

A GREEN LAND FAR AWAY:  
A LOOK AT THE ORIGINS  
OF THE GREEN MOVEMENT

*Introduction*

In a previous paper on German self-identity and attitudes to Nature (*JASO*, Vol. XVI, no.1, pp. 1-18) I argued that one of its main strains was a dissatisfaction with the shifting political and territorial boundaries of the nation and a search for a more authentic, earth-bound identity. This search led to a politically radical 'ecologism' which pre-dated National Socialism, but which emerged as an underlying theme in the Third Reich, reappearing in Germany well after the Second World War in more obviously left-oriented groups.

In this paper I want to examine the origins and growth of the Green movement itself in England and Germany. While the insecurity of national identity in Germany was not exactly paralleled in England, the English experience nonetheless demonstrates a search for lost 'roots' after 1880. This crisis of identity fused with criticisms of orthodox liberal economists and mechanistic biologists to produce the ecologists and, later, the Greens.

---

This is a shortened version of a paper first given to my own seminar on Modern Conservatism at Trinity College, Oxford, in June 1985; it was subsequently delivered at a Social Anthropology seminar chaired by Edwin Ardener at St John's College, Oxford, on 28 October 1985, and at the seminar on Political Theory organised by John Gray and Bill Weinstein at Balliol College, Oxford, on 1 November 1985. Notes have been kept to the minimum necessary to identify actual quotations and the more obscure works I have cited.

'Greenism' is defined here as a movement incorporating 'ecologism'. The word 'ecology' is used in the normative sense, not in the biological, descriptive sense. Ecology is a science which considers energy flows within a closed system. The normative input is that severe or drastic change within that system, or indeed any change which can damage any species within it or that disturbs the system, is seen as bad, wrong. Thus ecological ideas have come to be associated with conservation within nature, whether it be of a single species, of the weather pattern produced by the Amazon forests, or the continuity of human existence.

Why is this subject important and why should it be of interest to anyone? Man's vision of his place in the world, the question of the objective existence of that world and his relation with it, is of fundamental importance. It affects the large questions concerning the source of historical change, the nature of man, the why and the how of man's history, and it is intimately bound up with the problem of causality, affecting, for example, the source of innovation and creation. The validity of science and the possibility of a social science all hinge on the stance taken towards man's place in nature.

Both conceptually and empirically, man has validated his beliefs by natural example since written records began. Ideas of the special nature of man seem to originate with the Judaeo-Christian tradition. But conclusions drawn from the observation that man *is* an animal can vary greatly, as can conclusions drawn from the claim to be different from animals. It is possible to assert that if man is part of the natural world, subject to the same laws as the animals, then he is, like them, entitled to compete to survive. Because he cannot hope to escape from his animal nature, he is justified in aggression. Others see man's role as that of a shepherd who nurtures the earth rather than despoiling it, precisely because he partakes of the earthly burden. However, if man is special, so malleable and adaptable in his nature that the laws of the natural world no longer apply to him, then he can be made over to any image. The model of improvement through social and environmental controls is generally a progressive and left-wing model. But there is a conservative variant which argues that it is precisely man's lack of a fixed genetic inheritance that makes stable institutions essential as a substitute. If man is born without, for example, the genetic template of the Church of England, continuity in social and family institutions becomes more important, not less: here, the argument is that if you strip man of his cultural heritage in the name of social change an irreparable loss will ensue. The cultural continuity of the group can only be safeguarded by preserving the acquired knowledge and (in the Hayekian variant) organically felt customs of man, as expressed through his institutions.

The ecological, cultural and political position known as Greenism involves substantial ethical and moral claims and proposes drastic and apocalyptic remedies. Today's Green parties have carved out political niches which receive 7-11% of national party votes in a wedge of nations stretching from Finland in the north to Austria in the south. They include West Germany, Denmark,

Switzerland and Belgium, all Germanic nations except for the latter. In Britain there has been substantial 'entryism', especially within the Liberals and middle-class Labour Party groups. The Conservative Party is now seeking a Green position, and the National Front went Green last year. Greens have to be moles in Britain because of our two-party system, but even so, some three million people in Britain alone are alleged to be members of environmental and other ecological groups. The Green tendency has aroused unease in some political quarters and has been dismissed in others. The power-oriented, pro-American conservative Right see Greenism as an irritating distraction from the proper business of politics, which is to help provide the United States with an efficient anti-Soviet striking capacity. The respectable hard left do not think the Greens have a future. Avner Offer, describing Richard Jefferies as 'the Tory transcendentalist writer' and seeing his ideas as 'a refuge from unpleasant realities', thinks they 'had a fatal flaw...like ecological ideas, they were not made to mobilise the masses'.<sup>1</sup> A fatal flaw indeed, but the evidence seems to be that the masses are being mobilised nonetheless. When cultural criticisms are combined with mass political action, it is time to stop and look.

The political categorisation, the 'placing' of Greenism, is what I want to discuss here, and to do that one has, as it were, to find out whence it came. There is obviously a sense, a simple sense, in which Greenism is conservative: it aims to maintain a given stable ecological structure and system and, in the long term, prevent change. However, in its history ecologism has exhibited three dominant political strains. A left-wing egalitarianism with totalitarian overtones was the first. A second, religious, nationalist, high Tory version, strong in England, developed between the wars, while the third, a Nationalist Socialist version, was more radical, more negative, and more 'soft'. Although these groups do not represent a school or series of schools, they do present epistemological and morphological similarities. Forefathers are cited.<sup>2</sup> There is some cross-membership of individuals. Today's Greens, though often gaining from single-issue, one-off problems (save the Danube, save the whale, re-cycle glass bottles), seem to present some common factors. They are internationalist, against nuclear arms and nuclear power stations, have a strong feminist representation (non-Greens being macho, exploitative, etc.), and

---

<sup>1</sup> Avner Offer, *Property and Politics, 1870-1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981, p. 341; but cf. the reference to Jefferies in Paul Meier, *William Morris, The Marxist Dreamer* (tr. Frank Grubb), Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press 1978, where Jefferies is described as an inspirer of Morris's utopian socialism (pp. 68-9).

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Wolf-Dieter Hasenclever, speaker for the Green section in the Baden-Württemberg Landtag, 1980-4, compares the Green Social Wage scheme with that of Popper-Lynkeus (*Die Zeit*, 2 May 1986, p.40).

are egalitarian, pacifist and anti-capitalist. Is it possible to find a common ideology? I will return to this question after examining the Greens historically.

One problem with categorisation is that it is much harder to put people into boxes than at first appears. Just as the history of scientific thought concerns itself with the victors, so the history of political thought claims that the people who matter are those who are easily recognisable as forerunners or instigators of identifiable movements today. There is a recognised political evolutionary tree, with a main trunk and dead-end branches. If today's movement is respectable, then the forerunners have to be respectable too. If they are not, they are either written out of history, or rewritten. Since prewar political activists had a different conception of what was acceptable, it is easy to pick out respectable activists doing naughty things, in order to attack the canon of today. Marx was antisemitic. William Morris was a Nordic racist. Beatrice Webb opposed overseas aid, except to the children of German or Austrian professors.<sup>3</sup> This is fun. Historiographical dustbin-emptying is fun, and a hygienic and useful activity. But the unexpected categorisations that emerge from substituting a nature/anti-nature political axis for other currently accepted axes are meant here to offer a serious alternative. They are not for polemical ends.

### *History*

Ecological ideas break down into two distinct kinds, which both deserve the name 'ecological' and which arose at the same time, the late 1860s. One I will call biological ecologism; the other is the discipline concerned with energy-flow economics. Biological ecologists include Ernst Haeckel, who coined the term 'Oecology'; Willy Ostwald, the chemist, Nobel prize-winner and founder of the Monist League; Konrad Lorenz; R. Walther Darré, the Nazi Minister for Agriculture; Sir George Stapledon; Albert Howard; Lady Eve Balfour; Frederick Soddy, the nuclear physicist; Edward Goldsmith; and Frederick Georg Jünger.

Ecological economists include Podolinsky, Ostwald, Popper-Lynkeus, Ballod-Atlanticus, Liebig, Pfaundler, Sacher, Patrick Geddes, Soddy and Prigogine. Economic ecologism makes the claim, on an ethical basis, that it is concerned with non-renewable resources. Human energy is free and renewable: coal (later, oil) is not. The call to preserve scarce resources is today a very strong Green argument, and economists have begun to look at the problem of inter-generational allocation of resources (logically, this should be zero, but this is an unpopular conclusion). The question of non-renewable resources, with its apocalyptic impli-

---

<sup>3</sup> Beatrice Webb, *Diaries*, Vol. III, London: Virago Press/LSE 1984, p. 394.

cations of waste, loss, danger and famine, emerged when the implications of the theory of the dissipation of energy were understood. Before that, it was thought that as the earth was a closed system, no energy could leak out. This shift of vision paralleled the disappearance of Say's Law as a serious economic concept. The writers who contributed to the discipline of energy economics, which has never quite made the text books, were all socialists, and egalitarian. They proposed drastic solutions, including re-structuring society into a system which controlled resource allocation and resource use and which would ensure that the burden of shortage was equally shared. The paradox of this plan was that consumption of energy was seen as a bad thing, but those who consumed less energy than others should be able to consume more. This movement should be distinguished from the Malthusian one, which assumed an arithmetical growth of food production, together with a geometric rate of increase in the population.

The first writer to discuss this problem was the Ukrainian socialist Podolinsky (1850-92), landowner, populist and doctor of medicine.<sup>4</sup> In 1882 he wrote to Marx and Engels about his belief that inputs of energy units in agriculture could never be reclaimed in outputs (e.g. that the energy capital involved in digging a new allotment could never be reclaimed in the energy value of the food grown in it). Podolinsky hoped that Marx would realise that he had produced a scientifically based energy theory of value to replace the labour theory of value (the latter theory presented Marxists with the major theoretical problem of equating price with labour value). But Engels dismissed his argument as mere Ricardian physiocrats. Podolinsky was linked with Ukrainian populist nationalists, who formed themselves into communes. He also knew left-wing Ruthenes in Vienna, who idealised the Cossack tribal commune. As with today's Greens, he supported small-group nationalisms, such as those of the Catalans and Basques. He argued that 'the poverty of some human groups is the reverse side of the prosperity of other human groups', an argument which depended on a belief in finite resources.

Wilhelm Ostwald was an ecological economist, although because of his connection with Haeckel and his eugenic and communitarian ideals, he also belongs on the biological ecologist side. His book *The Energetic Imperative* ranked civilisations in terms of their efficiency in energy use. The most efficient would survive, according to the rules of natural selection. Ostwald's energetics received a hostile reception from Lenin, although he hailed Haeckel's work as a powerful weapon against capitalism. Ballod-Atlanticus (1864-1933) was inspired by both Marx's egalitarianism and Henry Ford's dynamism. He wrote a science fiction novel called *The Future State* which attacked capitalism and marginalist

---

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Professor Juan Martinez-Alier, of the University of Barcelona, for permission to read the draft of his book *Ecologism and Economics: History of a Hidden Relationship*, and for the many discussions we had on this topic at an earlier stage of my research. He is not responsible for my interpretation of these issues.

economics. He compared the energy conversion rate of the steam engine and the human body and found in favour of the latter: 20% compared to 5%.

In 1912 appeared a book entitled *Die Allgemeine Nährpflichtung*, written by Joseph Popper-Lynkeus, a distant connection of Karl Popper. He emphasised the problem of exhausting natural resources and introduced detailed 'energy accounting'. His solution was to introduce peacetime conscription. Men would work for twelve years, women for seven, and everyone would receive a basic 'social wage'. Popper-Lynkeus's energy accounting was Eurocentric. He proposed solving Germany's shortages by importing energy equivalents such as beans and sugar from Latin America. In his scheme, human labour would be used for 'proper purposes', satisfying basic needs.

Frederick Soddy (1877-1956), Professor of Physics at Oxford, presents a more complex picture. Soddy fans like to put him in the box of left-wing egalitarians. Like many natural scientists, he became obsessed with the idea of organising human society more rationally and 'economically' in the Aristotelian sense. Most economic theories geared to problem-solving are leakage theories (Marx as well as Silvio Gesell), and Soddy was no exception. Long before the Depression he envisaged a disappearance of capital. He wrote a 'Cartesian' criticism of economics. He claimed that if capital was embodied energy, then it was subject to the laws of entropy. This meant that the idea of interest, especially compound interest, arising from capital, was a myth. Stored capital, in whatever form, wasted away. He called this a Cartesian argument, on the grounds that 'scientific' economics were irrational.<sup>5</sup> He criticised Marx and Engels for not understanding energy limitations to growth.

Soddy was initially inspired by Ruskin. Later he became interested in Social Credit, although he disagreed with their compound-interest schemes. Because of its anti-capitalist bias his work on economics became a cult for biological ecologists, including the leader of the Kibbo Kift (later the Green Shirts), John Hargraves. He opposed nuclear bombs and wanted more research into nuclear power stations before they were built. Carrying the alternative nature of ecologists to extremes, Soddy was pro-Marx, anti-Soviet communism, anti the Russian atom bomb, anti-capitalist and anti-banking. The last position led him into antisemitic comments, but these were not programmatic. He thought that the white race would have to fight for its energy resources, because the notion that productive capacity could increase was a mirage.

These writers were described by Hayek as 'technocratic collectivists', and they did not see themselves as mystical, irrational or Utopian. They were united in their fear of the dissipation of energy and in their calculations of the carrying capacity of the earth. The attack on market economics followed from their belief that market methods of price formation did not take into account 'real' value, value based on energy. But although they

---

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Soddy, *Cartesian Economics*, London: Henderson 1922.

were rational socialists, the economic ecologists failed to get a hearing from their political leaders and even today are not legitimised in the works of John Goldthorpe, G.D.H. Cole, E.P. Thompson, and other guardians of the canon.

Late nineteenth-century biologists saw evolutionary theory as a science. But they attacked mechanistic thinking and called for a sensitive, organic, even holistic approach to the organisms they studied. Indeed, 'ecology' was defined by its founder, Haeckel, as 'the science of relations between organisms'. To men who thought in terms of millennia, who saw Beauty as coterminous with Nature, the immediate social and political implications of Darwinian theory could be ignored. However dark, unknowable and foreseeable Nature's ends, the method was still scientific. Nature ruled the earth. According to a metaphor which appears again and again, Nature was 'veiled' from man. If the veil could be rent aside, objective reality, the true truth, could be revealed. This idea had radical epistemological implications, because if the truth was achievable, then obviously nothing could be allowed to stand in the way of achieving it. Further, only change, flux itself, was permanent. The structure of tradition, holy lies, golden myths, and other means of maintaining social stability were seen by the radical late nineteenth-century biologists as obstacles to truth, those truths which could be learned from a didactic Nature. Thus the essential political message of biological ecologists was optimistic, as well as radical. If man could be brought into a 'correct' relationship with nature, all would be well. Nature would guide the path of progress.

Haeckel is probably the most significant figure in this movement. His own politics are typical. He became an influential populariser of science and scientific rationalism in Germany and in England, where his works were published by the Rationalist Press and distributed by working men's educational associations. He opposed duelling, corruption, reaction, Christianity and war. He thought that emotions were a myth, but that reason led to an appreciation of the beautiful - that beauty was an objective value, the essence of Nature. Originally a Protestant, he turned against Christianity because it placed animals and their feelings below people: he argued that people ranked equal but not superior to animals in the natural world. In his later writings he adopted an increasingly vitalist, neo-Lamarckian posture. From the position that the world was entirely matter he came to believe that it was entirely spirit, and in 1914 he published a work entitled *God-Nature*. Haeckel influenced the ecologists of the 1920s, especially in Britain, in two ways: first through his Goethean holism, his vision of the inter-relationship of all things, and the beauty of the world; and secondly but more importantly, through his argument that phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny. The implication of this theory was that evolution was recapitulated in each growing creature. Youth groups in the England and Germany of the 1920s concluded that one could alter and improve humanity through the correct environmental influences at the correct time of life: that the will came before determinist evolutionism. D.H. Lawrence was deeply influenced by Haeckel, by his atheism, humanism and worship of physical beauty.<sup>6</sup>

The much-used phrase 'Social Darwinism' is an inadequate label for this line of reasoning, and it was, rather, neo-Lamarckianism that reached a peak in German biology in 1909, with the publication of Hans Driesch's *Philosophy of the Organic*, which argued that all was spirit, that the life force ruled evolution. It was economic ecologism rather than biological ecologism that wanted a 'correct' use of resources to help the human race survive. In terms of practical planning, the group did not have to be so widely drawn. In England, a lawyer and Hebrew scholar, Joseph Yahuda, argued that a planned ecosystem should be introduced in the British Empire. He called for a eugenic policy, although not sterilisation, and for the compulsory movement of population from one part of the dominions to another, in order to equalise resource use and improve efficiency.<sup>7</sup> Although the author painstakingly (and correctly) differentiated his views from Germany's National Socialists, the belief in proper planning and the full and rational use of human energies and potential beings, and the desire to free misused abilities from worn-out, hidebound beliefs, are typically fascist.

The theory of the fascist state was attacked by some socio-biological Marxist writers of the 1930s for being primitive and for aiming at a static form, whereas Marxism, they claimed, understood the essential dynamism of biological processes. One left-wing biologist, on the other hand, Lancelot Hogben, who served in the International Brigade, thought that a state eugenic policy was essential in order to breed more workers because they possessed special genes for 'mutual help', but he opposed simple eugenics.<sup>8</sup> This school of Marxist ecologists were pro-growth and pro-dynamism. It has been argued that Marx himself was the first ecologist: that if you equate nature with the dialectic process, Marx was expressing a belief in the interconnection of man and the physical world that is ecological in spirit. This argument was popular in the class of post-'68, who equated capitalism with pollution. However, despite Marx's fondness for walks on Hampstead Heath, and Engels' love of hunting, the former's argument assumes the gradual abolition of the countryside, for both deterministic and normative reasons. He argued that rural life would decay and merge into urban life not only as the inevitable result of latifundian monopolisation and concomitant soil destruction, but as a desirable and progressive development, because of the alleged stupidity and bestiality of the peasant.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Roger Ebbatson, *Lawrence and the Nature Tradition*, Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press 1980, pp. 38, 71, 240.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Yahuda, *Bio-Economics*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman 1938.

<sup>8</sup> Marcel Prenant, *Biology and Marxism* (transl. C. Desmond Greaves), London: Lawrence and Wishart 1938.

<sup>9</sup> H.L. Parsons (ed.), *Marx and Engels on Ecology*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press 1977, pp. xi, 8, 10, 11; see also Murray Bookchin, *Post Scarcity Anarchism*, Berkeley: Ramparts Press 1971.



However, it is the conservative (loosely speaking) school of ecologists in Britain between the wars who represent the mainstream of true Greenness. Fascists and Marxists were not in power in Britain, but they were deeply concerned with power and how to achieve, use and maintain it, while the long-term apocalyptic visions of the true Green had no place for political structures and institutions. It is no accident that their representatives all came from a strata of the powerless: small landowners, small journalists, and non-mobile intellectuals who contracted the disease of independent thinking from their haphazard studies. They dropped out because they disliked the existing world: but they could not have worked within it in any case. Their inexperience about how nations work enabled them to have unfashionable ideas but prevented their implementation.

A key figure was Hugh Massingham, whose books on the English countryside, especially the Cotswolds, are still read. He was a believer in the theory of cultural diffusion, which he thought proved that man was an entirely 'pacific' being, and that Darwinism was wrong. He believed in the 'psychic unity of mankind' and wanted to decompose nations into small groups, especially Germany, whose unification he saw as unnatural. He saw culture, not race, as the main causal factor in society. As an early Guild Socialist he was to take up the cause of organic farming and of smallholders together with Jorian Jenks, Mosley's agricultural adviser, Lord Lynton, the Wyoming-born author of *Famine in England*, and Rolf Gardiner. This group saw environmental influences, not eugenics, as crucial: for example, infant feeding should be improved, so that 'a mother of C3 class, if undiseased herself, may ensure an A1 baby'.<sup>10</sup> European rats were compared unfavourably by one writer with Indian rats which ate organic breadcrumbs: 'One feels that the [European] rat would sooner sit and work at a bench or at a desk than make his muscles glow with hard work upon the field'.<sup>11</sup> Indian tribes in remote valleys were investigated to discover the causes of their superior health, teeth and longevity. Indian village compost-making was praised; the answer lay in the special virtues of recycling rotted waste, human and vegetable.

The paradox of the conservative ecologist position was that while materialism and hedonism were bad, the beauty and pleasure of rural life proved its virtues. This paradox was resolved through the Christian beliefs of the founders. It was man's duty to protect and conserve God's work. Like Massingham, C.S. Lewis criticised the teleological and manipulative scientific mind (see his attack on a disguised Olaf Stapleton in *That Hideous Strength*)

---

<sup>10</sup> Guy T. Wrench, *The Wheel of Health*, London: C.W. Daniel 1938, p. 51. Hugh Massingham's autobiography (*Remembrance*, London: Batsford 1941), as well as his *The Tree of Life* (London: Chapman and Hall 1943), uses the word 'ecological' in its normative sense.

<sup>11</sup> Wrench, *op.cit.*, p. 52.

and the concept of unlimited growth. H.G. Wells was the typical demonic figure for them; yet, as a typical economic ecologist, Wells was a member of the Kibbo Kift Kin.<sup>12</sup>

This group was formed by John Hargraves, a Quaker, in the early 1920s, after Hargraves read Rolf Gardiner's Guild Socialist magazine *Youth* at Cambridge. The Kibbo Kift was formed to help national regeneration through the countryside and it adopted Haeckelian theories. At first, members wore an Anglo-Saxon cowl and jerkin, topped with a Prussian army cloak, and their meetings were called the 'Althing'. Kipling and Nietzsche were among their inspirers, and their typically vitalist, anti-materialist slogan was 'All is Energy'. Their elitist philosophy combined beliefs in world unity, Social Credit and eugenics with, confusingly enough, an apolitical but *völkisch* nationalism, which is supposed to have influenced the German Youth Movement. The Kin included luminaries like Julian Huxley, Havelock Ellis, Norman Angell and Patrick Geddes, Professor of Botany and town planner. In the early 1930s the Kibbo Kift became the Green Shirts and organised marches and demonstrations by the unemployed.

The Kin was Germanophile, as were most middle-class, social reformist movements between the wars. Two Kin members, Gardiner and Lord Lyvington, contributed to the *Anglo-German Review* in the 1930s (some of whose articles, such as 'The Scottish Origins of National Socialism', drew annoyed rebuttals from the German contributors). Both Northern European nationalists, and with a common interest in ruralisation, they started the *New Pioneer* in 1938. It called for organic farming, back-to-the-land policies, and peace with Germany. Both men turned their estates into organic farming trusts. Gardiner afforested a desolate stretch of sandy Dorset heath. Gardiner had taken a troupe of folk dancers to Germany in 1921, and he wrote a Lawrenceian account of the call of the earth, the blood, and the electric excitement of communal dancing. His aim was 'a new union of Celto-Germanic peoples, from the Adriatic to the Arctic, the Vistula to the Atlantic'.<sup>13</sup> Racial frontiers were the 'real' ones: 'neither fascist blatancy nor Polish arrogance can obliterate them', he argued, in a veiled attack on imperialist fascism of the Mosley/Mussolini variety. In 1928 he attacked 'slavery to any nonsensical racial theory, such as a dogmatic belief in the Nordic race...', but gave a common Germanic

---

<sup>12</sup> For the Kibbo Kift, see J.L. Finlay, 'John Hargrave, The Green Shirts and Social Credit', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. V, no.1 (January 1970), pp. 53-71, especially 54-5; and D. Prynne, 'The Woodcraft Folk and the Labour Movement, 1925-70', *ibid.*, Vol. XVIII, no.1 (January 1983), pp. 79-97.

<sup>13</sup> H.R. Gardiner, 'A Common Destiny', in H.R. Gardiner and H. Rocholl (eds.), *Britain and Germany*, London: Williams and Norgate 1928, p. 127.

sympathy as a prerequisite for the international union he envisaged.<sup>14</sup>

The folk-dancing visits were reciprocated in the 1920s and continued after the Second World War, when Gardiner took a choir on a tour of Germany. He aimed to start a 'rural university' on his estate, which would include gymnastics, singing and Morris dancing, and he did run courses on rural husbandry. Gardiner criticised Mosley's British Union of Fascists for being lower middle class: national regeneration could only come from a combination of yeomen and aristocrats.

In 1940 Gardiner, Massingham and Lord Lymington established a group called Kinship in Husbandry, which wanted smallholdings, ecological protection and care for the earth. In the same year Lady Eve Balfour, author of *The Living Soil*, set up the Soil Association, which focused on one issue, organic farming. Correspondents and members had interests in wider aspects of rural reform and sometimes advocated Maoist agrarian communes, or the redistribution of land into very small plots, but the movement kept the argument on these issues to a minimum. In 1946, an attempt was made to form links with other countries, especially Germany, and German representatives, including an ex-Professor of Agriculture, later the Minister for Refugees in West Germany, attended a meeting to discuss possibilities. For reasons unknown to me nothing came of this meeting, and the German organic farming movement expanded and flourished as a separate organisation. The English conservative ecologists of the inter-war period continued with their programme of patriotic but moderate nationalism, an ethic of duty, service and care, nurture and tenderness for the earth, a Christian pantheism, and a paternalist social creed, focused also on the ideal of service.

### *The Steiner Connection*

Organic farming movements in Germany, despite the persuasive nature of their public case, are rooted in the theocratic mysticism of Rudolf Steiner (originally an Austrian Catholic) and the Anthroposophists. In the 1920s Steiner gave a series of influential lectures on the importance of the Earth, which he saw as the living mother, or biomass. He asked a follower to establish a farm to experiment with his ideas.<sup>15</sup> Steiner's constituency was the

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 126. See also H.R. Gardiner, *The English Folk Dance Tradition*, pamphlet published for *Die Hellerau Blätter*, Dresden: Dresden Verlag 1922.

<sup>15</sup> Hellmut Bartsch, *Erinnerungen eines Landwirts: mit Ergänzungen zu R. Steiners landwirtschaftlicher Impuls und seine Entfaltung 1924-5*, Stuttgart: J.Ch. Mellinger (no date; c.1948). A good and accessible work on Steiner is Geoffrey Ahearn's *Sun at*

professional middle class in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. These were the people who supported 'soft', social reformist ideas; indeed, Steiner's educational reforms, based on the so-called *Waldorfschule*, was originally aimed at helping the poor, the mentally handicapped and the hypersensitive child.

The values of the German Youth Movement - anti-urban, spiritualist, idealist - were inherently sympathetic to Anthroposophy. After the First World War many members of *Wandervögel* groups joined Steiner's movement. But, as quasi-anarchistic and apolitical as the Youth Movement, they had no political home, especially in the ferment of Weimar Germany. Conservative nationalists of the 1920s were not natural ecological sympathisers. Although often concerned for the same spiritual values, they subsumed such issues beneath their immediate concern for Germany's survival. The theoreticians of the neo-conservative movement looked for the sources of power, of action. Spengler argued that all man's constructs were artificial, essentially opposed to nature, while Ernst Jünger praised 'steel-like' warriors. However, the heirs of vitalist philosophy, including Heidegger and Friedrich Georg Jünger, saw technology and consumerism as parasitical and destructive, an interpretation especially dominant during the war. Jünger wrote that 'even the smallest technological labour-saving device consumes more energy than it produces', an analysis squarely in the tradition of the economic ecologists.

The most important ecologists belonged to the school led by the ethologist Konrad Lorenz. Although he was not incorporated into the rigid German or Austrian university system, there was a rapid and flexible feedback between his work and existing schools of biology. Lorenz's work followed the trail blazed by non-Germans, especially Whitman and Julian Huxley, but his chief emotional inspirer was Wilhelm Bölsche, author of *Love Life in Nature* and Haeckel's biographer. Vegetarianism, vitamins, and life-reform movements emerged not only from the open experimentalism of German free medicine, but from the holistic tradition of vitalist biology. What continuity was there between this tradition and National Socialism, which earlier I described as containing a 'soft' strand of ecologism?

Some members of the National Socialist government became prominent supporters of ecological issues and organic farming. They have been described as 'the first radical environmentalists in control of a state'.<sup>16</sup> A naturist hospital was named after Rudolf Hess (but re-named after his flight to England in 1941), while members of Hess's office, such as Antony Ludovici, argued for carefully planned, ecologically satisfactory land-use and planning. Fritz Todt and at least one of his members, landscape

---

*Midnight* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press 1984), which discusses *inter alia* Steiner's attitude to evolution and relativism.

<sup>16</sup> Milan L. Hauner, 'A German Racial Revolution?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. XIX, no.4 (October 1984), p. 685, n. 46.

architect and motorway designer Alwin Seifert, were ecologists: Seifert took a more extreme position, opposing land drainage, reclamation schemes and monoculture. He was an active follower of Steiner. The Nazi government was the first to insist that tree planting should include broad-leaved deciduous trees as well as conifers (1935), while hedgerow and copse-protection ordinances were passed in the 1930s 'to protect the habitat of wildlife'. Tension between Germany and Italy intensified when Mussolini persisted in cutting down trees in the South Tyrol. German spies in Poland in 1937 saw an outbreak of pine-bud mite, which destroyed vast tracts of forest along the German-Polish border, as tantamount to an act of war. Anti-vivisection laws were passed. R. Walther Darré, Minister of Agriculture from 1933 to 1942, conducted a campaign for organic farming between 1940 and 1941, against the wishes of Goering and Bormann. He received comprehensive reports from the Gauleiters of various areas which showed that many peasants, as well as large farmers, were switching to organic farming techniques. Darré's staff circulated a letter from the chemical giant I.G. Farben, who were alleged to be plotting against organic farmers. One third of the top Nazi leadership supported Darré's campaign; another third declined to lend support only because of the link with anthroposophical ideas. Himmler established experimental organic farms, including one at Dachau which grew organic herbs for SS medicines. His staff sent him papers on Vitamin B shortages as a cause of matriarchal societies and genetic problems with potash establishment in plants. Lorenz himself was able to continue his scientific research after the *Anschluss*, and both American and Russian biologists came to work in research institutes under the Nazis.

Clearly there was major continuity under National Socialism of earlier German traditions in this area. That in itself would not be surprising, as continuity of this kind can be found in many academic areas, including history. But the existence of ecological ideologues among the Nazi leadership does show that National Socialism was perceived at the time as a system which had room for ecological ideas. Certainly it was (in theory, if not in practice) anti-transcendental, and it was also opposed to capitalism and the mechanism of the market. The old critique of the mercantilist ethic was given lip service by the Nazis, as was the ideal of duty and service for the collective good. The emphasis on long-term aims also fitted the ecological framework. But ecologists were perceived as hostile to Germany's interests by the technocrats in the leadership, especially Heydrich, who set the SD to harass organic farmers and fringe naturist groups such as the nudists. Monists, Druids and the Union of Anthroposophists were all closed down in 1935. This was a result of the conflict between theory and political power rather than the triumph of one ideology over another. The war meant the final decline of the early ecological sympathisers.

Darré himself tried to start a 'Soil Association' in 1953, after his release from prison. He feared that his connection would be seen as giving the Association a 'nazistische' taint, and the idea tailed off. His old English friends and sympathisers

contacted him again and sent him works on smallholdings and organic farming. He wrote several articles on these themes for local papers under a pseudonym, and he reviewed Eve Balfour's book *The Living Soil*. The ex-owner of the experimental organic farm visited by Darré and other ministers in the 1930s continued to write to him from East Germany. Today *Demeter*, the title of the magazine of the anthroposophist organic farmers, is the name of a chain of health-food stores, and the movement is growing, with branches in Canada and Australia.

In a post-war Britain dedicated to large-scale planning, it took a German emigré, Fritz Schumacher (Small is Beautiful), together with John Papworth (Intermediate Technology), to revive conservationist ideals. Their constituency was not the demoralised and powerless conservative of the era, but the young left, the proto-hippy, reacting against a perceived establishment-led bureaucratic vandalism and waste of human effort. Despite the continuation of the old organic-farming, self-sufficiency groups, publicity and politicisation focused on a more unstructured set of beliefs. Let us look at the Greens in that context.

Today's Greens range from CND to the European New Right. They incorporate nomadic bands of witches, visiting Stonehenge to smear it with toad's blood and following the astral plane, and politicised animal-rights groups. The matriarchal pagan witches worship at the same standing stone in Germany as Darré did, complaining that the Nazis were far too patriarchal.<sup>17</sup> The New Right, grouped mostly in France, Italy and Belgium, base their Greenness on a cultural criticism. They are anti-technology, anti-American, anti-urban, anti-capitalist, and hostile to American nuclear missiles. There is a tendency to state a preference for Russia over America when pressed. They use socio-biological arguments to oppose democracy and are pan-European. Tolkien is one of their inspirers, though he would have been surprised at a hobbit movement which combined conservative moral, social and cultural values with an anti-conservative, revolutionary attitude.<sup>18</sup>

What do the witches and the French professors have in common, if anything? Can one talk of a common Green ethic, and what is the connection with the past?

The first point to note is that the groups I have discussed, past and present, are all anti-capitalist, pacifist, opposed to the market economy and to the ideal of transcendence (man is subject to the laws of nature), and in favour of a long-term view.

<sup>17</sup> Monica Sjoö, 'The Unofficial Herstory of the Externsteine, Ancient Sacred Rocks of Germany', *The Pipes of Pan* (Journal of Pagans Against Nukes), Beltane 1985, no. 19, p.4.

<sup>18</sup> Tolkien was inspired to create Gandalf by a German painting, *Der Berggeist* by Madalener, according to Humphrey Carpenter (*J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, London: George Allen & Unwin 1977, p.51).

They seek a return to tribal society and are communard and village-oriented. They oppose the nation state and have apocalyptic expectations of desertification, mass famine and *anomie*, together with the total pollution of air, soil and sea, to the point of endangering animal and plant as well as human survival. Today, all oppose nuclear power as well as nuclear weapons.

The moral values they have in common include the duty to nurture the earth and animals and care for future generations; quality, not quantity; distrust of large institutions; distrust of governmental institutions; pantheistic religious feeling; wholeness; the desire for a new culture, tribal or matriarchal; rejection of the old (not reactionary); opposition to what is perceived as the course of Western civilisation and to mercantilist, exploitative, materialist concepts; and the desire to conserve energy and other resources. If I point out at this stage that these values (apart from matriarchy) were all National Socialist ones, that does not mean I think today's ecologists are Nazis, only that many Nazis were ecologists. A science fiction novel published after the war by an ex-Nazi journalist paints a picture of a Green village utopia, and its rediscoverer points, quite rightly, I think, to the similarity between this and the radical Nazi desire for tribal stasis.<sup>19</sup> The fact that ex-Nazis can infiltrate Greens in Germany does not prove that German Greens are Nazis - they do dissolve these fake Green cells when they find them - but it does show that there is sufficient similarity in style and belief for a masquerade to take place.

The political manifestations of Greenness today are various. Greens have already split into churches, some broad, some narrow. The most publicised are the anti-nuclear movements, and here the German Greens are virtually a single-issue party and have attracted a broad left support, especially from left of the Communist Party. Greenness has, in short, been latched on to by single-issue groups. These can only be detected by looking for consistency. Animal-rights groups are consistent, if fanatical. Vegetarians are inconsistent; they do not try to convert carnivores, or not yet. Greens opposed to nuclear power stations are inconsistent; this is the cheapest and cleanest known way of generating power. Many pseudo-Greens belong to the Third-World lobby; they do not just demand a cessation of trade and commodity circulation, which would be consistent, but wish the First World to continue subsidising and providing unstringed aid for these countries. Similarly, entryist Greens in the Labour Party, while opposed to industry and trade, desire more state subsidies. Like the Nazis, they prefer state committees to the operation of the market, but unlike the Nazis, they do not seem to have thought it through. One key element of Greenness which marks Greens off from rural craftsmen or smallholders is that they are bad at being Green. Cobbett's peasant could live off a five-acre holding: today's

---

<sup>19</sup> Jost Hermand, 'All Power to the Women: Nazi Concepts of Matriarchy', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. XIX, no.4 (October 1984), pp. 649-50.

Green communities cannot be self-sufficient on three hundred acres, even in areas where the Welsh peasants around them are doing it all the time.

In categorising Greenness, then, the same problem arises as with revolutionary conservatives in Weimar Germany, or radical right groups anywhere, exacerbated by the left-wing entryism that has taken place - intensely conservative moral values, but a non-conservative political stance. There is opposition not only to the written rules, but also to the unwritten ones, because society has taken a wrong way and is dishonest, inauthentic. There is a desire for a return to single objects produced by one man, relating to a single consumer: the relationship between the three is as important as the object itself. It would be possible to dismiss the common denominator as simply anti-democratic: nicely so where single issues (whales etc.) are involved, not so nice when they invade Oxford laboratories and smear Sir Denis Noble's car with toad's blood. But the commitment or lack of it to a pluralistic democracy seems to me to be the least interesting thing about the Greens: and in any case, they all have a legal, parliamentary movement (although in Britain, as stated earlier, it is unlikely to succeed because of our electoral system). But what does render them important is their broad-church quality, and here my long historical survey reappears. The strength of the Greens is that they fuse the energy calculations of the economic ecologists with the bundle of moral values involved in both conservative and national socialist ecological movements. They can thus range from left-wing egalitarianism to anti-humanist elitism. They can appeal to anarchist libertarians, who also value the proper use of resources and see governmental and bureaucratic mechanisms as wasteful and destructive of human energy. On the whole, though, Greens see human energy as free and expendable and therefore as essentially less important than non-human energy resources. This can lead to troubling recommendations, such as Popper-Lynkeus' system of slavery mentioned above. The libertarian left have offered the concept of an infinitely self-adjusting feedback mechanism which can legitimate any system whatsoever: they insist that any viable energy system is, by definition, a viable ecosystem. This bit of entryism, though, strips the normativeness from ecologism and has been properly rejected by the Greens.

Here is a political movement fed by two streams: an apparently 'scientific' rational calculation of the 'best' way in which to run a society, backed by apocalyptic visions of no coal, or no oil; and a justified and powerful criticism of ugly, insensitive and wasteful societies, which has deeply influenced a deculturated generation inured to hardship of a sort through squats and drugs - proletarianised Greens whose roots have been lost by inadequate schooling and whose minds have been damaged by exposure to undisciplined music. This is a powerful and heady mixture, and it is not likely to go away.

ANNA BRAMWELL