

IN THE FIRST ISSUE OF GREEN LINE DAVID TAYLOR PROPOSED A GREEN CHALLENGE TO TRADITIONAL POLITICS. IT WOULD BE BUILT ON THE FOUR CORNER-STONES OF ECOLOGY, FEMINISM, NONVIOLENCE, AND DIRECT DEMOCRACY.

IN THIS FOLLOW-UP ARTICLE, RICHARD OLDFIELD TURNS TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN - THE WAYS IN WHICH THE ELEMENTS OF THE GREEN MOVEMENT ARE ARTIFICIALLY KEPT APART.

Dividing Lines

'REALIGNMENT', INCLUDING THE potential for further, more genuine political mould-breaking, is the key feature of British politics today. After decades of conformist orthodoxy, the era of slow-moving political dinosaurs is over. We see unprecedented splits in the Labour Party. In the Liberal Party there is a widening gap between what may be called the 'orange' faction - led by David Steel and including moderates, supporters of growth economics, and those who favour nuclear deterrence - and 'green' Liberals including radicals, ecologists, and those opposed to Cruise missiles. We even hear rumblings of discontent from the Tories. The manufacture of the SDP and their subsequent alliance with the Liberals, far from being a cause and much less a final effect, is merely a further symptom of a powerful wind of change. Such upheavals are both the beginnings of, and a call for, a clear-cut fundamental re-grouping within British politics. In this respect no amount of cosmetic gloss can change the SDP from the old era party it really is.

NATURAL PARTNERS

To fully realise the opportunity presenting itself, we must first recognise the family of political sub-groupings that have set this wave in motion. Whatever their origins - and some have a long history - this family today includes such as CND, feminist groups, the anti-nuclear campaign, FoE, animal and human rights campaigners, libertarians, as well as green socialists, green liberals, and the Ecology Party.

These are natural partners, sharing an interlinked set of aspirations and radical attitudes which reflect their broadly youthful basis - young radicals of the sixties, seventies, and now, ever stronger, the eighties. Youth is always a harbinger of change, and only youthful support could have given the zestful energy needed to spark and carry such a momentous wave.

The interlinked calls for nuclear disarmament, peace and nonviolence, for the recognition of feminist principles and women's rights, for a more direct democracy and for ecological awareness are at the root of current major political displacements - if only we look deep enough.

DISUNITY OF NATURAL ALLIES

Yet where these calls should sound in harmony, we too often hear either a babble of political in-fighting or a deafening silence. This is the crux of the problem: the disunity of greens and radicals today. Natural allies are kept artificially divided and confused by the entrenched - subterfuge, hostility and obsolete preoccupations of 'leaders' and political establishments - hierarchies which many of these sub-groupings, through lack of a credible alternative, blindly continue to support.

There are of course differences between these partners over this or that particular, but the general convergence of their world views far outweighs these. Indeed the potential exists to create a genuinely green and radical movement of such energy, with such broadly based support and so clearly distinguished, as to form one of the most powerful political forces in this country.

NETRAYAL BY THE POLITICIANS

As it is, the 'fudgers and mudgers', the politically bankrupt, old-style careerists continue to control and mystify, to diffuse vital forces into fringe pressure groups or isolated campaigns. The trade union movement provides a classic example of this, being bogged down in the shallow and largely diversionary conventions of percentage-point wage negotiations, productivity bonuses, and so on. Their protests and concerns are directed within a narrow, isolated range of artificially prescribed limits. Thus they've come to support the techno-industrial world view; worse still, with their largely uncritical approach to

industrial expansion and economic growth, they actively oppose much of the radical and green movement.

A HONEYMOON OF EXPEDIENCY

A further example of this dilution process may be drawn from the Liberals' supposed outright opposition to nuclear energy. David Steel and cohorts make the right noises when necessary - in order to deflect green Liberals. In reality however an Alliance government would at best merely tone down the scale of the nuclear power programme; especially so considering the nature of the SDP. Similarly, despite the token rhetoric of the Liberal/SDP leadership, it is clear they do not seriously believe in any significant measure of decentralisation. Steel's rejection of the Liberal Conference vote against Cruise shows his disregard for even this elementary form of decentralist decision-taking.

Further illusions are woven by 'orange' Liberals over the question of an ecologically based economic policy. For despite politically expedient reassurances, it would again be mainly 'business as usual' and their SDP alliance only serves to confirm this. Despite the immense lure of political success and the consequent pressuring calls for unity, the Liberal/SDP honeymoon is even now wearing thin as the true nature of their political programme becomes clearer and the 'greens' glance uneasily around them.



But where can these greens turn to? Certainly not to the Labour Party - a party which supports nuclear power, supports the illusionary creed of democratic centralism, being preoccupied with central economic planning and nationalisation. Certainly not to a party which is disinterested in the debate between economic growth and sustainability. Even when green socialists manage briefly to focus the party's attention on relevant issues, they see it fail to draw full conclusions, fail to adopt a holistic approach to policy-making.

What can the result ever be but piecemeal - even damaging - tinkering? What little 'red' socialists know of political ecology they view as diversionary, delaying the progress of Keynesian economic thought or irrelevant to

the welfare of the working class. Thus they continue to advocate solutions that are themselves effectively part of the problem. In any case, the considerable opposition in Labour's ranks to unilateral nuclear disarmament is depressingly familiar to the restless green Liberals.

On the other hand, where can the frustrated green socialists turn to? Not to the Liberals or Social Democrats - who are seen as pro-EEC, anti-'socialist', and completely split on the bomb. Nevertheless envious glances are cast at the apparent success of the anti-nuclear power lobby within the Liberals, and weary comparisons made with the massive defeat this cause faces at successive TUC and Labour Party conferences.

THE BOMB: NO CHOICE AT THE POLLS?

In all of this, the ways in which political leaders distort, oversimplify and often completely obscure the strands of thinking in rival groupings plays a key part in the continuing mystification of party labels and in the separation, as enemies, of many who would otherwise be natural allies.

Perhaps the most indictable aspect of this confused and pathetic state of affairs is the probability that the electorate in the next General Election will not even have the chance to vote for a party they know would actually implement a policy of total unilateral nuclear disarmament if elected. As for the 'don't knows' and those who, for one reason or another, never vote, it seems that no established political option is of sufficient inspiration or radical originality

ECO'S CATALYST ROLE

Some of us, of course, have turned to the Ecology Party. But the realisation is dawning that Eco's main role at this time must be that of a catalyst in bringing about the unity of the greens and radicals, rather than believing that electioneering offers a way out of the present impasse. The catalyst role is something that Eco, with its combination of wider political vision and a national network of activists, is uniquely able to fill.

It involves recognising the need to unite natural partners first, before realistically expecting mass support for green politics.

It also means recognising that historically diverse elements will only unite through a federal structure.

The creation of a green federation is the most urgent task before us today.

Surely after Hillhead, after Croydon, ecologists will think again? As though it was not enough to be humiliated by the National Front, now the Lunatic fringe does it too! Something has to be done. If it is not done deliberately (in which case there is hope) it will be imposed by events and that will be finis.

At the Green Gathering last year I put the case for extra-parliamentary democracy and noticed that it had strong, albeit minority, support. The point is that green politics have to be genuinely alternative or they are not green. It is a structural, i.e. a constitutional matter; it is not a question of injecting a few ecological ideas into the old bottles of party politics on the Westminster model. And it is no use trying to emulate the German success: theirs is a quite different tradition.

The SDP may or may not break the two-party mould: but the mould that counts is Westminster itself and that, to the SDP, is utterly sacrosanct. It is exactly at that point that new thinking needs to begin.

WHERE THE POWER LIES

About ten years ago there was much talk about 'participatory democracy' and 'community politics' inspired by the Young Liberals with Peter Hain very much in evidence. Then someone high up, presumably Jeremy Thorpe, said: 'That's enough; get back on the electoral knocker!' and they did. The thing died. A pity: it was the right track.

I still go to meetings where great issues are discussed and cringe with embarrassment when the Chairman, or someone, offers his final advice to the assembled legionaries of the good: 'Write to your MP.' If ever there was a counsel of despair, that was surely it, because the power has long passed from Westminster. The Treasury, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office took it away years ago. One reason why Mrs Thatcher is bound to fail is because she presumes to think she rules the Civil Service. The presumption of the woman! The SDP is known as the Permanent Secretaries Party already and that is why it will succeed. Mr Jenkins can be relied on to do what Whitehall tells him to do.

THE NEW POWER BASE

Westminster will never be green, never in a thousand years, and trying to make it so is literally pointless. A backbench MP is

Messing about in votes

Peter Cadogan

poorly informed and powerless. If an MP is of any consequence, like Tony Benn, it is because he has had the sense to get himself a power base elsewhere, outside the House and the official party structure. We need a polycentric Britain in a polycentric Europe.

The green task is to invent people-power as the Poles have done in Solidarity. It is done by breaking through the class barrier and integrating the best of the intelligentsia with the mass powers of the workers and the enthusiasm and vitality of the young. There are plenty of small signs that it will happen here too, but small signs are not obvious and they have to be written as well as read.

People-power has to be where people are and most certainly they are not in Westminster or Whitehall. People can only function in localities and regions and in connection with special functions. This does not necessarily make for parochialism in the old pejorative sense, and the new slogan from across the Atlantic is a good one: Act locally, think globally. To be for decentralism and for Westminster is a hopeless contradiction in terms.

Thinking globally means, first and foremost, having done with the Cold War and putting an end to the absurd dominion of the two super-powers which now both take refuge in that same Cold War that has taken the place of the American dream (following Vietnam, Watergate, and Central America) and the Soviet communist dream (following Budapest, Prague, and Gdansk.) Green means peace, and the organised cause of peace needs to be upgraded in the priorities of greens. The Green Gate at Greenham on March 21 was not a bad start.

Can we begin to think in terms of a confederate, polycentric, demilitarised Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals? Today it is only big ideas that will work.