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THE Green CHALLENGE

the development of Green parties in Europe

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Edited by
Dick Richardson and Chris Rootes

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The Green Challenge

Despite considerable media and popular interest in environmentalism, environmental movements and Green parties, there has been relatively little systematic academic assessment of the factors involved in the formation, development and electoral performance of Green parties in Europe.

The Green Challenge is an up-to-date comparative analysis of the rise, development and varying electoral successes of Green parties in western, southern and central Europe. It provides a common comparative perspective and contextual setting through which the very different fortunes of individual Green parties operating in different national circumstances can be analysed. By using a comparative thematic perspective rather than a pre-ordained theory, *The Green Challenge* not only points out the deficiencies of existing theoretical studies but illuminates the primary factors which have helped to make the rise of political ecology such an important development in contemporary Europe.

Its conceptual unity and coherent approach make it essential reading not only for students of Green politics but for Green activists and anyone interested in the rise of political ecology.

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Foreword

The Green Challenge is an extremely important book. It is the first academic study to set Europe's Green parties within an explicitly political context as participants, challengers and potential successors to the current accepted political orthodoxies.

Green Party activists in the UK are often asked, 'but why don't you do as well as *Die Grünen*?' This book provides useful answers. It examines the political circumstances in a number of European countries, assessing how the development of Green parties has been assisted or held back by the availability of political space and looking at how individual parties have exploited that space.

The writers make clear that there is no perfect model for the development of a Green party; each has arisen from particular circumstances but all share the conviction that current political practices and beliefs must change fundamentally if the world is to have the chance of peaceful, equitable and lasting survival.

The dual challenge facing Green parties is clear from this study. The first challenge is that posed to existing political power and we see how it has responded: through dirty tricks, co-option of the easier policies or attempts to co-opt the parties into compromising alliances, and through outright opposition, which has brought together management and workers against the Greens. The second challenge is that posed to the Greens themselves: how have they adapted to the shift from parties of opposition to ones of proposition as they have gained political representation? How have they coped within the political arena without losing their political identity and integrity? How do they maintain and enlarge their political space?

These are important questions for the developing Green political movement. Serious studies such as this will help us see ourselves

more clearly and enable us to learn and draw strength from each other so that we can maximize our political effect and bring about the ecologically sustainable future for which we are all working.

I look forward to the next volume with great anticipation!

Jean Lambert
Chair, Green Party Executive and former UK representative to the Green group in the European Parliament

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Introduction

Dick Richardson and Chris Rootes

One does not need to be a committed supporter of a Green party to recognize that Greens have become a more or less permanent feature on the European political scene and one that is growing in visibility. The highly publicized failure of the German Greens to retain their parliamentary representation at national level after the 1990 unification election, the similar loss of parliamentary status by the Swedish Greens in 1991 and the very public internal wranglings of British and French Greens should not be allowed to obscure the more or less steady progress the Greens have made in other countries and, fairly generally, at regional and local levels. Almost everywhere in western Europe, the Greens are more established political parties now than they were even five years ago. Clearly, the widespread dismissal of the Greens as a merely transient and irretrievably marginal phenomenon has been proved wrong.

1989 was a very significant year for the Greens. First, they did extraordinarily well – often in very unlikely places – in the elections for the European Parliament. Second, they were at the forefront of the opposition to the state-socialist regimes of central and eastern Europe. In recognition of the high profile of the Greens and their breakthrough in public acceptance across the whole continent of Europe, the European Consortium for Political Research sponsored a workshop on the Green challenge to political orthodoxy at its Joint Sessions at the University of Essex in March 1991. The idea for this book originated at those sessions.

The book is not, however, a collection of conference papers. The chapters assembled here have been specially commissioned to address the central theme which emerged in the course of our discussions at Essex: that the principal factor in the rise and development of Green parties, and their electoral successes, has

been the varying impact of political competition upon them, within the overall context of heightened environmental consciousness. The fortunes of national Green parties clearly have been influenced by competition between them and other parties, but also – perhaps especially – by competition among already established parties and actors. In organizing this book around the theme of political competition, our aim is not merely to add to the volume of literature which *describes* Green parties, but to explain *why* Green parties have developed so differently in different European countries.

We have not tried to cover all European countries or all European Green parties. An exhaustively comparative book would either have been much longer and correspondingly more expensive, or the individual chapters would have been too short to give an adequate analysis of any individual case. We have instead opted to cover a broad sample of European cases in greater depth. Some countries selected themselves because of their sheer size and their prominence within European political arrangements: Germany, Britain, France and Italy. Other countries have been included because of the distinctiveness and intrinsic interest of their experience of Green party development; in this category we include Belgium, Sweden, The Netherlands and Switzerland. Inevitably, constraints of space and time have dictated the omission of several cases – especially those of Austria, Finland and Portugal – which, on grounds of intrinsic interest, we should have liked to include. Nor could we cover all countries in which Green parties have been less prominent; instead we have attempted to achieve a balance by including chapters on two such cases: one on Greece, which in some respects can be taken as illustrative of the travails of Green parties in the Mediterranean periphery generally; and one on Czechoslovakia which, though it is in many ways not typical of post-Communist states, does at least raise most of the problems which confront Green parties elsewhere in central and eastern Europe.

In editing the book, we have given our contributors a fair degree of latitude in the interpretation of the central theme and, although we have endeavoured to standardize the general style, the methodology and conclusions of each chapter are the responsibility of its author.

Editing this volume has been an interesting – indeed salutary – experience. The patience of those contributors who met our original deadline has been sorely tried, but so was our own when

two authors who had promised chapters withdrew at the last minute. We should therefore like to record our special thanks to Martin Rhodes and Gene Frankland for providing the chapters on Italy and Germany at very short notice. We should like, too, to thank the Royal Mail for unfailingly managing the overnight delivery of mail between villages at the northern and southern extremities of England.

February 1994

Chapter 1

The Green challenge

Philosophical, programmatic and electoral considerations

Dick Richardson

Green political ideas are hardly new. Xenophon, among other ancient Greeks, is alleged to have set out the main principles of the Gaia hypothesis, on which much Green thinking is based, over 2,000 years before James Lovelock developed the modern, scientific version. Green political parties, on the other hand, are a distinctly modern phenomenon. It was only in 1972 that the first Green party was established (the New Zealand Values Party) and in 1979 that the first Green member was elected to a national parliament (Daniel Brelaz in Switzerland). Now, Greens sit in democratic assemblies at local government level throughout Europe and in a great number of national assemblies, including the former Soviet satellite states in eastern and central Europe. They represent a challenge to political orthodoxies of both left and right in three main respects: philosophical, programmatic and electoral.

THE NATURE AND CONTEXT OF THE GREEN CHALLENGE

Given that Green ideas coexisted with the major religions of the world through to late medieval times and never entirely disappeared, it is perhaps surprising that Green political parties did not develop with the emergence of the political state. The fact that they did not develop until the late twentieth century can be attributed to a number of factors. Primarily, however, the rise of industrial society in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries stimulated the emergence of anthropocentric rather than biocentric ways of thinking. By the twentieth century, the industrial world-view, based on the conquest of nature ('domination theory' – the philosophical aspect), materialism (the spiritual aspect) and

consumption (the economic aspect), predominated over the Gaian view to such an extent that, to all intents and purposes, it became non-existent as far as practical politics was concerned.

There have always been critics of industrial society and the industrial world-view, but before the 1960s the apparent success of industrialism in raising living standards, at least in the so-called developed world, made many critics appear irrational and nostalgic for a pre-industrial Eden that never existed. In the 1960s, however, there was a surge of interest in the natural environment from a scientific and economic point of view, and this was to have a profound impact on the way the environment was viewed in intellectual, if not yet political, circles. In 1962, for example, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a damning indictment of the overuse of pesticides and their deleterious effects on natural systems. Although calling for greater scientific enquiry, Carson's work represented an indirect attack on prevailing scientific reductionist theories. Damned by much of the scientific establishment of the time as 'emotional', the conclusions of *Silent Spring* are now generally accepted. Indeed, many of the pesticides attacked by Carson are now banned.

In 1967 E.J. Mishan attacked the prevailing economic orthodoxy of industrialism in *The Costs of Economic Growth*. This was followed in 1968 by the establishment of the Club of Rome, an informal international association of scientists and industrialists concerned about the impact of industrialism and the industrial ethic not only on human society but on the planet itself. The Club's major publication, *The Limits to Growth* (1972), was extremely influential in questioning the ability of the planet to sustain the lifestyles emerging in the developed world. The Earth's resources were seen to be finite; it was not a question of *if* the planet's resources would run out at contemporary rates of consumption, but *when*.

1972 marked a watershed in the development of Green ideas. The publication of *The Ecologist*'s *A Blueprint for Survival* alongside *The Limits to Growth* inaugurated not only an intellectual debate on what were to become known as green issues, but also the first inklings of a political debate, sometimes known as The Great Doom Debate. Four considerations prompted the publication of *Blueprint*. First, there was the perception that, if current patterns of material consumption and resource depletion were allowed to persist, the life-support systems of the planet would be irreversibly disrupted and society would inevitably break down. Second, there was an

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