

THE GREEN MOVEMENT:  
A socio-historical exploration

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## 1. A problem, three approaches

The Green Movement is puzzling people today, and particularly when it takes the form of a green party, and most particularly in connection with the German party, the by far most important one, Die Grünen. They are said to be unpredictable and unable /unwilling to make any compromises with any other actors on the party political scene; consequently they are not really in politics, they are only political. For a party launched in 1981 to break through the 5% barrier (they made 5.6%) already in the elections March 1983 and then move on to 7, 8, 9% and so in subsequent elections, is already an achievement and leads to three obvious hypotheses about the future: they will continue their comet-like career; they will find their natural level as a party below 10%, but possibly still above 5%; they will dwindle down to zero again which is where they belong.

The following is an effort to explore the phenomenon, particularly directed at listeners and readers in Third world countries very used to conceiving of politics in terms of blue and red, market forces, protected by conservative parties and étatiste forces with planning and redistribution protected by socialist parties; both of them found in democratic and dictatorial versions. The greens are obviously different, neither blue nor red, neither dictatorial nor democratic in the parliamentarian sense of that word. In spite of participating in parliamentary elections, mass action, direct democracy, local autonomy, self-reliance and so on are obviously closer to their heart.

Hence, what do they stand for, where do they come from, who are they? Without in any sense claiming to have valid or any novel answers to these questions, they are certainly worth exploring: the greens have probably come here to stay, and to expand. Hence, three approaches: ideological, historical and sociological; not necessarily compatible, not necessarily contradictory, but well suited to shed some light on the phenomenon.

A SURVEY OF GREEN POLICIES

MAINSTREAM CHARACTERISTICS

GREEN POLICIES, MOVEMENTS

E  
C  
O  
N  
O  
M  
I  
C

B  
A  
S  
I  
S

1. Exploitation of internal proletariat
2. Exploitation of external sector
3. Exploitation of nature
4. Exploitation of self

cooperative enterprises, movements  
labor buyer/seller difference abolished, customers directly involved  
co-existence with the Third world;  
only equitable exchange relations  
liberation movements  
ecological balance Person-Nature;  
building diversity, symbiosis;  
complete or partial vegetarianism  
more labor- and creativity-intensive;  
decreasing productivity some fields;  
alternative technologies

M  
I  
L  
I  
T  
A  
R  
Y

B  
A  
S  
I  
S

1. Dependency on foreign trade
2. Dependency on formal sector, BCI-complex
3. Offensive defense policies, very destructive defense technology
4. Alignment with superpowers

self-reliance; self-sufficiency in food, health, energy and defense  
local self-reliance, decreasing urbanization, intermediate technology;  
defensive defense policies, with less destructive technology, also non-military, nonviolent defense  
non-alignment, even neutralism;  
decoupling from superpowers

S  
T  
R  
U  
C  
T  
U  
R  
A  
L

B  
A  
S  
I  
S

1. Bureaucracy, state [plan] strong and centralized
2. Corporation, capital [market] strong and centralized
3. Intelligentsia, research strong and centralized
4. MAMU factor; BCI peopled by middle-aged males with university education (and dominant race/ethnic group)

recentralization of local level, building federations of local units;  
building informal, green economy;  
- production for self-consumption  
- production for non-monet. exchange  
- production for local cycles  
high level non-formal education, building own forms of understanding;  
feminist movements, justice/equality and for new culture and structure;  
movements of the young and the old  
movements for racial/ethnic equality

1. Non-manual work, eliminating heavy, dirty, dangerous work
2. Material comfort, dampening fluctuations of nature
3. Privatism, withdrawal into family and peer groups
4. Security, the probability that this will last

keeping the gains when healthy, mixing manual and non-manual  
keeping the gains when healthy, living closer to nature  
communal life in bigger units, collective production/consumption  
keeping security when healthy, making life style less predictable

1. Alcohol, tranquilizers, drugs
2. Tobacco, sugar, salt, tea/coffee
3. Chemically treated food, panem natural fibers removed
4. Circenses, TV, sport, spectatorism

moderation, experiments with non-addictive, life-enhancing things  
moderation, enhancing the body's capacity for joy, eg through sex  
bio-organic cultivation, health food, balanced food, moderation  
generating own entertainment, moderate exercise, particularly as manual work, walking, bicycling

Bourgeois  
Way of  
Life

Chemical  
Circus  
Way of  
Life

## 2. The Green Movement: An ideological characterisation

The reader will find on the next page "A Survey of Green Policies", divided into twenty points, organised in packages with four points each. The mainstream characteristics in First world societies are then confronted with their counterpoints, green policies and movements. The list is self-explanatory, suffice it here only to add some remarks about how the list came into being.

The point of departure is a simple model of mainstream society with an economic basis, a military basis and a structural basis. The latter is particularly important for this is where the pillars of the Western social formation are found: the State with its bureaucracy and its plans, capital with its corporations and its markets, and the intelligentsia with its research, serving both of them. In addition to that there is a peculiar selection of people for these institutions: middle-aged males with university education from the dominant racial/ethnic group (MAMUs) being preponderant almost everywhere. It is this structure, then, and composed in that particular manner that organises the economic and military basis of society. And all of this is done, manifestly, in order to achieve what is here called the "Bourgeois Way of Life" with its four characteristics, and the somewhat empty, "Chemical Way of Life" with booze, with panem et circenses, in ways known to everybody in the first world. The BWL/CWL complex.

Let me now formulate two assumptions about the Green Movement:

(1) The Green Movement is an umbrella movement for a number of partial movements, each one of them attacking one or more elements on this list.

And,

(2) The Green Movement differs from many other social movements in denying that basic social problems can be solved attacking one single factor; a much more holistic approach is needed.

Thus, the Green Movement is a federation of constituent movements and aims at an alternative society roughly characterised by the right hand column in the survey of the policies. Many such lists can be made. This is one of them, not necessarily better or worse than most others; probably somewhat more comprehensive. To be a "green", one does not have to subscribe to all of these ideas; one probably has to agree with more than just one of them, however. There is a correlation in the ideological universe and not only because ideas happen to be held by the same people. There is some kind of internal consistency. For one's inner eye is conjured up the vision of a decentralised society, probably some kind of federation, with strongly autonomous units using the local bases in a self-reliant manner, trying not to become dependent on the outside, including for military purposes. Inside this social formation an Alternative Way of Life is supposed to come into being, more or less as described here.

There is no doubt that ideologically the Green Movement is in neither the liberal/conservative/capitalist nor the marxist/socialist traditions, but in the anarchist tradition, and more particularly in the non-violent part of that tradition. Two great names from the Third world in this century, Gandhi and Mao Zedong are now overshadowing the great French and Russian thinkers of the 19th century, St Simon and Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. There is much to draw upon. But this is not necessarily a philosophically deeply reflective movement; It is rather, as pointed out above, a more or less tightly knit federation of single issue movements, some of them with relatively low life expectancy, but then possibly to be revived within a more general green setting. Thus, I doubt that there is much to learn about the ideology of this movement from the study of the six names mentioned; I doubt that the members of these movements themselves have even been much inspired by those books. Rather, the Green Movement is a general reaction to the mal-functioning of the Western social formation. It is a reaction to the generally lamented "crisis" and purports to bring into society a number of initiatives that when realised on a large enough scale together would constitute a solution.

### 3. The Green Movement: A historical characterisation

However, this is a much too rational way of looking at a phenomenon like the Green Movement. It is a part of a socio-historical dialectic, like any other social movement, and should be understood in the light of that dialectic. About the basic dialectic of the Western social formation, there are many opinions, my perspective is one, and runs about as follows.

Let us take as point of departure the classical European social formation, often referred to as "feudal", which is acceptable if that word is understood to outlive the middle ages. In that formation the clergy was on top, then came the aristocracy, then the merchants (and some artisans), then the peasants (and some workers) and at the bottom were the totally marginalised people, gipsies, jews and arabs, women.

Let us now see each of these five groups as the carrier of successive social transformations. First, the revolt of the aristocracy against the clergy, secularising the social order, separating State and Church. Second, the revolt of the merchants against the top two, claiming a place in society that could be legitimised neither as God's servants, nor by noble birth, invoking such instruments as human rights to promote social and geographical mobility. Third, the revolt of the fourth layer, workers of all kinds, basically men, in order to have a better share in the social product they themselves were largely responsible for bringing into being, and in order to benefit from the social mobility channels opened by the bourgeoisie. Socialist parties, social democrats, trade unions - and communists.

And then, the fourth transformation spear-headed by the bottom layer, by what today would be the foreign workers, by the women, by everybody marginalised by the social order set up by the other four (with the clergy transformed into intellectuals, the aristocrats into bureaucrats and the

commercial people, the capitalists remaining capitalists so that the three together constitute the BCI complex, populated by MAMU's, many of them taking from the working classes.) Logically, socio-logically, socio-historically there is not the slightest reason why they should not also claim their right to come into the society created by the other four, to open that society for foreign workers and women alike, thus constituting a pressure on the western social formation.

However, there is no social movement that only wants to fill positions in the existing structure, They also want to change that structure. If this is not the case, the movement is no longer social, it is just a number of parallel individual movements to promote their own social career; on an individual basis, into slots already prepared in the structure. Social change is used to legitimise striving for individual career; individual careers may be used "inside the system" to promote social change - either approach may be more or less successful. The preceding social transformation by the working class probably changed the workers more than the social order they wanted to transform, but in so doing also changed that social order. Neither the fifth group nor the fourth group in this image of the classical western society were alone in what they were doing; they were always aided by enlightened/disgruntled individuals from the other groups. Nor did everybody in the group participate in the transformation, Social history is never that neat.

Let us now try to translate this into very concrete terms, the terms of party politics. Let us assume that the first two groups, the clergy and the aristocracy with their institutions, Church and University, Land, Military and Law constitute the backbone of conservative society, and also the basic carriers of conservative parties. Of course they have many more followers than their own numbers should indicate, among other reasons because they command institutions that reach deep down in society, to its very end, the outcasts (particularly true

for Church and Military), serving as vacuum cleaners to scoop up even the social debris at the very bottom, putting them at the disposal of the top, at least as voters.

Given that image, it is clear that the conservative parties have received three basic challenges, corresponding to transformations N° 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

The first challenge came from the merchants/burghers, strongly individualistic, human rights oriented and in favour of free circulation of production factors, goods and services, of labour skilled and unskilled, capital and nature. In other words: the liberal parties.

The second challenge came from the third transformation: the mass movements of the working classes, backed up by their strong institution, Trade Unions, in other words the socialist/workers parties.

And then the third challenge corresponding to the fourth transformation: the green wave, ultimately necessarily organised as one or more political parties, the green parties.

The second basic hypothesis in this connection would be that the conservative parties tend to remain although they transform their content: their task is always and invariably to resist the social transformation demanded by those challenging the social order. The first challenge, the liberals, came, broke through the conservative barrier and formed its own governments, declined and is now disappearing from the scene. On the way down it made electoral alliances in many countries with the next party on the way up, the working class parties. They were then able to liberate themselves from the liberals, broke through the conservative barrier (of which the liberals may now have become a part) made their own governments, started declining and are now in all likelihood on their way out. One basic reason



for that, incidentally, is that the trade unions are on their way out as major social forces, simply because they do not muster adequate numbers of sufficiently exploited workers who think collective action with major strikes will bring more benefit than the skilful use of individual career opportunities.

Working class parties on their way down would then be coalition material for green wave parties on their way up in spite of everything that is now so often being said about their inability as political partners. We shall enter a period of red-green alliances and by then see the green parties break through the conservative barrier with the help of such alliances (later on perhaps alone), until they reach their climax, start declining and ultimately disappear. In other words, the idea is not that the green party is the end of the political history of the western social formation, nor that that social formation is doomed in advance to a lasting green future.

Everything is an episode, including the green wave. What is claimed, however, is that the phenomenon will increase in importance, the working class parties decrease, but it is in the interest of both of them to form alliances so that for some period they may break through the basic conservative pattern and constitute something new. That prediction, like any prediction, may be right or wrong - I would tend to believe in it because it seems to fit the logic of western social history relatively well.

However, there is another danger with this kind of perspective. The focus is on the green party rather than the green movement, simply because the green party is more in the mass media, in the public eye. Yet, the green party can only make politics (as opposed to politicking) when supported by a green movement.

#### 4. The Green Movement: A sociological characterisation

Who, then, will tend to join the Green Movement?

Above two categories have been mentioned: foreign workers, and the whole "ethnic" complex within any country, marginalised because of their ethnicity, and women - certainly not all members of these groups, but sufficient numbers to make the movement grow. But many of them would tend to vote with the parties that represent preceding social transformations, having no wish at all for new social transformations only for stability and security and possibly some advancement within the status quo.

However, there are many other groups that might be interested in the Green Movement according to the type of analysis made above. They can be seen by looking at the list of green policies presented above, especially if one makes use of two simple criteria: is the subjective motivation to feel concerned, strong enough? And is the subjective sense of capability strong enough to make the person feel that it matters if he or she joins? Or, would an individual solution be preferable?

Thus, take the issue of cooperative enterprises. To be interested in this, today a major aspect of the Green Movement, one definitely has to be interested in some kind of production, but basically in doing things together, closeness, overcoming feelings of isolation, alienation. And this immediately concerns a considerable number of the citizens of the contemporary Western social formation. Work as therapy becomes a major slogan, work together as group therapy even better.

When we move on to the point about the Third world, the members of the Green Movement would be sympathisers with those in the Third world suffering the consequences of "modernisation" and those in the liberation movements suffering the consequences of continued or renewed repression. But they would be relatively few and relatively ideological; the people really hit are

found outside any First world society.

This is not the case with the ecological sub-movement of the Green Movement, however - the one that has given rise to the name of their movement, "Green". At this particular point in the Green Movement the motivation will only increase with the growing perception of impending disaster, right now particularly in connection with the dying out of forests in Central Europe (starting in Northern Europe, as well). At the same time, there is increasing frustration in people feeling that there is very little they can do individually; the matter is in the hands of big corporations and big bureaucracies. Individuals may cut down on electric consumption and save water in their private households. They may also change their dietary habits, but they feel helpless facing such macro-phenomena, and that helplessness will increasingly be translated into demonstrations and mass movements and be the kind of material of which political party formations can be made.

New work styles, however, is more a question of capability than motivation. Many people seek more artisanal modes of production simply because they are capable of doing so; others may sense a weak motivation but feel totally incapable. The search for alternative technologies will continue but it may also be that the momentum of the 1970's is no longer there, or at least not so forcefully. There may be a new cycle, however.

But then, on the other hand, there are the points associated with another major component in the Green Movement: the peace movement. This is a broad movement not only concerned with such military matters as decreasing dependence on offensive weaponry, particularly nuclear arms; and trans-armament in the direction of social defence, or defensive defence in general (including conventional military defence and paramilitary defence). The peace movement is also concerned with such issues as non-alignment/neutrality, various forms of decoupling from super-powers, at least in the sense of denying them bases,

particularly with nuclear "tasks", and of withdrawing from their command structure in times of war. Moreover, the peace movement is concerned with both local and national self-reliance, with making countries stronger so that they can resist economic blackmail, and also by making local communities stronger, much more capable of standing up for themselves, being less dependent on the centre of the country. In short, the peace movement does not only stand for international transformations with trans-armament and transformation of the alliance system; the peace movement also stands for changes at the national level to make national and local societies stronger. The peace movement will probably continue growing, in depth and quality if not in mass demonstrations and quantity - the latter was more typical of the anti-missile movement which no doubt has played a considerable role for consciousness formation, political mobilisation and even confrontation. Neither the blue, nor the red, nor the pink, seem to be capable of solving these problems, hence the motivation will still be there, although frustration may also have a paralysing impact.

When it comes to the structural changes envisaged by the Green Movement, such as decentralisation with more power to the local level and transformations from centralised to more (con)federate structures; the building up of informal, green economies (more locally based, less monetary, more for the quality of life and less for money); decentralisation of knowledge production to very many and much smaller universities, I think the motivation will continue to be there, also the capability, particularly in the form of Green economy and non-formal Green education. When it comes to changes in the heavier structures, the State formation itself, it goes without saying that this can only be done by using central political machinery, possibly through political parties. Individual capability is almost nil, and I am not so sure that the motivation is as strong as it was in the 1970s. But a major component of the Green Movement in this connection, the third major part of the movement, the feminist movement, has had considerable success. It is obviously split into two: the

"fifty-percenters" wanting social positions to be gender blind, meaning 50% women in positions so far dominated by men and 50% men in positions so far dominated by women (including domestic life); and on the other hand those who think and act in terms of a specific feminist culture that could serve as a model for social relations at large. I think it is useful to conceive of the feminist movement in terms of both - and, and not either/or when it comes to this split, and that both types of momentum are terribly important in the ongoing social transformation. Of activist women there are many: Many men will join them and many women will not, but it is hard to believe that motivation and capability will not increase rather than decrease in the years to come. It may also be that the movement for the older generation, the troisième cycle, retired people, will be of significance as well as the lasting significance of racial/ethnic equality in heterogeneous countries and that means, increasingly, all countries today. In principle, the Green Movement will be an umbrella for all of them, depending on the extent to which it is capable of articulating their demands in a politically relevant direction.

Finally, there are the two "ways of life" packages, more relevant individually. It may be that the big wave of the 1970's with communes, kitchen gardens, health food, etc. has flattened out to some extent, in some quarters even decreased. But on the other hand it may also be that the days of fundamentalism are over, but the movement is penetrating all sections of society (with very expensive health food for those who only feel well when they spend a lot of money), in smaller packages, less densely packed, more pragmatic. The transformation of individual ways of life may also have an impact on the political outlook although it is not at all certain that this will lead to votes for Green parties; it could also lead to the greening of red, pink and blue parties. Like the feminist movement, these may be signs of successful social transformations, changing the essence of what it means to be a First world inhabitant during the last decade of the twentieth century.

I think the net conclusion of what has been said above

is that the Green parties will continue to grow. The reason is simple : there are so many issues generated by the present Western social formation, there is so much frustration around, there is so little capability in the blue, red and pink parties to bear upon these issues in a forceful manner, many people are hit by the problems, the motivation is high, and individual level solutions are insufficient. Obviously, to feel motivated by a social evil not directly hitting oneself, both social knowledge and social compassion are indispensable, together with the sense of individual frustration, "there is nothing I and my family can do for ourselves to solve the problem".

These two conditions should point in the direction of people with a certain level of education which would mean middle class and upper class people; but at the same time away from upper class people who because of their resources usually will be able to find a solution for themselves and their family - like moving out of polluted cities to non-polluted countryside, combining work and leisure, affording the transportation/communication expenses involved. At the same time, any transformation movement would appeal more to the young and the middle aged, than to the old: the latter might say, why bother, we shall not be around very long anyhow. Finally, the movement will appeal more to women than to men, both because women are worst hit by the system, because the feminist movement is an important component of the total Green Movement, and because women are, presumably, more capable of holistic thinking. So much for the sociological portrait.

But the latter is almost a condition for Green Movement behaviour in general and party political behaviour in particular. Look again at the issue catalogue: there is no simple, all-encompassing formula like "the interests of the entrepreneurs/employers" or "the interests of the workers/employees". If society is a layer cake, these issues do not mobilise one layer against the other. Rather, the metaphor would be a layer cake with some poisoned almonds, raisins and what not distributed all over, visible only to those who have a vision of the cake as a whole. Unfortunately, they have to be removed, something

has to be done about it, otherwise the whole cake will be poisoned, those on the top, those in the middle and those at the bottom. The happy message is that the poisoned items do not all have to be removed at the same time. Removal of one of them already makes sense for that environment. The sad message is that there is no method by which one can remove all at the same time, nor does removal of one guarantee that all the others will disappear. Well-coordinated, synchronous work is recommended, as mentioned above.

It may be objected that now we have come a long way from the theory of the fifth layer in the preceding section. But that is a theory of social dynamism, of major social forces that may carry on their shoulders much of the movement. It is like the preceding movement of the working class. There were the obvious interests of the working class but the socialist wave contained considerably more than that, there was also "socialist humanism", an international peace movement, and so on. As a matter of fact, many of the tasks today taken on by the Green Movement can be seen as parts of the socialist programme. the preceding wave of social energy left unsolved.

And that gives us an important additional theory to the Green Movement in general and the party in particular as a meeting ground of frustrated people from the blue parties (conservatives, nationalists, even with a nazi past) and from the red parties (the 1968 generation) finding nowhere else to go. Strange bedfellows these: the green party seems to have some transformative capacity, making green people out of the most diverse raw material. How lasting these transformations are and how lasting the co-habitation will prove to be is another matter.

5. Conclusion: The Green Movement has come to stay

I think it is very difficult to arrive at any other conclusion. Like any political movement, it will have ups and downs, and although it is a child of the western social formation, the geographical variation will be considerable.

Take the case of the Federal Republic of Germany. Why is the movement so strong there? The problems of one half of humanity, the women are not particularly worse in that country than in other western countries. The peace problems are more acute, the ecological problems about the same with the exception of the dying forests. The reason is probably historical: the Green Movement is also a rupture with the nazi past, a past that encompassed almost all of German society, leaving the communists relatively alone as a nucleus of solid resistance. But anti-nazism cannot be built on communism in western Europe in general and Western Germany in particular. Marxism was tried, from the mid-60s to the mid-70s, the student revolt with terrorism (RAF) as an important form of expression. The Green Movement with its focus on non-violence is also a rejection of terrorism and single factor, Marxist determinism.

Take France as another example. The Green Movement is inconspicuous, the ecological party made only 0.5% in the cantonal elections Spring 1985. Why is that?

One reason, very conspicuous in the eyes of a foreign observer like the present author, would be the sharp distinction in France between classe politique with not only decision monopoly but also, practically speaking knowledge monopoly, and for that reason, interest monopoly. The population at large is simply uninterested in a wide range of political phenomena, and uninformed. It is not like Western Germany (and DDR also, for that matter) where one can travel to almost any little town or village and find people deeply concerned, well-read, and articulate about the



points on the Green agenda. In France disinterest is the rule.

But this, of course, is also begging the question: why is that so? Maybe one reason is to be found in extremely strong French individualism. The French love "freedom", meaning the right of the individual with his/her nuclear family to do more or less what they want to do, a right which is also expressed in the somewhat particular way of driving and parking cars. In the Green Movement there are strong collectivist elements, togetherness beyond the confines of the nuclear family and very much concern for the society as a whole, for collective solutions. French individualism would point in the direction of interest parties rather than interested (or for that matter interesting) parties. The layer cake model with one layer against the other, perhaps agreeing on cake expansion to counteract the poisoned cake model!

Still, another difference relative to Germany would be the shared feeling, right or wrong, that there is no past to reject, no sins to atone for. The old parties may not be perfect but they can do the job. They have been with us for a long time, if the Left doesn't make it, then the solution will by definition have to be with the Right and vice versa. This may be totally irrational reasoning. Economic problems may depend on changes in the world system and be totally beyond reach of Left or Right; the many problems of contemporary French society may also be outside the paradigms for political action shared by left and right. In either case, the Green formulas may be relevant but if they are not seen as such in a French setting then that does not help much.

Still another reason may be the strong reaction against the undeniable puritan elements in the Green Movement. The French are very tied to their cuisine, the cuisine is meatist rather than vegetarian, as such it is of course excellent, one of the two best in the world (the other being Chinese). To challenge meatism is to challenge French cuisine. Not to go in for the bourgeois style of life including some elements of elegance in the clothing is unfrench activity and can probably only be

legitimised if one is aesthetically elegant in some other field, for instance by being an artist. The Germans have no cuisine to defend, hence there is no problem of that kind and although the ordinary German looks very bourgeois, there is no haute couture to defend either. National pride is not at stake, only bourgeois feelings.

Finally, Germany is a neighbour, watched relatively closely by French politicians and the inroads made by the Green movements in German politics must have given them a shock: this must not happen here. The calumnies coming out of the French press against the peace movement and the ecological movement are telling signs of irrational fear, not the invitation to reasoned debate that should characterise democratic society. On the other hand, the French feminist movement is strong and relatively successful although they have a very long way to go with the remnants of feudalism.- But then, la femme française is also a part of the national pride. She is not unfrench activity, she is French. And yet France will probably sooner or later have to follow suit with the other countries also in this regard.

The countries of Southern Europe, however, will not follow suit. They are still in the throes of the third social transformation, even the second, even the first for that matter (Spain, Italy). On the other hand, in the countries of Northern Europe one may even talk of a general greening of all political parties - with conservative parties picking up ecological and feminist issues, but (certainly) not peace issues.

So, the picture is mixed, as it should be. But there are green points all over that picture. Anyone wanting to understand the First world today would do better not pretending that they are not there.