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Al Gore, Reactionary Environmentalist

By FRED L. SMITH

Al Gore has written, "When giving us dominion over the earth, did God choose an appropriate technology?" And then: "One is tempted to answer, the jury is still out." Much the same can be said about Governor Bill Clinton's wisdom in selecting Sen. Gore to be his running mate.

While Mr. Clinton has spent months (if not years) attempting to fashion himself as a moderate Democrat unwedded to the Big Government programs that have dominated his party for so long, the selection of Al Gore signals a return to yesteryear's agenda. The 1992 Democratic platform may indeed offer a new liberal agenda that rejects "an outdated faith in programs as the solution to every problem." But Mr. Gore's record clearly belies that attitude.

This is true particularly on the issue of the environment. Although the press has scrambled to portray Mr. Gore as an environmental "moderate," a close look shows he is quite radical. Mr. Gore has called for a "Global Marshall Plan" and a "Strategic Environment Initiative" designed to save the world from ecological destruction. Anything short of total war in this effort is appeasement, "designed to satisfy the public's desire to believe that a wrenching transformation of society will not be necessary."

Radical Vision

The outline of Mr. Gore's radical environmental vision is found in his book, "Earth In the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit" (Houghton Mifflin, 1992). The best seller charges "we must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization." Mr. Gore actually researched and wrote this book himself. All the more reason to fear the environmental policies that might result from a Clinton-Gore administration.

For Al Gore the earth is on the verge of environmental apocalypse. Repeating the green litany of environmental threats—acid rain, deforestation, ozone depletion ("threatens all life on earth"), and global warming—Mr. Gore believes we are faced with an Ecological *Kristallnacht*: "The evidence is as clear as the sounds of glass shattering in Berlin."

Unfortunately, Mr. Gore, like much of the environmental establishment, gets the scientific evidence wrong on the threats facing the earth's ecology. Consider his views on global warming, which is to Mr. Gore "the most dangerous of all" environmental threats. As writers including Fred S. Singer have noted on this page, the data have yet to support such a conclusion. Moreover surveys of scientists, conducted by Gallup, and even Greenpeace, disprove Mr. Gore's claim that 98% of scientists support his fears. Mr. Gore credits Roger Revelle for alerting him to the danger global warming poses, yet Revelle himself wrote that "The scientific base for a greenhouse warming is too uncertain to justify drastic action at this time" (emphasis his).



Albert Gore Jr.

Because of the grave threat he sees on the horizon, Mr. Gore calls for a vast array of new laws and expanded bureaucracies to preserve the earth's ecological balance. Thus, Mr. Gore wholeheartedly endorsed the green internationalist agenda unveiled at the Rio Earth Summit, complete with massive redistribution of wealth to developing nations. In this posture he "out-greened" President Bush, who pledged almost \$900 million, but failed to sign off on the most redistributionist proposals put forward in Rio.

Mr. Gore wishes to export capital, rather than capitalism, to the Third World. Business should note that Mr. Gore supports green trade restrictions, taxes on carbon dioxide emissions and a "virgin materials fee." For example, Mr. Gore explains that "paper mills would be charged a materials fee on the basis of the

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percentage of their paper made from freshly cut trees as opposed to recycled pulp and paper." This would force firms like International Paper or Weyerhaeuser to pass along additional costs to their customers, including newspapers.

Mr. Gore also endorses international conventions on climate change and biodiversity—indeed, any treaty written in green ink. The senator should know by now that without vibrant free-market economies, developing nations have little hope. But his prescriptions for global "regulatory frameworks, specific prohibitions, enforcement mechanisms, cooperative planning, sharing arrangements, incentives penalties, and mutual obligations" hardly solve the problem.

The package does not end there. In 1989, Mr. Gore called for "a ban within five years on packaging that is neither recyclable nor naturally degradable." In his book he advocates "the strategic goal of completely eliminating the internal combustion engine over, say, a twenty-five year period." To Mr. Gore such steps are the "truly conservative approach."

Moreover, Mr. Gore has either the audacity (or naivete) to call seriously for "the establishment of rigorous and sophisticated technology assessment procedures, paying close attention to all of the costs and benefits—both monetary and ecological" of new technologies.

In short, this is a call for a wide bureaucratic superstructure. It is as if Mr. Gore has never heard of the Food and Drug Administration and the logjam that bureaucratic agency has created. Bureaucratic incentives always favor delay. The risks of technological innovation are always highlighted, the risks that new technologies could reduce are always neglected. The FDA's record on potentially lifesaving drugs makes this clear; yet Mr.

Gore wants to place all new technologies at the mercy of such regulatory gatekeepers.

For industries like biotechnology, industries where the U.S. maintains a competitive edge, this policy would be disastrous. The ability of companies to bring new products to market would be severely curtailed, limiting the incentive for investment. How would a Genentech do under such a regulatory regime? For the U.S. to cede power to an international entity of this sort would surely hamper U.S. economic progress. Then again, that is what some environmentalists—and perhaps Mr. Gore himself—have in mind.

Mr. Gore claims to understand that "free men and women who take individual responsibility for a particular part of the earth are, by and large, its most effective protectors, defenders, and stewards." It is a shame that none of his policies reflect this insight. In effect, he draws the wrong lessons from the history of environmental policy, calling for increased bureaucratization and economic controls rather than expanded private stewardship. The results for the American economy could be painful. Carbon taxes of the sort Mr. Gore has endorsed could destroy more than 600,000 jobs, 120,000 in Texas and California alone, according to a recent study by the CONSAD Research Corp.

Another study, conducted by the Department of Energy, found that a tax of a mere \$100 per metric ton of carbon would result in an increase of 26 cents per gallon of gasoline at the pump. Coal prices would more than double. Mr. Gore doesn't give a figure on this issue. But the senator did endorse Rep. Henry Waxman's (D., Calif.) legislation aimed at reducing carbon dioxide emissions, upon which the CONSAD study was based.

Product of the '60s

In this sense Mr. Gore is a true product of the 1960s. Then, political intellectuals were on the vanguard of economic central planning. The "best and the brightest," we were told, would find a way to eliminate poverty, flatten the business cycle and fine-tune the economy into full employment and rapid economic growth. The result was an utter disaster. If Mr. Gore remains true to his own past, he will want to replicate these central planning mistakes under an ecological banner. The road to serfdom need not be paved with red bricks: Green bricks will do just fine.

It is worth mentioning here that the danger of Mr. Gore's agenda is not confined to massive environmental programs. The National Taxpayers Union has consistently ranked Mr. Gore as one of the Senate's biggest spenders; Mr. Gore topped their list in 1989 and 1990. In my own group's 1990 Competitive Enterprise Index, an assessment of 61 key votes, Mr. Gore tied Alan Cranston as the Senate's most anti-market member.

Although Mr. Gore seems eager to impose a lower standard of living on the world, he personally sat in first-class on his return flight from the Rio Earth Summit. If elected vice president, he will be sitting next to the pilot.

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