

# Morgen Die Welt

## The EU's 'Green Imperialism'

JEREMY RABKIN

**A**RE you 'very proud of your nationality'? An international survey posed this question to people in 43 countries in the early 1990s. Only 19 per cent of Germans said yes, a smaller proportion than in any other country in the survey.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, Germans are also among the strongest supporters of European integration: a great many people in Germany find it preferable to classify themselves as Europeans rather than Germans.

Yet there continue to be notable differences among the different countries of the European Union. German culture has long had a particular preoccupation with purity and cleansing. Similar cultural dispositions are also evident in neighbouring Protestant countries (though they were, of course, differently expressed there in the first decades of this century). Thus, in the above survey, Nordic countries in Europe ranked higher than any other in the priority they gave to environmental protection. By contrast, the Catholic countries in the EU ranked near the bottom in this world survey (with most English-speaking countries somewhere in the middle).<sup>2</sup>

Yet again and again, when the European Union establishes common environmental standards for its member states, what emerges are the standards favoured by the Germans (and the Nordic states). As a recent study observed, 'The European Union has become a vehicle for exporting the environmental standards of Europe's greener nations to the rest of the continent.'<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, we have begun to see a great increase in international environmental regulation. And the most consistent and committed champions of such programmes are the same countries in northern Europe that have done so much to force the greening of EU policy. Will they do to the world at large what they have done in Europe?

In fact, international programmes have many of the same features as EU policy. Just as a succession of treaties have delegated vast powers to a central

bureaucratic authority in Europe—the European Commission in Brussels—so international treaties have begun to establish centralized administrative bodies, which can supplement (and, perhaps, ultimately supplant) the traditional pattern of state-to-state bargaining in international affairs.

Equally striking is the degree to which international programmes have enlisted the service and support of non-government organizations. In Europe, nearly ten per cent of the EU budget goes to the support of non-government organizations (NGOs) and a considerable proportion of that goes to environ-

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mental advocacy organizations. So all six of the major environmental advocacy groups with permanent staffs in Brussels receive sizeable financial support from the EU. This support makes obvious sense for European bureaucrats in Brussels: these European-wide advocacy groups help to mobilize public support for EU policies, countering the influence of national parliaments and governments in the member states, which are often in a position of rivalry or tension with EU authorities. At the international level, we again find environmental advocacy groups given a visible and prominent role by organizers of international conferences—and for much the same reason.

International environmental programmes have begun to extrapolate EU practices in yet a third way, by offering financial inducements to cajole reluctant states into co-operation. In the EU, sizeable payments go to a special 'cohesion fund' designed to compensate less affluent states for adhering to costly European regulatory standards, easing their resistance to Nordic environmental norms. Somewhat in the same way, international programmes have offered financial inducements for less developed countries in Asia and elsewhere to sign on to environmental standards favoured by the EU and Western states.

There is a catch, however—in the EU itself, as in the wider world. EU environmental policy gained momentum only after the Single European Market agreement of 1986, when countries with higher environmental standards began to fear competition from countries with lower standards. So the staff of DG XI—the directorate of the European Commission with special responsibility for the environment—expanded from 55 in 1986 to 450 in 1992 and more environmental directives were issued in the last two years of that interval than in the preceding two decades. These new standards proved to be extremely alert to business concerns in the 'greener' states: 'of the main influences,' concludes a recent survey of EU policy-making, 'economic motives seem to provide the most important authority behind the development of European environmental policy.'<sup>4</sup>

At just the same time, the EU (which has a diplomatic presence at international conferences) began to push for global agreements where commercial interests in Europe happened to coincide with green enthusiasms. In treaties to protect the ozone layer, for example, Europeans successfully pushed for bans on the production and use of chlorofluorocarbons—the replacements for which (most especially for refrigerants) happened to be supplied by European (and US) chemical producers, with secure, new patents. In the 1997 climate

change treaty negotiated at Kyoto, Europeans successfully pushed for reductions in the emission of 'greenhouse emissions' below the levels of 1990—just the year when Germany and the UK began phasing out coal use and so were already (for other reasons) curtailing their own emissions. Under the Basel Convention on trade in hazardous wastes, the EU countries established a cartel on recycling, which prevents outside countries from competing with European recycling businesses and excludes even relatively developed countries like Monaco and Israel from participating.

To induce developing countries to co-operate, special assistance funds have been organized. The World Bank has established a special Global Environmental Facility, offering low-interest loans to poor countries to help them comply with new international standards. But the issue of the hour is whether the EU will succeed in its demands to have the World Trade Organization incorporate new global environmental treaties into its own standards, so that trade sanctions (or duties against 'eco-dumping') can be imposed on countries that fail to comply with new environmental standards. Already there have been serious proposals from Europe for a new 'World Environment Organization' to supervise compliance with new standards and mesh them with trade norms. At that point, we will be seeing something like a global EU. Who will really benefit from it? This is a question we should all be asking now.

## NOTES

- 1 Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Countries*, Princeton University Press, 1997, page 86.
- 2 Ronald Inglehart, 'Public Support for Environmental Protection: Objective Problems and Subjective Values in 43 Societies', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, March 1995, page 61.
- 3 David Vogel, *Trading Up: Consumer and Environmental Regulation in a Global Economy*, Harvard University Press, 1996, page 97.
- 4 Justin Greenwood, *Representing Interests in the European Union*, London: Macmillan, 1997, page 181.

Jeremy Rabkin is Professor of Politics at Cornell University.

IPAA

# Letter on America

NIGEL ASHFORD

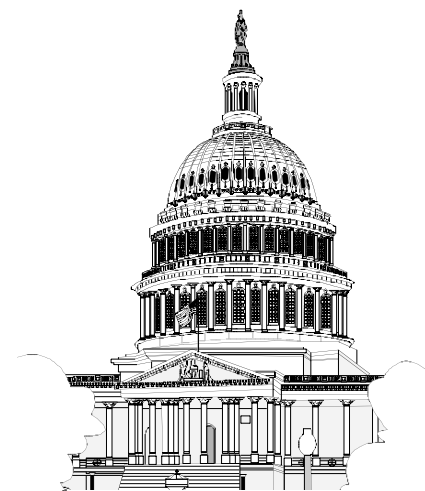
## George W. Bush and compassionate conservatism: rhetoric or substance?

**A**CCORDING to opinion polls, the next President of the United States will be George W. Bush, Governor of Texas and son of President George Bush. He is the front-runner for the Republican nomination, way ahead of his nearest challengers, Elizabeth Dole and Steve Forbes. In polls, he soundly beats the likely Democratic nominee, Vice President Al Gore, by as much as 54 per cent to 41 per cent. It would be unwise to attach too much significance to polls so early in the campaign. More importantly for now, Bush has stimulated debate by espousing a philosophy he calls 'compassionate conservatism'. What does it mean? Is it just fine rhetoric, or does it have real substance? Does it have anything to contribute to conservative thought as it redefines itself for the next century?

Bush defines his philosophy in this way: 'It is conservative to cut taxes and compassionate to give people more money to spend. It is conservative to insist upon local control of schools and high standards and results. It is compassionate to make sure every single child learns to read and no one is left behind.' This is not a definition, but a set of soundbites. Does it have any meaning?

The phrase is lambasted by his competitors amongst Republicans. Some view it as an insult that implies that conservatives are not compassionate. It only reinforces Democratic propaganda claiming that Republicans do not care about children, parents, the elderly, the sick. For some, 'compassion' is just another word for more government spending of taxpayers' money. Others criticize it as vacuous, meaning nothing or everything depending on the listener.

Multimillionaire businessman and rival Steve Forbes, best known for his advocacy of a flat tax, stated that 'Mealy-mouthed rhetoric and poll-tested clichés are no substitute for a muscular and sub-



stantive agenda.' Former Vice President Dan Quayle told supporters:

I have ordered my staff to never, ever, utter the words 'compassionate conservatism'. This is a silly and insulting term created by liberal Republicans and is nothing more than code for surrendering our values and principles.

Lamar Alexander, President Bush's Secretary of Education, described them as weasel words, 'words that are clearly and deliberately put together to confuse people by meaning nothing.' Alluding to President Bush, Alexander recalled 'a time not long ago when conservatives were told to be "kinder and gentler" and soon we were qualifying our principles' and losing the White House. 'We should be electing a president who doesn't mince words, doesn't fudge the issues.'

I believe that 'compassionate conservatism' is more than rhetoric or weasel words. It has a set of principles, substantive policies and intellectual integrity. It has useful lessons for conservatives, but also poses some real dangers. There is much here that conservatives around the world should thoughtfully ponder, but only partially embrace.

Compassionate conservatism is best summed up as: government does not work well, markets are good but not enough, and civil society is the way forward. Bush expresses this rather clumsily. 'My guiding principle is government if necessary, but not necessarily government.' Bush unfortunately shares some of his father's inarticulate speech patterns, but he does have 'the vision thing'.

I identify his principles as (1) society's problems are cultural, not economic, (2) ▶