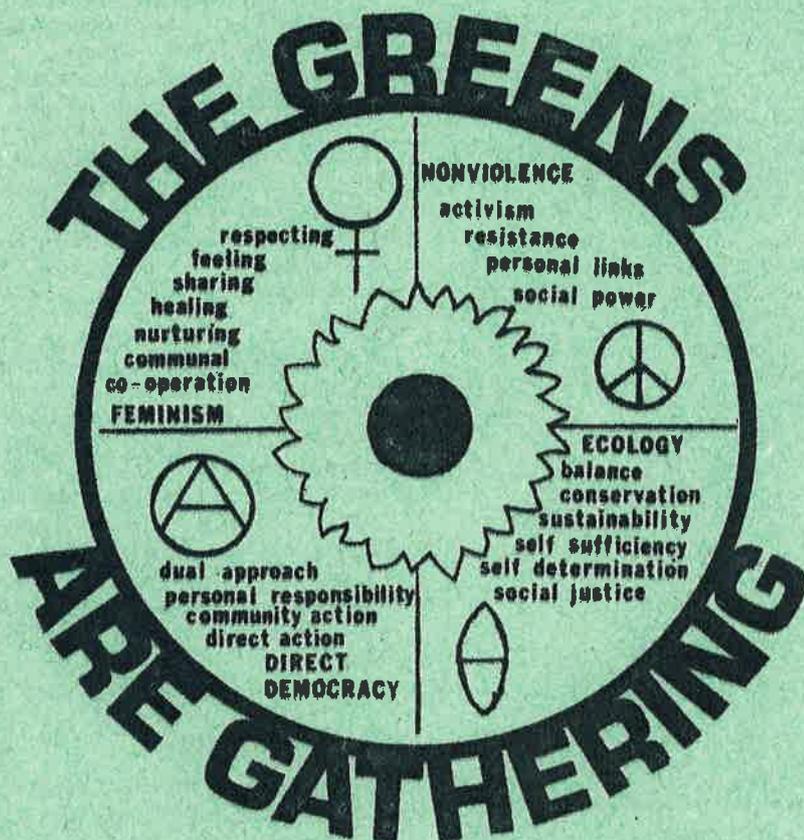


THERE ARE MORE ENVIRONMENT, ECOLOGY AND ANIMAL WELFARE GROUPS IN BRITAIN THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD. THERE IS A LONG TRADITION OF PEACE CAMPAIGNING. The Suffragettes inspired women throughout the world to tackle sexual inequalities. Devolutionary calls and regional autonomy groups have provided a constant back-cloth to the theatre of national politics. Why then have we signally failed to produce an effective radical challenge to conventional political parties and institutions? In this article, DAVID TAYLOR sees a convergence in the eighties of those social movements that form the bedrock of our radicalism.



FEMINISM, NONVIOLENCE, ECOLOGY and direct democracy, each distinct in origin and action, now co-operate to present what could be the most powerful and radical challenge to ever face the British state. Community action groups, the Women for Life on Earth, the Ecology Party and the anti-nuclear movement have all played their role in highlighting the links which could bind these four social movements into an irresistible political challenge. Each confronts domination, whether it be the masculine over the feminine, the violent over the gentle, the artificial over the organic, or the centralised over the local. They challenge the mutually reinforcing values of patriarchy, militarism, economic growth and centralism.

It is therefore imperative that these radical movements combine also: together they could form the most powerful political movement in this country.

Each has long searched for a true political home to replace their

present 'existence' on the margins of orthodox political currents such as socialism or liberalism. There is hope that they could now form the mainstream of a genuinely radical force. There is only one colour that can give full expression to this desire for a living, dynamic interaction between people and a caring relationship with our planet. Green is the colour of healing, of balance and of life - the properties that our divided and scared world so desperately needs.

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON POWER

The feminist perspective on power structures in society must be understood if the green movement is to have any real chance of pulling together. The Ecology Party's past failure to understand feminism has been one of the main reasons for its lack of support from those it considers its natural allies. National party politics are seen as an extension of the traditional 'male' approach based on competition, centralism

and hierarchy. The 'party' label has alienated many feminists who would otherwise be Eco's natural supporters: a feminist analysis links the domination of women by men with the domination of the earth by men and distorted masculine values. Potential violence is seen as the means by which men use their physical strength to retain power and indoctrinate women into a subservient role in most relationships.

In working for non-sexist modes of living and organising, feminists have played an important part in helping to break down hierarchies in the movement and develop collective campaigning structures and skills, many of which are now used throughout the nonviolence movement.

THE PERSONAL CONFRONTATION

Feminism is concerned with correcting the imbalance between feminine and masculine values. Feminine values are seen as those of healing, home making, sharing, and being emotional; with masculine values being those of aggression, competition, domination and rationalism.

Feminism began with the Suffragettes; that led to the struggle of women to assert themselves in a man's world through emphasising their masculine characteristics.

This struggle is now evolving into what is called 'third wave feminism' or eco-feminism. In this, everyone - woman or man - seeks to find their own personal balance between the masculine and feminine, the rational and the emotional, the competitive and the collective. Whereas women are oppressed by outside influences, men tend to suppress their feminine characteristics themselves. One result is the ease with which the military can divorce decisions from their actual human consequences. More than any of the other cornerstones feminism confronts on a personal level.

Men find this challenge particularly difficult; but without a new and dynamic relationship between the feminine and the masculine we shall not have the power, based on personal contact, to build the green movement at all.

CND AND NVDA

In the 60s the peace movement was seriously divided between direct action groups and those who followed the conventional approach of the CND leadership. This was one of the main reasons for its failure. Last November CND committed itself to nonviolent

direct action (NVDA) when necessary. This single decision reflects a shift in the thinking of CND activists that goes way beyond the question of tactics. Many activists are now tackling the problems of hierarchy and sexism within their own groups; they are building new structures and campaigning techniques. In fact it might be said that the peace movement was evolving into the nonviolence movement: groups are disposing of their 'chairmen' and are using consensus decision taking and collective structures.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY RECLAIMED

CND's decision on NVDA clearly shows that it sees its responsibility to rid this country of nuclear weapons as more important than its responsibility to obey civil law. This reclaiming of personal responsibility for the health and welfare of both planet and people is the central theme of direct democracy. Many of us feel that the peace movement is part of a much broader struggle that takes opposition to violence further than nuclear weapons. The principles of nonviolence apply in our homes, communities, and relationships with the planet. The Women for Life on Earth highlight the clear links between feminism, nonviolence, ecology and direct democracy. It is significant that they have become the focal point of our resistance to cruise at USAF Greenham Common.

THE SOCIAL BASE OF EVOLUTION

As a dynamic social relation, nonviolence is the means by which people discover that their social power is not dependent upon wealth, weaponry, authority or institutions. It is a form of organising and acting that allows us all to develop our full potential and to challenge the very essence of state power - violence. Nature can be violent as well as non-violent, no one can deny that. However, we have now reached a time when violence threatens planetary existence.

Nonviolence is the necessary counteracting force. Threatened with global annihilation, people throughout the world are coming together to resist this ultimate catastrophe. In nonviolence they hold the seeds of a change so radical that the future of humanity could forever be set in a new direction. Nonviolence is not just the absence of violence; it is the social power on which our evolution rests.

POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Political ecology has two main aspects... the physical and the human. Physical ecology is based on the principle that we must learn to live in harmony with nature within the limits of the Earth's finite supply of resources.

Unlike the essentially reactionary politics of environmentalism, ecology tackles the causes of pollution and environmental degradation. All other political doctrines share a belief in perpetual economic growth - the assumption that it is both possible and desirable to ever increase our production and consumption, a root cause of exploitation.

Ecologists therefore propose transition to a sustainable economy putting back into the Earth what we take out and learning to tread lightly and live more simply, recognising the natural laws of our existence.



HUMAN ECOLOGY

Human power over nature turns out to be a power exercised by some people over others, with natural resources as their instrument: the exploitation of people cannot therefore be separated from the exploitation of the Earth.

Beginning with those at the bottom of the pile, this level of exploitation has caused massive suffering and now threatens our very survival unless we begin the transition to a sustainable society.

A system can only be sustainable if it guarantees the basic material security of all and allows for full participation in decision taking with the establishment of collective structures. Discrimination of all kinds can be countered in community based social structures in which everyone has a role, in which the artificial barrier between the employed and unemployed is removed, and everyone's creative energies are given the fullest possible opportunity for expression. Radical ecology opposes all exploitation, whether it be of women, men, children, minorities, animals or the environment. The same natural laws govern the interrelationships between people and between people and the environment.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Direct democracy encompasses both community action and nonviolent direct action. It is the expression of a desire to have personal responsibility for the welfare of both planet and people. Without personal responsibility all ideas of a genuinely decentralised society become a nonsense: such a change can only be possible through the twin motivations of self-determination and self-reliance. Direct democracy recognises that temporal law can deprive people of the right to take control of their own lives. Gandhi said: "I have disregarded the order served upon me, not for want of respect for lawful authority, but in obedience to the higher law of our being, the law of conscience."

Direct democracy can be contrasted with electoral or indirect democracy. Electoral democracy means that decisions are taken by representatives - whether MPs or councillors. Although they may be influenced by letters, leaflets, demonstrations, and - occasionally - by elections themselves, such a system necessarily involves some abdication of personal responsibility.

THE DUAL APPROACH

This is not to dismiss completely the value of elections, but simply to show the vital need for a Dual Approach - a combination of direct democracy and electioneering, challenging the state from without and within. At present most Greens channel their energies through one or other of the approaches, but not through both. The movement will only be united in tactics through the recognition and practice of the Dual Approach.

In the 60s this alternative / green movement of ours began to emerge. In the 70s it took shape. In the 80s it can mature as the single most powerful political force in Britain. We shall have to examine this common philosophy and use it to break down the political barriers that divide us. As the Spring Equinox approaches, let us concentrate our energies on a period of renewed growth and synthesis, breaking down the ghettos of our artificial separation and working together to build the green movement - uniting the social forces of feminism, nonviolence, ecology, and direct democracy.

Diversity and unity will be our strength.