

Green Parties, Green Future

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From Local Groups to
the International Stage

Per Gahrton

Foreword by Caroline Lucas



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INTRODUCTION: THE GREENS – TOWARDS HEGEMONY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

The idea that humanity has recently entered a new epoch, the Anthropocene, having lived through the Holocene era for some 12,000 years, seems to be gathering increasing scientific support. A pivotal step in this direction was taken in January 2015 when a group of scientists defined the starting date of Anthropocene as the summer of 1945, when the use of the atomic bomb illustrated a new and highly dangerous capability of humans to change, and destroy, the basic prerequisites for life on Earth.¹ Even if humans have affected the environment since the beginning of the Holocene, and the first warnings were made already by classical Chinese and Greek philosophers several thousand years ago, the switch from the Holocene to the Anthropocene constitutes such a fundamental change that the need for completely new ideas about the effects of human activity appears to be more urgent than ever.

The Green political movement claims to be the carrier of these new ideas, of Green thinking or ecologism. It is hardly a coincidence that only a few years after the start of the Anthropocene, the first voices were raised questioning all earlier political ideologies, such as conservatism, liberalism and socialism, and that from the 1970s onwards many groups, organisations and political parties were established around demands for alternatives to the dominant models of thinking. As of January 2015 there were almost exactly 100 political parties (representing around 90 countries) affiliated to the Global Greens structure, through the four regional Green Federations: for Africa, the Americas, the Asia-Pacific Region and Europe. In addition there are dozens of other Green parties with the ambition to qualify for membership in the Global Greens structure. There are also parties that claim to be Green but have been denied affiliation to the Global Greens structure because they are considered either politically apart or artificial organisations set up by ruling elites for use against genuine Green efforts. Some of these parties are allowed to send representatives as informal observers at some Global Green meetings, which may encourage them to convert to genuine Green parties.

It is obvious that the Green label and a Green political identity are popular and considered assets in most parts of the world. There are Green parties in about 80% of the states of Europe, about 50% of the states of Africa and the

Americas, and about 20% of the states of the Asia-Pacific region. The trend is upwards, despite sometimes draconian countermeasures: if the power elite doesn't try to pre-empt a genuine Green party by creating a fake one, controlled by the ruling authorities, then new genuine Green parties in some countries are required to pay exorbitant deposits, prove the existence of an almost unreachable number of active members or, if there is nothing else to stop them, are hindered by hurdles in the election system. These types of obstacles, which have hit Greens hard even in countries which otherwise are considered good democracies (for example in Japan by deposits, in the UK, USA and other countries by the first-past-the-post election system), are sometimes defended as measures to guarantee political stability and avoid a devastating fractionalisation of the party system. But the most significant effect of all these factors is that they constitute a barrier against renewal in a time when a number of global crises illustrate that everywhere, even in the best of democracies, there is an urgent need for political renewal to cope with problems which the old parties and established ruling elites have so miserably failed to handle in adequate ways.

In an introduction to a book about the first 20 years of the European Greens, which I co-edited with Arnold Cassola in 2003, I had to admit that while I was sure that the Greens 'have a bright future,' 'quite a few Greens from the first generation have difficulties recognising the Greens they fell in love with some 20 years ago.'² This is probably even more true to-day, some 50 years after the establishment of the first Green parties, in the UK and New Zealand. The major changes are both vertical – Green parties are entering parliaments and governments and taking part directly in the ruling of countries, regions and local assemblies – and horizontal – the number of Green parties is growing and spreading all over the world.

Some of the Green parties I have visited have been groups of enthusiasts without parliamentary representation, like in Peru, Egypt, Albania and Azerbaijan. Others have been large and growing mass-parties with tens of thousands of members, like in Germany, the United Kingdom, Brazil and my own Sweden. Some have consisted mostly of amateurs, others have already become professionals. But as I hope will be made clear in this book, most of the amateurs have the ambition to become more professional in order to be able to push Green issues more efficiently, while most of the professionals are aware that if they were to discard all vestiges of amateurism and grassroots democracy they would be cutting away the branch they are sitting on. And, most importantly, as I believe is proven in this book, most Greens, whether amateurs or professionals, share a very large number of values, principles, basic convictions and concrete proposals, to an extent that is unlikely to be found in any other 'political family' today. The many party programmes and platforms I studied for Chapter 4 are all nationally adapted variations upon one basic theme: We are one humanity, we are destroying the conditions for life on Earth,

we must cooperate globally in order to stop the destruction of our common Gaia, and we must share the enormous richness of our Earth equitably to ensure that every living creature gets its fair share of the environmental space available.³

Chapter 1 gives an account of the background for and the process of the Green awakening in the 1960s and 1970s. Chapter 2 offers a presentation of and a discussion around Green philosophy. Chapter 3 gives a general overview of the emergence of Green parties. Chapter 4 presents and discusses several concrete Green proposals and policies, based upon an extensive analysis of Green programmes and platforms. In Chapter 5, the history of Green parties in government is related and analysed, based upon the relevant political science literature as well as interviews with former and present Green ministers. In Chapter 6 my vision of a Green future is outlined. In the Appendix some 100 Green parties from across the world are introduced, described and analysed.

Green ideas require testing and development. New and fledgling Green parties need support. This is already happening but could be developed much further. The Global Greens structure needs strengthening. In a world where a great deal of the real power has moved to global economic players, often operating outside democratic political systems, Greens must strive to secure positions of power in all democratically based institutions, from local communities to the United Nations.

1

THE GREEN AWAKENING

The 1960s was a turbulent decade. After a period of relative calm following the end of the Second World War everything began to change. Colonies fought for and achieved independence. The USA's aggressive attempts to contain communism with the mass bombing of Vietnam, isolation of Cuba, military interventions against progressive regimes and support for the fascist junta in Chile, mobilised enormous protests all over the world; the apartheid regimes of Southern Africa also triggered worldwide dismay and protest. At the same time socialism didn't have a much better reputation following the Soviet interventions in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Afghanistan in 1979. A 'new' left arose, still anti-imperialist, but without blinkers in relation to communist one-party dictatorships. Women's liberation advanced. Oppressed people everywhere rose to demand equal rights. Even in the assumed-to-be well-organised Western European welfare societies, discontent emerged and developed into political movements. The new generation demanded personal liberation from old traditions and superstitions. In Europe a 'sexual liberation' changed lifestyles and partly transformed into the student revolts of 1968. In some places, especially in France, links were made between student demands for more individual freedom and workers' and trade unionists' demands for improved working conditions, including 'industrial democracy'. A few years into the 1970s, however, some basic flaws of the 1968 movement could be observed: it was deeply split and had failed to organise into a powerful political organisation with leverage in the decision-making political system; despite its feminist rhetoric, it also remained predominantly male in its structures. Above all, it was driven by a materialist (often Marxist) outlook and was unable to understand and fight against the causes of the destruction of the environment and the quality of life.

Already in the 1970s many of the activists of the 1968 and similar protest movements became disillusioned with political slogans and other types of primarily verbal action. One alternative option was to define the enemy – be it the state, big business, the military-industrial complex, or just all those who held power – as deadly foes whom it would not be possible to affect or defeat by normal non-violent methods. Those who chose this option took up arms

in what they considered a legitimate war of liberation. ‘If it’s right in Vietnam and Palestine, why not in Frankfurt, Paris and Stockholm?’ One of the most well-known examples was the German Red Army Faction (or Baader-Meinhof Gang), but there were similar groups in other democracies: Action Direct in France, the Communist Combatant Cells in Belgium, the Red Brigades in Italy. Spain, Portugal and Greece, with their history of recent fascist dictatorship, also saw the emergence of violent groups. Even Northern Europe, with a reputation for stability, saw an eruption of terrorist violence. The Danish ‘Blekinge Street Gang’ (*Blekingegadebanden*) robbed banks in the 1970s and ’80s, sometimes with deadly results, giving as a motive their wish to support the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation.¹

It is symbolic that the most well-known figure of the 1968 revolt, Daniel Cohn-Bendit – who later turned Green and was a member of the European Parliament from 1994 to 2014 – in a book commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the ’68 revolt, already in the title urges readers to *Forget 68* (the book is in French, despite the English title).² When telling the story of the Greens, however, to forget ’68 completely would be going too far. Undoubtedly some inspiration was taken from this upheaval by the Green pioneers in the 1970s, not least from the fact that quite a few of the activists who had been



Figure 1 A Green congress in Catalonia in 1985. One poster (far right) is a reminder of Green roots among peaceniks, feminists and other alternative movements. Another (far left), with text in six European languages, illustrates the limited expansion of Green parties in 1985 compared to 30 years later. At the microphone, Paul Staes, MEP of the Flemish Greens, Agalev. Photo: the author.

involved in the revolt switched to Green groups and parties. But perhaps it could be said that the main impact of '68 on the Green awakening came from its failure. The fledgling Greens in the 1970s had to realise that even if tough opposition to the existing political system was necessary, it was not enough; the Greens also had to propose alternatives and set the rules of the game, that is, participate in making political decisions on all levels.

EARLY WHISTLE-BLOWERS

One early whistle-blower was the Chinese thinker Meng Zi (Mencius), who lived 372–289 BC. He observed environmental destruction on a mountain, wrote about the causes of deforestation, and gave advice on the planting of new trees. Most of the early alarm-bells, however, come from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some lists of forerunners of Green thinking mention the Swedish biologist Carl von Linné (1707–1778) because he stated that animals have a soul. The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) has also been interpreted as a Green pioneer for his belief that human beings are basically good: the evil of the world isn't the result of wickedness inherent in humans, but rather of their distance from a natural condition. Others mention Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832), because of the basic conflict in his major dramatic work, *Faust*, around civilisation and the meaning of life. The American Henry Thoreau (1817–1862), in his book *Walden, A Reflection Upon Simple Living in Natural Surroundings*, appears as a model for the 'green wave' people, who choose to withdraw into a more or less 'primitive' rural lifestyle.³ Another example is the speech given in 1854 by the Native Indian Chief Seattle to a gathering of white settlers, demanding respect for the rights of indigenous people and their ecological way of living. Aldo Leopold (1887–1948) took a similar line in his posthumous bestseller *A Sand Country Almanac*, which has its place in Green history for its pioneering elaboration of an ecocentric and holistic ethic regarding Nature.⁴ The Ukrainian biochemist Vladimir Vernadsky (1863–1945) is often mentioned as a founding father by ecologists in the former Soviet Union, because of his book *The Biosphere* and his theory of the noosphere (human cognition) as the third stage of the Earth's development, after the geosphere (inanimate matter) and the biosphere (life).⁵ Just as the emergence of life has transformed the geosphere, the noosphere will, according to Vernadsky, transform the biosphere – which, it could be argued, is exactly what is going on at the beginning of the twenty-first century, with the shift from Holocene to Anthropocene.

FUTURE SHOCK AND GLOBAL CHALLENGE

In the period of the Green awakening a number of futurologists made dramatic predictions about a future that would be fundamentally different from the contemporary industrialised world. Even if not explicitly ecological, some of these forecasts influenced the Green awakening, two of which deserve mentioning.

The first is *Future Shock*, by the American futurologist Alvin Toffler, who claimed that humanity was in for ‘too much change in too short a period of time’, mainly because of the technological development. Industrialisation would become ‘super-industrialisation’ leading to an ‘information overload.’⁶ There is no doubt that technology has transformed the structure of production and the labour market profoundly, with far-reaching effects. In January 2015 it was reported that 400,000 jobs have disappeared from the Swedish industrial sector since 1980. Relocalisation away from the old high-cost industrial countries to new low-cost countries is not the only reason for this trend. Another is the dramatic increase in robotisation which makes human labour redundant. From a Green point of view this provides a strong argument for the shortening of working hours.

The second influential study is *Le défi mondiale* (The Global Challenge) by the French liberal journalist Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber (1924–2006), founder of *L'Express*.⁷ One of his predictions was that computerisation would be more revolutionary for the poor parts of the world than for the rich, while new technology would create direct information links between poor peasants in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the rest of the world. This vision seemed far-fetched in 1980; in 2015 it is a reality. The fact that vast numbers of people now have an internet-linked, multi-information device in their pocket is not enough to ensure a fair globalisation from below, but it has changed the situation in a way that Greens must react to.

GREEN THINKING: ENVIRONMENTALISM OR ECOLOGISM?

In the foreword to the second edition of his seminal work, *Green Political Thought* Andrew Dobson wrote: ‘In 1989 I knew of no textbook of this sort that included a chapter on ecological political thought, but now there are several.’⁸ Still, he dates the birth of ‘ecologism’ to more than a decade earlier: ‘The *Limits to Growth* report of 1972 is hard to beat as a symbol for the birth of ecologism in its fully contemporary guise.’ That might be true, in hindsight. But Dobson is right in claiming that the real beginning of the use of ecologism as a label for the thinking of Green parties occurred around 1990. Acceptance of ‘ecologism’

as the acknowledged term for the ideology of Green parties is, however, not all-encompassing. The term is not to be found on the Encyclopaedia Britannica website, for example, where *environmentalism* is exhaustively defined as:

a political and ethical movement that seeks to improve and protect the quality of the natural environment through changes to environmentally harmful human activities; through the adoption of forms of political, economic, and social organisation that are thought to be necessary for, or at least conducive to, the benign treatment of the environment by humans; and through a reassessment of humanity's relationship with nature.

Likewise, when searching for *ecologism* on the English Wikipedia site, one is redirected to *environmentalism*, which is here defined as:

a broad philosophy, ideology and social movement regarding concerns for environmental protection and improvement of the health of the environment, particularly as the measure for this health seeks to incorporate the concerns of non-human elements.

Another Green encyclopaedia in which ecologism does not appear is John Button's *A Dictionary of Green Ideas* – neither among the 1,500 entries, nor in a three-page list of words starting with 'eco-'.⁹ Instead Button seems to use environmentalism to refer to what others call ecologism.⁹ The broad and detailed definitions of environmentalism given by the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Button's Green dictionary, and the English Wikipedia give the impression that these sources have chosen to use environmentalism in place of ecologism – but only in English. The equivalent of ecologism is treated under that label on Wikipedia in several other languages: German: Ökologismus; Swedish: Ekologism; Danish: Økologisme; French: Écologisme; Dutch: Ecologisme. The reason why neither the Britannica, nor Button's dictionary, nor the English Wikipedia carry special articles on ecologism is difficult to understand, especially as most of the theoretical writing on ecologism as a political ideology has been done by authors writing in English. An example is Andrew Dobson, who underlines that it is very important to distinguish between environmentalism and ecologism, each of which he defines as follows:

Ecologism holds that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life.

Environmentalism argues for a managerial approach to environmental problems, secure in the belief that they can be solved without fundamental changes in the present values or patterns of production and consumption.

It is obvious that ecologism and environmentalism are rather close to two other important concepts used to describe different trends in Green thinking: *deep ecology* (= ecologism) and *shallow ecology* (= environmentalism). To some extent a third pair of concepts could also be seen as representing a similar divide: *fundis* (fundamentalist = ecologist) and *realos* (realist = environmentalist), although theoretically this dichotomy is of another dimension, as it was originally coined among the German Greens to distinguish between different strategies rather than ideological/philosophical trends, the *fundis* giving priority to maintaining the Greens as a radical counter-force against the centres of power, the *realos* advocating a strategy for securing executive power, including participating in only partly Green coalition governments.

In Dobson's view environmentalism is no ideology at all, while ecologism is an ideology based upon the 'twin condition of a belief in the limits to growth and a questioning of strong anthropocentrism'. He claims that 'many of the people and organisations whom we would want to include in the green movement are environmentalist rather than political-ecologist'. He emphasises that while ecologism emerged only in the 1960 and '70s, environmentalism is much older. This distinction between environmentalism and ecologism seems well-founded and makes an important contribution to an understanding of the differences between Green parties (which have an ecologist agenda) and a lot of other groups, including in the business world, which advocate all kinds of 'ecological' production and 'green' consumption, wildlife conservation, and so forth, which are merely environmentalist.

While environmentalism, as implied by the word, deals with the environment, Green political programmes are comprehensive, proposing alternative positions on every type of issue that might be the subject of political decision-making. To pretend that such a political platform is 'environmentalist' would give the wrong impression of a narrow, 'single-issue' political programme. But are the Green party programmes 'ecologist'? Some Greens would still prefer just to talk about 'green thinking'.

GREEN THINKING AND OTHER IDEOLOGIES

From a green perspective the great classical political ideologies – conservatism, liberalism and socialism – seem to have forgotten all other parts of existence than currently living human beings. Somewhat simplified, the essence of these ideologies could be summarised as follows: conservatism strives to maintain

the supremacy of the upper class; liberalism wants to open up society for free competition between individuals irrespective of social class; socialism has the ambition of eradicating class differences and creating equality for everybody. The only relations taken into account are those between living people. There is no concern for other forms of life (animals, plants).

Some writers have claimed that conservatism is close to ecologism, because of its conservationist trend. But there is an important difference, as expressed by Dobson: 'Conservatism is interested in conserving and preserving the past, ecologism is interested in conserving and preserving for the future.' More important is that conservatism basically takes a position against the type of individual freedom that is important to Greens, such as free abortion and LGBT rights.¹⁰ Another element of disagreement is the fact that most 'conservative' parties today pursue a neoliberal agenda on economics.

Some of the democratic and libertarian trends of Greens have their origins in liberalism, but liberalism is also the home of materialism, profit-seeking, market freedom, the anti-social myth of the invisible hand, and a valuing of competition instead of cooperation as lifestyle and social system.

While conservatism and liberalism, as the ruling ideologies globally and in most countries, pursue no agenda of major change, socialism, at least in principle, does. Like ecologism, socialism has a vision of a very different society compared to the existing one. As everyone knows, most socialist parties today seem to have capitulated to neoliberalism and no longer have much of a transformation agenda. This is not only a result of their conventional adaptation to the restraints of electoral politics, but has a deeper cause. To socialism the basic evil is capitalism, while to ecologists the basic evil is 'productivism'. While the rationale of Green scepticism about 'productivism' concerns its damaging effects upon nature, the rationale for the socialist struggle against capitalism has been of another order, one element being of course the unequal distribution of goods, but another having been the belief that capitalism is ineffective on its own terms and that a socialist economy would not only distribute goods more evenly but would also be more efficient in producing them.

Celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of Nikita Khrushchev's coming to power in the USSR (and the fiftieth anniversary of his losing it), a Russian newspaper recalled the fantastic story of the belief, held not only in the USSR, that the Soviet Union would soon produce more than the USA. Khrushchev once told a party meeting: 'The Americans are worried, they ask: When? I have told them: You can write in your notebook – in 1970 we will catch up with you (ovations by the public) and in 1980 we will produce twice as much as the USA (ovations by the public).'¹¹ But as the article reveals, the enormous production results reported to the Kremlin were empty balloons, managed by corrupt regional communist politruks. The balloons exploded, Khrushchev was toppled, and by the time the socialist system of the USSR should have been producing