Green Web Bulletin # 17

PROBLEMS FACING THE GREEN MOVEMENT
IN CANADA AND NOVA SCOTIA

(Some comments by David Orton of the Green Web, responding to the visit of the Swedish Green M.P. Per Gahrton to Nova Scotia, January 14-17, 1990.)

Introduction
Greens are on the periphery of political life in Canada. Yet green parties were established in 1983 federally, and in the same year in British Columbia and Ontario. There is also a green party in Quebec, which in the recent provincial election had more electoral support than the NDP. There is a green party in Newfoundland of recent origin. In Canada there are green publications which link a network of activists, like Green Multilogue, The New Catalyst, B.C. Green Party News, Ontario Green News, The Trumpeter, etc. More traditional magazines, like the academic environmental journal Alternatives and the left social democratic magazine Canadian Dimension, reflect, to some extent, green ideas. However, in Nova Scotia, greens are hard to find. In Nova Scotia, since 1983, my wife and I have defined ourselves publicly as greens. Yet it is only probably now, with the visit of Per Gahrton, that building a green movement comes to be seen by a number of people as on the immediate political agenda.

Nationally
In Canada, there are various problems hampering the growth of green movements/parties. It is a complex problem to explain. But Nova Scotia greens too will have to address these problems:

1. **Green parties were formed in Canada before there was a green movement, rooted in actual struggles and with a green alternative vision, appropriate to Canada.** The formation of green parties preceded movement building. The success of the West German greens, Die Grünen, who formed their federal party in 1981, seems to have been influential in the decision of some people to form Canadian green parties back in 1983. Anyway, there is now a division between movement and party people. The larger question here is what kind of political vehicle is appropriate for a green movement and how does such a vehicle remain controlled by and accountable to the movement? Does the green movement just take over the existing political structures of parliamentary politics or are new grass roots political forms, which facilitate real involvement, to be developed? While greens network fairly extensively, many who are very practically involved do not support the existing green parties. Much of the best environmental work that is being done in Canada is being done by groups who are completely independent of the green parties that exist. Yet party people raise good points. A recent letter (Dec. 1989), from a green party contact in Quebec put it this way:
   The facts are that you will wait until hell freezes over before seeing a ‘grassroots’ movement. Most people don’t give a damn and don’t want to get involved. In the meantime, the minority that is conscious and wants to work towards change can join or form environmental groups and/or work with the Green Party. In my opinion, however, working with the Green Party means that you are committed to a broader vision of social change than strictly environmental issues, as with pressure groups.

In Tasmania, Australia, five greens were elected in 1989 as green independents and now help form a coalition government. This government has preserved large areas of the state from exploitation.
2. Philosophical basis of the green movement. The West German greens, considered by many to be the pace setters in the international green movement, speak of the four pillars of Die Grünen as being ecology, social concern, grass roots democracy and non-violence. Quite a number of Canadian greens seem to take these values as some kind of social gospel, against which everything has to be measured. Yet reading the history of the West German greens, it is clear that these particular “pillars”, were to some extent drawn up at a green congress, to unite the various factions in the party. (Offenbach congress, in October of 1979)

**Deep Ecology:** In 1990, it is more appropriate to look at the philosophical basis of the Canadian green movement, which mirrors that of the U.S. green movement. There are various tendencies which are essentially in contention for the soul of the movement. The philosophy will determine how greens look at the natural world, as well as the social world. The dominant view is that of deep ecology. This is a view initially articulated by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who back in the early 1970’s made the distinction between “deep” and “shallow” ecology. Shallow ecology is trying to change various aspects of the existing ecological problems but remains within the system. Deep ecology is a biocentric or ecocentric worldview, which looks at the ecological self and sees humans as only one among many life forms, with no privileged status. Thus it is necessary to move to a whole new worldview and value system, and away from the existing human-centered universe which considers all of non-human nature merely as “resources” for human exploitation. The influence of deep ecology marks a very significant differentiation with the European green movement.

**Social Ecology:** A viewpoint which is very critical of deep ecology is social ecology. Murray Bookchin has been the main exponent of this position. For social ecology, the way we treat nature is in some way a reflection of the way we treat each other within society. The worldview is human-centered, with humans having a different status from other life forms. Social ecology has criticized deep ecology for its lack of concern for social issues. Many left wing people have adopted this position. Some greens who are left wing, but not supporters of social ecology, believe that there is little “ecology” in the social ecology platform. The conduct of the polemics between social ecology and deep ecology supporters has often taken a bitter form.

**Ecofeminism:** This seems close to a social ecology position. The basic belief is perhaps that the way we treat nature is a reflection of the oppression of women in society. Some ecofeminists also believe that women are in some sense closer to nature and therefore have deeper insights into ecological problems. One can be a supporter of feminism, but not necessarily support ecofeminism.

**Socialist Biocentrism:** This comes out of the deep ecology perspective. It is the stand of socialist greens who support in principle a biocentric position. The name for this tendency has not definitely jelled yet, but the terms left biocentrism, socialist biocentrism or socialist ecocentrism are being used.

3. Relationship of the green movement/green political parties to the left/socialism/ social democracy, etc. Are the greens on the left, or is the appropriate slogan “Neither left nor right but in front”? The dominant tendency in the green parties in Canada is to say the greens are not part of the left. Yet the West German green party sees itself as a left wing party and a party that is left of the social democrats. In Canada, until the last couple of years, with a few exceptions, left wing people were not involved in the green movement.
**Nova Scotia**

In the federal election of 1980, 11 independent candidates, 9 of whom were from Atlantic Canada, ran on an anti-nuclear platform. These people collectively viewed themselves as the “Small Party”, and their concerns were essentially of an ecological nature.

People come from across the political spectrum into the environmental movement. As a green movement consciousness develops, this range of political views is to be found among greens. In Nova Scotia, there seems to have been little interest in developing an independent green presence in the province. What are the reasons for this?

With some exceptions, the left in the province has been around the NDP and not involved in environmental struggles. There has been little critical discussion within environmental circles. The dominant emphasis in the environmental movement has been on lobbying government bureaucracies and politicians. Government grants (and sometimes corporate grants) have been sought by the largest environmental groups. The perspective has been to see environmental problems as resolvable within capitalism. No alternative vision of a sustainable society has been presented and mobilized around. Instead we are urged to participate in various “multi-stake-user” committees, where environmentalists have some token representation. Ecology Action Centre best represents this tradition of respectable environmentalism within the system, but this tradition has many supporters throughout Nova Scotia.

The other tendency within the environmental movement has been a minority one. The Tatamagouche Blockade for six weeks of a spray site in the summer of 1988, is the clearest example of public activity of this trend. Government lobbying or appeals to industry are seen as a waste of time, and the message put forth is that people have to rely on their own resources and take the protection of Nova Scotia’s environment into their own hands.

But both the above tendencies have not shown, until fairly recently, interest in developing a green alternative in Nova Scotia. It is this environmental movement which has provided the opposition to the ongoing ecological destruction of our province. Also, deep ecology or biocentric ideas have been raised by environmentalists increasingly within Nova Scotia. Examples of this in the past year would be the article by Geoff May on forestry in *The Chronicle Herald* and the Spiddle Hill funeral demonstration against clear-cutting. The Green Web has also been actively involved in the promotion of biocentric and green ideas in the province. Individuals and groups in the loose environmental movement have exposed many examples of abuse against nature and humans. Some examples are the use of pesticides in forest nurseries and the Mulgrave water supply area; making Boat Harbour a high profile issue; exposure of the use of many pesticides on Christmas trees; opposition to aquaculture by a group of residents in Jordan Bay, etc.

Yet many in the environmental movement have been prepared to be mobilized by drummers for government and business. The embracement of “sustainable development” is the obvious recent example. Sustainable development, as defined in the U.N. Brundtland Report, promotes such non-green ideas as: more economic growth, ecology is not primary, human-centered “resourcist” orientation towards nature, population growth (8.2 billion), no transfer of productive wealth to the poorer nations, use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, etc. Little criticism of sustainable development has been heard in Nova Scotia.
Humans have only been around for about two million years and by the actions which are being pursued, there is a very good possibility that we face extinction as a species. Those of us who have come forward to take up the environmental struggle, have to continually examine our actions. Diane Cole, who has now left the province, wrote a critical evaluation of the Herbicide Trial which nobody wanted to publish. I will conclude these comments by quoting from her unpublished article:

To be raped is one thing, quite another to applaud the performance...
In order to improve society, it is absolutely essential to call things for what they are: in order to fight injustice one must be able to recognize it and then name it...
Poor leadership is worse than no leadership at all because it lures the people to defeat in a dead end, making the failure appear as victory – stifling dreams, ideals, and creative possibilities.

By becoming involved in the green movement, environmentalists in Nova Scotia can transform the status quo. We have to offer “an alternative ecological vision to that offered by the concept of sustainable development. This vision has to offer a way forward which responds to the public’s deepening concern about the growing destruction of the Earth and the need for decisive action.” (Green Web Bulletin # 16 “Sustainable Development: Expanded Environmental Destruction”) Ecological sustainability, not economic growth, has to become the goal of human society.

P.S. Emergency: As these comments are being typed, a telephone call has come from Australia, asking for support of the Earth First! Women’s Tree Huggers Group. There have been 56 arrests and 2 people injured by a logging truck in an action to save a forest area with 200-year old trees in the state of Victoria. In the context of this paper, this telephone call illustrates the international nature of the green movement, our common aims, and the solidarity and mutual support we can, and must, extend to each other’s struggles. For further information and to extend support write Earth First!, c/o Marianne Heynemann, P.O. box 256, Mitchem, 3132 Australia. The specific request is that messages of opposition be sent to Prime Minister Bob Hawke, Government of Australia, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia.

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