do point to organizational characteristics of the committee that have shaped its policy role. The style of successive chairmen, intercommittee battles for jurisdiction, conflicts over minority staffing and subcommittee autonomy, and the committee's relations with NASA and the National Science Foundation are given suggestive treatment. But Hechler does not systematically develop such observations, and they become rarer in later chapters.

Hechler conveys a sense of how the committee's preoccupations, and its political attractiveness to its members, have varied with shifts in public opinion and in the international space race. But this sensitivity is overshadowed by a more static view of the committee's agenda—a huge workload, self-evident

to the members in its dimensions, on which they labored with great diligence. One gains little sense of these legislators as politicians moved by a range of incentives and constraints, exploiting certain kinds of issues and leaving others undeveloped, systematically favoring some interests and values rather than others. Nor is Hechler inclined to undertake the sort of intercommittee comparison that might bring the committee's distinctiveness into focus. Probably an official history is the wrong place to look for the treatment of such matters. But they must be developed if a committee's policy role is to be adequately understood or evaluated.

Hechler's treatment has its virtues—in part as a corrective to social-scientific approaches that factor individual agency and expressed intentions out of the picture altogether. It provides the flavor of personal interactions in Congress and chronicles in a comprehensive and workmanlike fashion the policy involvements of the committee over two decades. The book is itself a primary document, revealing, as John Logsdon suggests in his foreword, "how Congress sees itself in operation."

Hechler's chronicle does not make fascinating reading; it is best used as a reference work, or sampled for topics of particular interest. Primarily descriptive, it will hardly satisfy those in search of explanation or analysis. But, as committee histories go, this one deserves a place of honor. And when one contemplates the use to which many legislators put their contacts and experience after retirement one feels increased admiration for Hechler's devotion of a year to producing this book.

DAVID E. PRICE

*Department of Political Science,  
Duke University,  
Durham, North Carolina 27706*

## The Life of Malthus

**Population Malthus.** His Life and Times. PATRICIA JAMES. Routledge and Kegan Paul, Boston, 1979. xviii, 524 pp. + plates. \$43.50.

This is the first full-length biography of T. Robert Malthus (1766–1834). Patricia James has provided us a scholarly work based upon 15 years of research into published materials, manuscripts, official records, diaries, notes, and personal correspondence. The result of her effort

is a detailed account of Malthus's life placed in historical and intellectual perspective. The biography is essentially chronological, as Malthus lived his life in rather distinct stages—a childhood with unconventional family and tutors, Student Malthus at Cambridge, Reverend Malthus, Population Malthus, Professor Malthus, and Economist Malthus.

The first *Essay on Population* was published anonymously in 1798 and was