

stood early on the nature of the rule by reason that academic bureaucrats have used to dominate the modern world from Washington to Brussels to Beijing. I suspect John Adams understood it as well—and wished to avoid it in the new country he helped to establish.

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OUR ALLY, THE STATE?

By Bruce Ramsey

The Trouble With Government

By Derek Bok

Harvard University Press, 493 pages, \$35

Why don't Americans like government? They want their Social Security checks, they want to protect the whooping cranes, and they support the minimum wage. They almost always reelect their senators and representatives. But when polled, the same Americans rank elected pols down among car salesmen and union bosses.

This bothers Derek Bok. In *The Trouble With Government*, the Harvard professor emeritus, famous as a defender of racial preferences, has come again to the defense of the administrative state. Americans, he says, "have come to depend on the State to meet so many of their needs." We aim for a level of security that "no society on earth has achieved without the active leadership of the State," yet have a "profound distrust of the federal establishment."

With such a suspicious frame of mind, Americans are unlikely to get the bold new social programs they seem to want. "Voters may be unwilling to accept additional taxes," Bok worries. Further, he says, all this suspicion might "eventually weaken the moral authority of the State," which would be even a worse thing, because the State "is the one administrative agency that can define, enunciate, and validate a set of common moral standards and obligations for all the people."

The core of this book is Bok's desire to make government work better so that we will quit bellyaching about it and accept more of it. He repeatedly com-

pares us with other industrial welfare states, which have been so much better in seeing that every citizen has a doctor and every worker is in a union. Americans would have these things, too, if we weren't so suspicious of government.

What is the matter with us? Why did we reject the Clinton health plan? Why don't we have more government television channels, or pay "subsidies to make serious public-affairs programming more attractive to commercial producers"? Americans have a tradition, unfortunately still extant, of "individualism, the reliance on competition and the distrust of authority."

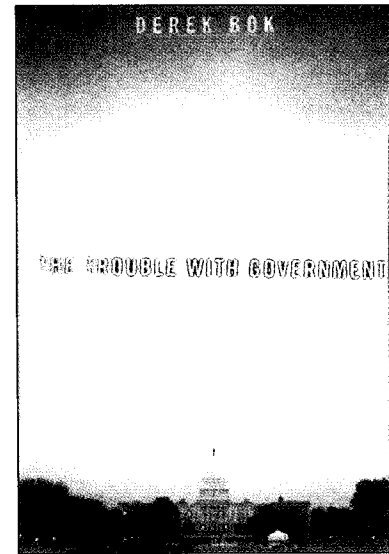
This tradition is embodied in our Constitution, which sets up a structure for a limited government. And this is not an efficient structure for the administrative state. Yet it is unlikely this structure will change. As Bok writes sarcastically, "To alter the Constitutional framework is to tamper with the sacred text." Not sacred to Derek Bok, apparently. In this book, the very word "sacred" has invisible quotation marks around it.

In another place, Bok writes, "Our expensive regulatory process can be viewed as a monument to the pervasive distrust of official action and the desire to protect citizens in any possible way from the arbitrary use of power. Unfortunately, the costs of maintaining the monument are far greater than those of a more informal, cooperative system."

A "monument"—a word used, like "sacred," to mock what other people revere. Bok respects these American traditions like he might respect his great aunt's evangelism.

Bok notes that America tried once during the twentieth century to construct a "collaborative, corporatist" system, under Franklin Roosevelt. Here was government lathered on so thick that the federal power undertook to determine the correct procedure for extracting a chicken from a coop. The Supreme Court, however, declared it unconstitutional.

Ah, the Constitution. That document again. Bok would pretty clearly like to amend it heavily, but saying so would be too un-mainstream. And that is the central problem with this book. The most engaging questions, like what the purpose and structure of the State ought to be, are not discussed. All that's left to argue are partic-



ular details, like campaign finance reform, regulatory revisions, and how to exhort more Americans to vote.

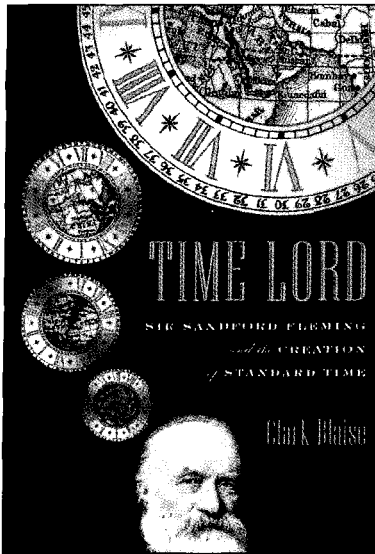
Bok favors more restrictions on how citizens may back political candidates. He allows, however, that "public subsidies, by themselves, would simply encourage more challengers to run for office." He ends up arguing for a ban on soft money and tighter rules on independent expenditures.

Bok favors regulatory reform, including cost-benefit analysis. He allows that the Superfund law is foolish legislation based on alarmist journalism. He supports the use of market forces in regulation, but notes that such systems still require government rules and officials to enforce them.

Bok thinks that too few poor people vote, and sees this as a big problem. If more poor people voted, they would get bigger welfare benefits, and maybe even "comprehensive social legislation." He is attracted to compulsory voting, but recognizes that Americans would never accept it.

He is also attracted to National Service. Bok finds the idea "all the more compelling now that the disappearance of the draft has removed one of the few opportunities to gather Americans from all walks of life in a common civic undertaking." But the unions wouldn't allow the national servers to do anything useful, and the libertarians would fight the compulsion part. The idea, he laments, is "premature."

He considers reforms of Congress. One idea he likes is voting for parties only, not candidates, so that no American could ever split his vote. Then the



government could really pass social legislation, and get things done. But Americans wouldn't go for that, either. He suggests instead that Congress reduce the size of committees and have more hearings in closed session.

And so it goes throughout the book. Bok's heart clearly leans left. If anything is sacred to him, it's government. He longs for a muscular, confident, controlling government that could "define, enunciate, and validate a set of common moral standards and obligations for all the people." He would have loved the 1930s. But to embrace state power with such enthusiasm today is not seemly. So he has written a faux-moderate book, in which he toys briefly with full-blast progressivism, backs away, and offers up the same ideas that emanate from the talking heads on television.

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SEIZING THE HOUR

By Philip Jenkins

Time Lord: Sir Sandford Fleming and the Creation of Standard Time

By Clark Blaise

Pantheon Books, 272 pages, \$24

When it is noon in Los Angeles, the time in New York City is 3 p.m., and it's eight in the evening in London. As we progress eastwards around the globe,

the time changes in neat hourly increments every thousand miles or so, until we reach the International Date Line which traverses the Pacific Ocean, where the day shifts. The fact that the world measures its time in such a well-structured way seems so obvious that few of us pause to think how matters could ever have been different. Global standard time is just *there*, like the sun and the moon.

Yet of course this organizational framework is far from natural, and in fact was only imposed by a "Prime Meridian Conference" in Washington, D.C. in 1884. Before that, cities and regions controlled their own time on a local, ad hoc basis. For any given community, the point of day at which the sun stood overhead was declared to be noon, and other hours were calculated accordingly. This state of affairs was fine for a world moving at the speed of horse and rider, but it became thoroughly inadequate following the advent of railroads and steamships.

Just imagine planning to catch a travel connection in Constantinople at, say, 6 p.m. on Tuesday when you had no idea how that city's time structure corresponded to those of neighboring lands. In 1880, the transportation hub of St. Louis had to observe no less than six official railroad times. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the world was experiencing a process of globalization quite as far-reaching and intoxicating as that of our own day. Then as now, problems arising from expanding worldwide communications demanded imaginative solutions.

In the case of standard time, the great innovator was Sir Sandford Fleming (1827-1915), a Scottish-born engineer who undertook surveying work for the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway. Inevitably he encountered the scheduling difficulties arising from different time zones employed across the vast expanse of Canada, and he recognized a crying need for standardization. Fleming became the founder and principal spokesman for the emerging standard time movement that triumphed with the 1884 conference. The result was the system we know today, with 24 time zones, each corresponding to 15 degrees of longitude.

As part of a larger Victorian pattern,

Fleming secured a triumph of human-designed order over the natural world. A great strength of Clark Blaise's well-researched and enjoyable biography is his awareness of the wider cultural implications in such acts, repeated over and over during the growth of capitalist modernity and the erosion of pre-modern traditions. As Blaise summarizes, "You can have speed, or you can have tradition, but you can't have both."

Fleming is anything but a household name, but the significance of his work was (dare I use the word?) immeasurable. "Natural time—the time of the gods, the sun, and the moon—starts in a savage, glorious myth and ends on an Irish railway platform in 1876, when Sandford Fleming missed his train," writes Blaise. To appreciate the extent of Fleming's accomplishment, it is helpful to recall that the plot of Jules Verne's 1873 novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* depends on the hero failing to notice that he has gained an entire day by traveling round the globe, thereby enabling him to win his bet. Fleming was dealing in matters that seemed extraordinarily complex and unmanageable in his day, but which became merely routine once he had devised his elegant solution.

Fleming was part of an age when people believed that science and technology could impose harmonious order on the natural world, promoting universal betterment in the process. Describing his vision in those terms indicates just how wide a gulf separates his world from ours. If a scheme to impose global standard time were proposed afresh today, the objections would be legion. Post-modern academics would bemoan the glorification of rigid linear notions of time, and resist the supplanting of subjective local realities. Feminists might complain that this was par excellence a *masculine* vision, derived from exaggerated scientism and objectivity. And Third World activists would object to a model so obviously founded on imperialist and business interests. The impudence of the hegemons in placing London at the temporal center of the world! Any global time scheme proposed today would certainly have to shift its standard meridian every

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