

Radioactive Waste Disposal at Sea: Public Ideas, Transnational Policy Entrepreneurs, and Environmental Regimes by *Lasse Ringius*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2001. 261 pp. Paper, \$23.95.

The half-century-long odyssey over management of radioactive waste has yet to result in anything approaching consensus. Lasse Ringius offers an insightful analysis into the demise of one possible disposal method that has now been banned through a 1993 international accord—ocean dumping. From the dawn of the nuclear age through the 1960s, nations such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Japan used this technique for some forms of low-level radioactive waste. These wastes include a range of by-products from nuclear plants as well as hospitals and medical research, including exposed clothing, tools, and animal carcasses.

Ringius provides a detailed political history of the evolution of national and international policy leading up to the 1993 international agreement. The book emphasizes the limitations of traditional bodies of theory to explain this period and examines ultimate regime change that reflected the overwhelming support of participating nations. In particular, it finds conventional power-based and interest-based perspectives ill equipped to account for these policy changes.

Instead, Ringius submits that “transnational entrepreneurial coalitions,” drawing heavily upon environmental interest groups and public opinion, were pivotal forces that tend to be downplayed in other approaches to international environmental relations. These coalitions are packed with policy entrepreneurs

who inject “principled ideas” into national and international policy deliberations and have an enduring impact on recasting how policy options are framed and ultimately implemented.

Greenpeace is singled out as the most influential entrepreneurial force. Ringius reviews Greenpeace’s familiar abilities to mobilize public opposition, but also argues that the organization helped forge a transnational coalition to sustain this opposition to ocean dumping over many years, providing vital monitoring of national disposal practices and forcefully building a case for the ban.

This is an engaging work, both as a longitudinal political history but also as a challenge to much conventional thinking on environmental policy. It effectively argues that policy entrepreneurs—and their ideas—need to be taken more seriously in understanding regime change. At the same time, the book leaves questions inherent in any effort to advance an alternative theoretical approach on the basis of a single-case analysis. There is little effort to consider how typical the radioactive waste case may be, particularly given features that may be rather unique in the environmental arena. Radioactive waste is generated in a limited number of countries, its sources and total volume are well-established, and the risks it poses to human health are clearly understood. So how differently might transnational coalitions operate in very different contexts, such as global climate change? Moreover, it remains somewhat unclear just how important an international agreement has been in this area, given the strong national opposition among many leading waste generators. The United States, for example, abandoned ocean dumping nearly a quarter-century before the international accord, and other countries were clearly moving away from this method prior to 1993. Is, for example, the work of groups like Greenpeace on the international stage much easier—and its role inflated—when it builds on a movement already underway in many influential nations?

Finally, the book does not consider policy options for radioactive waste or how the coalition has evolved in the past decade in which on-site storage has emerged as the *de facto* approach for waste management. Can transnational coalitions evolve further and form long-term strategies or are they confined to blocking more visible and controversial disposal methods?

These types of questions receive relatively little attention but need to be explored by Ringius and others to fully establish the role of transnational entrepreneurial coalitions in the international environmental arena. Nonetheless, this book offers an unusually insightful glimpse into one instance of regime change and thereby challenges scholars to be more attentive to forces that often go overlooked.

BARRY G. RABE
University of Michigan