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Innovation in movement politics: the repertoire of green parties in France and Great Britain

Florence FAUCHER

The greens have decided to get involved in politics in order to have a say in the crucial decisions that shape our lives. They are concerned and worried about the ecological and social crisis which, according to one of them, threatens "the future of any civilised form of life on this planet". They are moved by a feeling of urgency and are determined to assume their share of responsibility for the sake of future human (and non human) generations. If the environment is closely associated with green politics and has become their rallying issue, it does not however constitute their sole concern. Their program encompasses more than pure conservationist or environmentalist policies as their overarching long term goal is the implementation of a sustainable society.

The creation of partisan organisation marked the acceptance by the greens of the legitimacy of conventional politics as a potentially fruitful means to promote their ideas. Green parties have often been classified according to the strategy chosen to implement their common ideal. A green strategy combines a double-binding commitment to alternative means and absolute ends. Many a paradox which characterised the greens stem from this difficult articulation. Les Verts and the Green Party have enshrined in their constitution a commitment to the promotion of green ideas on the political agenda and the acceptance of the conventional political rules. The British greens, in particular, stress the endeavour to get people elected at all level of government (Constitution, article 2.b). As Les Verts do not stress their participative convictions, both parties have been seen as primarily motivated by the ecological crisis and its solution. Less conventional forms of participation seemed henceforth to be considered as secondary or relegated to non political organisations. They have been considered as power oriented groups (Rucht, 1990, p. 162), contrasting with alternative parties such as Die Grünen. Thus, they have been described as pure ecologist organisations with little interest in new politics demands.

However, such classifications underestimate the ongoing tension on strategy orientations which have characterised the French and British greens

as much as any other green party. If one considers activists' actions rather than their constitutions, both Les Verts and the Green Party are far less committed to a purely instrumentalist and institutionalised strategy than one might have expected (Miller-Rommel, 1985). They claim an interest in alternative politics and emphasise their connections with social movements and protests. Moreover they have demonstrated their willingness to preserve their alternative structures despite their possible counter-effectiveness. They try to combine both strategies and many debates have arisen from the necessity to choose between two partially contradictory strategies. They have often been sensitive to this potential incompatibility and have endeavoured to find ways to appear consistent.

Internal debates have played an important role in decisions related to electoral strategies and direct action. The Green Party has for some time been dominated by *Realos* preoccupied by practical policy outcomes rather than participative democracy. The conflict culminated in 1992 with the resignation of Sara Parkin and her team from the executive and the withdrawal of many of supporters from party activism, thus leaving space for the experimentation of new strategies advocated by those committed to grassroot democracy. Les Verts have, in a different context, undergone a similar process : activists opposed to electoral alliances left the party after 1993, allowing the elaboration of a new electoral strategy.

At any given time the strategy adopted by the greens is the result of the combined influences of the internal debate, the perceived context and the objective cluster of opportunities and constraints. The difficulties they have faced as new political actors do not necessarily plead in favour of the argument often put forward that the parliamentary strategy is the most efficient and effective one they could choose. Kriesi and *alii* insist on the role played by political opportunities and bring out three sets of properties : the formal institutional structure, the informal procedures and predominant strategies, the configuration of power (Kriesi et *alii*, 1995). They highlight the importance of the nature of the reaction of the authorities as well as the chances of success of action or non action. According to the criteria set by Kriesi as well as Kitschelt (Kitschelt, 1986), both countries appear to be relatively closed to new demands.

In France and Great Britain, the partisan and electoral systems have been largely hostile to new political parties¹. The French State remains largely inattentive to new demands and fiercely attached to the affirmation that it is the sole embodiment of the public good (Rucht et Midtun, 1994). France illustrates a situation of "selective exclusion" where the challenger can count on neither formal nor informal access to the political system although there are some limited possibilities of influence (Kriesi, 1995: 36). The closure of the French system invites disruptive actions (Kriesi et alii, 1992: 227). Comparatively, the British system may seem less exclusive: not only as a consultation process allows interest groups to influence the British administration (McCormick, 1991), but the absence of rigid rules on governmental action also gives almost unlimited flexibility to adopt or withdraw initiatives (Rootes, 1997: 4). Rootes stresses that in a context of relative openness, choices of direct action by British environmentalists has often been a tactical decision rather than a commitment to grass root participation.

The concept of a "political opportunity structure" often fails to take full account of the continuous changes going on. Besides, most of its variables only remain stable over a period of time. The electoral system or the party system for instance are far from being immutable as have demonstrated the various changes in electoral law in France or the appearance of new parties. The electoral system and campaign legislation, the structure of political cleavages, the nature of political institutions, and the openness of the state to discussion with interest groups, are variables which all contribute to determine the strength and the shape of the national green party. Choices of means of action are influenced and shaped by the contingency as well as by the objective institutional context in which parties evolve. However, the interpretation the greens draw of their environment plays a major role as many of their decisions have been interpreted in specific frames characterised by a prejudice against traditional political parties. Standing in elections is often seen as the main characteristics of political parties and the conviction that elections were the most effective way to put the message across was decisive in the creation of green parties. The greens have been keen about standing for elections although this has raised many questions about the alternative and radical character of their

¹ The success of Les Verts in the 1997 legislative elections is a consequence of the electoral pact with the socialists and therefore highlights the limited political space in which the French greens evolve.

organisation. The use they make of non conventional strategies has evolved according to the perception of political opportunities.

Strategy debates in Les Verts and the Green Party

The greens are disproportionately drawn from the new middle class fractions of our society, showing high levels of education and political concern. They feel they could and should contribute more to the political decision process and resent the representative system which only allows them to participate at election time. This attitude is related to their desire to transform politics in a more participative way, to empower citizens. Politics permeates every human action, from gender relations to lifestyle decisions and shouldn't be left to politicians alone. They believe that every one should take responsibility for one's actions, therefore getting more thoroughly involved in one's community. They condemn the disempowerment of ordinary citizens by traditional political parties. They criticise the institutionalised actors who protect their established positions and powers. They believe that permanent participation in the day-to-day running of the community would be a guarantee of efficiency and the means to overcome the imperfections of the representative system. Greens are keen to participate and many of them are hyperactive. Their commitment is consistent with their belief that the personal is political and that private behaviours should reflect one's attitudes and public positions.

Strategic debate are often characterised by the importance given to idealistic principles which confuse any analysis of political opportunities and constraints. Most of the time, greens make little attempt to identify potential allies or the most likely constituency: because they believe that green politics, as a consciousness raising process, is to enlighten everyone, many activists refuse the idea of targeting selected groups. Elections are seen as good opportunities to promote the cause: "*at the end of the day, elections is the only way,*" explains a member of Oxford Green Party, "*we can knock on door, we can talk to people, we can produce an awful lot of literature*"². Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the French greens confined themselves to ephemeral electoral coalitions of local groups.

² Don, Oxford Green Party election agent, May 1993. The 1979 General Election proved decisive in raising the profile of the party. As more than fifty candidates claimed to belong to it, Ecology Party got a few minutes of free electoral broadcasting, therefore allowing the message to reach a broader public. Ten years later, the European election proved even more effective as a recruitment campaign (the membership of the party rose to 18000 members in July 1990).

When the creation of a perennial organisation was at last accepted in 1984, standing in elections was seen as the demonstration of their willingness to become a political party and this commitment has never been really questioned since then. Standing in election is the most important political action ó and sometimes the only one as it attracts public attention to the cause ó in which local branches of Les Verts get involved throughout the year. Alternative strategies became second to this primary effort to exert influence on the party system.

Because any electoral strategy implies that the candidate or its party gets enough visibility and credibility to attract voters, the perceived organisational implications of such a choice fostered many tough debates. Moreover, the structures of green parties are more often than not inspired by direct-democratic principles. The greens have indeed attempted to create parties in which members play a major role in the decision-making processes. Not only do they elect and control the executive but they also directly contribute to the elaboration of policies and strategies. The greens promote new ways of practising politics and they advocate continuous involvement and participation in the party as well as in the community. Since they encourage participation, these structures were thought to contribute to the realisation of the sustainable society.

The British *fundi-realo* debate arose around the issue of centralisation or decentralisation of the national organisation. Eager to be able to play a role in national politics in order to implement the urgent measures they thought necessary, some activists advocated a centralised organisation, the election of an executive which would be able to reply swiftly to arising matters. A new constitution was adopted by the party conference in Autumn 1991. On the other hand, decentralists envisaged the party as a loose network of groups with the national organisation acting as a resource centre and were committed to participative democracy. They wanted the party to be a small replica of the ideal green community rather than an effective organisation geared at power and electoral or media success. They argue that not only demonstrations and issue campaigning draw attention to the party but it also convince people to get involved at the local level and therefore serve the party's image and credibility. As an Oxford activist puts it:

I don't think the Green Party does enough campaigning really, we're sometimes too busy fighting elections. We win because people think we've got something to campaign on and not because they've read our leaflet. We

won in St Clements because we gradually built up and there's been a lot of issues around on transport, on housing, that people have been really concerned about (Eric, Oxford Green Party activist, May 1993).

Similar concerns are often expressed by members of Les Verts who fear that too much focus on electoral activity does not allow the party to distinguish itself from more traditional political organisations of which they are so critical. They claim Les Verts should make an effort to be active more regularly in local campaigns.

I think we don't work enough with people, I've said that at various meetings, I am not the only one to have said so. We just act like the other political parties, that is, on the eve of the elections, we run a campaign for a fortnight, just like the others. Then we just go away. We must do politics everyday, well, every week, to be different (Marc, Les Verts du Pays d'Aix, July 1994).

French and British greens are equally committed to having an alternative party organisation which gives members control over the executive decisions and strategy. They are particularly worried by the thought that the electoral strategy could induce too many concessions to the representative system they despise. They don't want to lose what they perceive as their main organisational characteristics: empowerment of citizens and participative democracy.

Alternative political style and parliamentary strategy

Among Les Verts, the debate focused less on the implicit organisational consequences than on the nature and justifications of electoral pacts and alliances. Many feared that this would put an end to their radicalism and would shake the image of independence they had slowly built up. Above all they suspected advocates of such agreements of being primarily interested in electoral success and power. "*If the only objective is to win seats, then it is not alternative politics anymore*", remarks bitterly an activist from Aix. While British greens saw in centralisation a perversion of their ideals, the French feared such consequences would be brought about by collaboration with traditional political organisation. The image of the traitor, in France, is not associated with vicious attempts to centralise the party and take the power away from members but with treacherous surrender to a more powerful adversary.

In Britain, coalitions are exceptional as the plurality system allows single party government. Political parties are reluctant to announce any agreement before the elections and even if a few greens hoped that this could be an option, no party seemed interested in an electoral pact with such a marginal organisation³. Many among the Green Party claimed this would be an unnecessary concession to grey politics and that one would do better wait until they become really "green". On the contrary, the French two rounds majority system favours electoral pacts. While the first round allows the expression of dissent, the second gives an advantage to established organisations and coalitions. Therefore, right from the beginning of their political career, Les Verts had to consider this eventuality. As French movements have little scope of influencing state power, the electoral strategy could be seen as a potentially effective one.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, The French greens had worked with the alternative left. Many items on their agendas were similar even if their diagnoses were different. As Les Verts were looking for political partners, some activists tried to facilitate collaboration with their former allies. Few greens dared to suggest an alliance with the socialists who were looked at with suspicion after the betrayal of 1981⁴. Not only was the PS unreliable but the greens feared they would lose their autonomy. In 1986, a motion advocating the abiding by a strict autonomy rule won the majority and marked a break away from the previous search for alliances with small leftist groups. The affirmation of an autonomous identity and the refusal of any electoral agreement formed the core of their agenda. Until 1992, Les Verts kept out of any electoral alliance.

The foundation of Génération Ecologie in 1990 and its rapid growth as a rival organisation did not, in the first instance, convince Les Verts to revise their plans. They couldn't accept that they had worked so hard for more than ten years only to have their potential success stolen by opportunists. They thought the electorate would tell the difference between altruistic ecology and opportunism. The two stood against each other in most regions but they both benefited from the disarray of the socialists and

³ A local pact was signed between the Welsh Green Party and the Plaid Cymru, which allowed the greens to claim "half" an MP. However, the agreement was brought to an end by Green Party members.

⁴ Despite its promises, the PS only took a few symbolic measures.

from the crisis induced by the long period of socialist rule⁵. To counter-attack accusations of sectarianism, Les Verts reluctantly accepted an electoral pact. The *Entente des Ecologistes* stood joint candidates at the following 1993 legislative election. The partial eviction of the old left-right divide had been one of the trump card of the greens who defined themselves as neither left nor right. In 1993, however, the government was at stake and ecologists were summoned to position themselves. What they described as political autonomy was seen as unreliability and inconsistency and they added to the confusion by their lack of definite strategy. Disagreements on coalition strategies led to several splits in both Les Verts and Génération Ecologie and opened a period of disastrous electoral results for the greens.

The success, then decline of Les Verts in the early 1990s, is linked to the reluctance of many members to permit the institutionalisation of their party and the need to accept electoral partnership if the party were to play a role in the changing partisan environment. By 1992, Les Verts were convinced that they were bound to win since they were "*dans le sens de l'histoire*", they could not envisage that the situation was all but transitory. They thought they would play a pivotal role in the recomposition of the left but feared that an early agreement with a powerful ally would lead to their deradicalisation. Such an attitude explains why Les Verts often favoured less dangerous partners such as the alternative and second left. The strategy adopted in 1986 was consistent with an autonomous image, but changes on the political scene meant it was necessary to adapt to the situation. Drawing lessons from their unfruitful attempts to work with the alternative left, Les Verts resolved in 1997 to adopt a new strategy of alliance and they seem to have at last overcome their reluctance to party politics. After months of negotiations, Les Verts and the Parti Socialiste reached an agreement which was officially accepted in March 1997. The pact included an electoral dimension as well as an agreement on a few key symbolic issues including nuclear energy, the reduction of the working week, transport and a new

⁵ Boy, 1993 et 1996. Their success can be explained by changes in the French political landscape. The environment had become a salient issue but was still neglected by traditional parties. The European elections were thought to be the appropriate level to implement new ecological standards. Moreover the French party system was entering a phase of turmoil. The right-left divide was blurred and the socialist party was exhausted by many years of government. The weakening of the Parti Communiste turned *Les Verts* into the only remaining protest party on the left. As they appeared quite moderate and outside the traditional divide, they also attracted electors from the centre (Faucher, 1996). Similar explanations run for the 1989 European results of the Green Party.

citizenship⁶. Although the green candidates only polled 4.12% nationally, twenty candidates were able to stand in the second round and eight were elected⁷ on the 1st of June 1997.

Dominique Voynet joined the left government lead by Lionel Jospin but Les Vert have been careful to keep high their protest profile. During the Winter 1997-1998, they have actively taken part in the unemployed movement and challenged the government in the streets and in Parliament. If their participation in state power could induce observers to believe they have opted for instrumental strategies, their participation in movements shows that they need to maintain their profile and identity and therefore use expressive strategies. Although they have further engaged themselves in more traditional political styles, they are reluctant to shed their alternative past and are confronted with the traditional dilemma between protest actions and governmental solidarity.

Elections have been an issue in many a debate in the Green Party and repeated failure has led some of them into thinking that they were not worth the efforts and the money put into them. The 1994 European election raised the question again as party activists knew the results were to be disappointing compared to 1989. In the run up to the 1997 general election, the party principal speaker came up with a new strategy proposal which was defeated in conference in September 1996: it was suggested that the Green Party stood no candidate as a protest against the unfair electoral system. Most members doubted this would allow the party to get any publicity at all. The party needs at least 50 candidates to be eligible for a free election broadcast. It was decided that an effort would be made to stand in selected constituencies where the chance to get publicity are enhanced⁸.

A continuum of participation

In each party, some activists have pointed to the necessity to convert the people and have insisted on a preliminary "cultural revolution". They do not believe in the outright success of top-down ecological decisions nor do they think that such a model would be consistent with green principles. According to them, the empowerment of citizens in a bottom-up attempt to

⁶ Vert Contact, 451, March 1997, p. 5.

⁷ Four of them are not members of *Les Verts* but campaigned with their support (Aschieri, Marchand, Mamère and Rivasi).

⁸ Because a famous candidate is standing or because there is a chance to get a decent result.

change society implies much more than a mere education program through the diffusion of electoral literature.

Before pragmatic objectives and demands can be expressed, the new actor needs to be recognised as such by its potential partners (Cohen, 1985, p. 693). As demonstrated by Alessandro Pizzorno, the affirmation of a political identity is a necessary preliminary step for any social movement (Pizzorno, 1990). However, the identity of the movement is not definitely acquired at any point but is the outcome of a permanent construction, the process is never to be fully achieved. Identity is the produce of interactions within the party of members who enact the values they share and thus claim their autonomy as political actors (Faucher, 1992). The adoption of an expressive style by the greens is a response to the obstacles they face as new political actors. Given the difficulties the greens have had in establishing their autonomous identity, a tension between these two poles gives a clearer image of the dynamic evolution of green strategies over time. They try at all time to combine actions aimed at national power and government with others focused on the empowerment of citizens.

Most European green parties have their roots in new social movements from which they have inherited issues and tactics. It reflects their enthusiasm for renewed forms of political participation. Non conventional ways of participation compensate for the difficulties the greens have in expressing themselves in the official political broadcasts and news programmes. Moreover, although it is consistent with the instrumental outlook of political ecology, the electoral strategy and its limitations somehow contradict the commitment of the greens to participative democracy and, if it is to be played according to the rules of the game, it doesn't allow the expression of controversial policies and attitudes which can be better expressed in demonstrations and innovative actions.

Willing to expand the boundaries of politics beyond what is normally perceived as public life and elections, the greens have tried to follow the innovations brought about by NGOs. Not only do they try and organise campaigns which are as lively and colourful as possible but they also endeavour to promote some co-operation. Links between associations and new social movements are well developed in France because the ecology movement has long been indistinct from other new political groups. The foundation of Les Verts came relatively late and activists are eager to preserve these links which date back to the beginning of their political

career. They have never completely given up the idea that they were closely related to the broader alternative movement and, if often hardly noticed⁹, they have taken part in many a struggle on environmental as well as social issues¹⁰. The invocation of co-operation with association has moral tones and it is expected that all party members are also involved in "the social movement", i.e. in various local or national associations.

The idealisation of voluntary groups encourages Les Verts in asking people who are not actually members of the party but are locally known for their involvement in specific campaigns to stand as "*candidat d'ouverture*". Les Verts see such an attitude as a demonstration of their closeness with "civil society", a proof of their commitment to a participative democracy. Les Verts haven't completely shed their distrust of political parties and getting closer to associations is, for most of them, a means to refute the idea that their own party is increasingly institutionalised. Their reluctance in the face of institutionalisation is manifest in the reservations repeatedly expressed about their partisan nature: they resolved to adopt the title of "*parti politique*"¹¹ at the beginning of the 1990s under the pressure of the legislation.

British NGOs have always preferred to resort to conventional ways of promoting their cause to Whitehall officials and have been reluctant to be associated with a micro party remote from the arcades of power. They feared their support would undermine their legitimacy in the eyes of governing parties. More so than in the French case, links between the Green Party and associations have remained informal, based on individual multiple memberships¹². As a consequence, many activists have mixed feelings about members of environmentalist associations: they are only half way on the path to enlightenment and green consciousness. A few members

⁹ Les Verts have often been quite unsuccessful in getting the attention of the press. Many demonstrations gather too few people to be properly covered by the press even when they are organised by coalitions of groups, let alone when they are organised by Les Verts (in such instances, the presence of a political party is often regarded as disgraceful and incompatible with the authenticity of the movement!).

¹⁰ They have been particularly active in marches and demonstrations against social exclusion and homelessness.

¹¹ This decision was taken in order to comply with a new legislation on state funding for political parties.

¹² 74% of Les Verts belong to one association or more of whom 48% to an environmental group. The figures are similar in Britain: 87% of the greens belong to an environmental NGO (Roche et Benhamias, 1991, pp. 135; R, dig and *alii*, 1991, pp. 34).

express strong criticism of the environmental movement because it hasn't so far broken away from the industrialist paradigm. Conservation, according to them, has unfortunately more to do with conservatism than with ecology. An Oxford Green Party member explains her attitude:

I tend to be rather unenthusiastic about a lot of the pressure groups because they spend too much time fighting battles, usually defensive battles, which they tend to lose! It's too easy for the establishment, for the powers that be to keep them busy fighting these battles, while the establishment get away with things that nobody notices. It's all right to have people campaigning about individual planning decision or transport decisions but you need to have a broader perspective on it as well. You don't get that without having a political action and there's no doubt the politicians take more notice of votes. If they start losing votes they start to notice (Sue, Oxford Green Party, member of the Green Party Regional Council, May 1993).

Hardly existent before, links remained scant throughout the 1980s. However, this does not prevent new politics issues to form the core of the Green Party program. This may be due to the long and in depth reflection led by the British greens on their MFSS. The counterculture has also been able to thrive, inducing an influx of hedonistic and libertarian ideas. Indeed, many have found in the party an opportunity to voice their concerns and claims and some have hoped to make their party the facilitator of the wider green movement.

In France as well as in the UK, green party members often also subscribe to a number of movements¹³. However, high levels of membership do not necessarily imply equivalent levels of activism as many contributions are limited to giving money. Moreover, activists often restrict their active participation to one group at a time, turning to non political organisation when the local Green Party is little active (McCulloch, 1993). In Great Britain, many members have changed their commitment to the local party hence strengthening its ability to stand in elections. Many British local authorities are renewed by thirds, leading to annual electoral competition. When they manage to put up candidates every year, the British greens run a permanent campaign consistent with their desire to sustain a continuing participation in the democratic life of their community. Oxford Green Party is one of the local branches which has defended most fiercely

¹³ 74% of Les Verts and 69% of GP members are members of an association of which 48% of the French and 87% of the British belong to environmentalist groups (Faucher, 1997: 69).

an electoralist strategy against the advocates of purely non conventional action. Oxford Green Party has a long tradition of now successful electoral campaigns makes them a reference in such techniques. They have come to believe that a slowly building local profile will help them elect more councillors and thus will be instrumental in greening the city. However, Oxford activists are also involved in issue and community campaigning as they perceive the potential cross-fertilisation effects of such a strategy. To that extent, they oppose any plan which would limit the scope of the party to either elections or protests. The efforts they put into General and European elections aim to raise the profile of the party for local elections. Focused on local success and overworked by their year-round campaigns, Oxford greens consider that their experience shows how both strategies can be seen as complementary rather than exclusive.

New opportunities and constraints, new frame of interpretation

Although the greens claim that their actions are mainly inspired by their participative ideals, they are constrained by institutional rules and by the interpretation they make. The analysis of the objective "political opportunity structure" is not sufficient to understand action choices made by green parties. Activism is associated with a feeling of personal efficiency. Activists have to be convinced that the time they give is useful. The remoteness of any prospective electoral victory means that activists need to find justifications for their commitment to the green cause. Their interest in alternative forms of political participation can partially be explained by such circumstances.

Most groups only come to non violent direct action when they have experienced in vain all other institutional routes. Therefore, according to Lowe and Goyder, incidents have been relatively rare in Britain (Lowe and Goyder, 1983, p. 62). British politics has long been characterised by a relative openness to interest groups demands and concerns. Thanks to the consultation process, many associations found an easy and convenient way to influence political and administrative decisions. In return, many groups had adopted a conciliatory tone. However, such openness has been reduced by successive conservative governments. As direct access to the authorities about road projects has become more difficult, many groups had to find new ways of being heard (Radke, 1997). Thus, some have turned to non conventional actions. The rapid growth of protest movements followed the mediatization of the struggle against new road building projects.

Samuel Barnes and Max Kaase have shown how new modes of participation have spread in Western societies to the extent that the distinction between conventional and non conventional forms of participation is no longer valid (Barnes et Kaase, 1979). Few people indeed would now refuse to engage in what is perceived as the mere continuation of traditional participation (Topf, 1995). Direct action groups sprung up in Britain at the beginning of the 1990s, inspired by American radicals. Earth First! was created in 1991 as a network of autonomous groupings dedicated to non conventional forms of protest and participative politics. Because they have become more widespread, non conventional forms of action have lost their unpredictable character and henceforth part of their efficiency, leading to new waves of radicalisation (Tarrow, 1994, p. 9).

Most protesters are young radicals who feel alienated by party politics and are eager to confront the system. They have played an important role in the development of anti-road and animal rights campaigns. As protests against new road buildings took over the issue of landscape protection, the green movement was able to attract people from the wider public, beyond the usual audience of environmental associations. What was even more important was the ability of protesters to draw the attention of the media. The adoption of the Criminal Justice Act in 1994 outraged them because it outlawed alternative lifestyles as well as radical protests and unconventional behaviour. The multiplication of symbolic battles have encouraged the Green Party to modify its strategy.

A strategy working group was set up in 1991 as part of the Green 2000 project. Its objective was to come up with a comprehensive strategy for the future and practical propositions to improve the electoral performance of the party¹⁴. A questionnaire was sent to party members to evaluate their appreciation of various types of action. The working group reported that more than a quarter of the members weighed equally electoral and non electoral actions while the majority of the others were in favour of non electoral actions¹⁵. The absence of any concrete results¹⁶ is no doubt

¹⁴ The working group was a subcommittee of the newly created Green Party Regional Council, a body to which many opponent of green 2000 had been elected in 1991-1992. Many advocates of a pure electoralist strategy left the party soon after Sara Parkin.

¹⁵ 37% of the members surveyed by Strathclyde in 1990 and 1991 were in favour of non violent direct action (R, dig and *alii*, 1995, pp. 230-231). As most of the members of the GPRC working group were pro NVDA, they insist on the fraction of the membership who shares their ideas.

responsible for the frustration of activists. Many have lost faith in the parliamentary route and they increasingly express an interest in innovative forms of participation. The working group produced a document which was discussed by the party conference in April and September 1993. An analysis of the political background, opportunities and constraints was proposed, which accents were highly pessimistic: an unfair electoral system; a hostile media; a well-organised partisan establishment with a vested interest in keeping them out; a too materialist electorate and a green movement cautious not to be too closely identified with them (Basis for Renewal, 1993, PS 207).

From then on, the issue of non violent direct action (NVDA) became a fashionable issue for debate in the Green Party. In March 1993, the Green Party Regional Council decided to get involved in such protest activities and argued that it was a "long-established and respectable tradition in this country". A Committee of 100 was created¹⁷ which, after a few hesitations was approved by the Executive. At the following Autumn conference, the strategy motion was debated, amended and adopted which legitimised the NVDA. Since then those who oppose it have to justify their attitude. Leaflets and hand-outs were circulated at meetings and articles have been published in the newsletter¹⁸, asking people to join in : "If thou doest not act, thou doest nothing"¹⁹. The new strategy led to the creation of a new quarterly, Green Wing, which aim is to bring together activists from all greenish backgrounds²⁰. A calendar of green events and demonstrations is regularly published.

NVDA is often presented by green activists as an asset to recruit members who are reluctant to join any traditional political party and are looking for alternative forms of participation in tune with their alternative lifestyles.

¹⁶ The Green Party can only claim about one hundred and thirty local councillors, most of them at parish and district levels.

¹⁷ Frank Myers (1976), "Civil Disobedience and Organisational Change: the British Committee of 100", in Richard Rose, Studies in British Politics. A Reader in Political Sociology, London: McMillan, pp. 420-437. A tradition in Britain, NVDA is nowadays especially used by the green movement.

¹⁸ David Taylor, green World, n°3, septembre 1993, p. 4.

¹⁹ Gerrald Winstanley, 1649, quoted in of the Committee of 100's leaflet. This places the NVDA in a glorious historic context.

²⁰ From Friends of the Earth to Women's Environmental Network through London Cyclist Campaign and Friends and Families of Travellers. To a certain extent, the recent radicalisation of the Green Party has further increased the mistrust of some of the most traditional environmentalist groupings.

Road building at the moment is an absolutely central place where non violent direct action is being used. I think the importance of it is that it is people taking power for themselves, people taking control of their own lives. Direct action contrasts with indirect action which is when you ask someone to do something for you and it is a profoundly green idea that communities take control over their own destinies and their own environment. And that is why I think there is a close connection between non-violence and green politics. I see it as complementary to all of the other tactics that we have available to us. You can't just overthrow the state from below, you have to have some facilitation, you have to have some reciprocation, some co-operation by the state and that I think is where electoral politics comes in. But non violence is a crucial component. It basically stands with frustration from the conventional environmental groups who concentrated too much on lobbying and not in empowering people and communities (Alex, Leeds Green Party, member of the Green Committee of Hundred, September 1993).

The distinction between legal and illegal action is not really helpful in a study of new forms of political action as definitions related to legality or legitimacy of an action are both subjective and cultural (Topf, 1995, p. 67; Favre et Fillieule, 1994). Activists from the Green Party who join the movement learn specific demonstration tactics: some have moved temporarily to squats, to tree houses, others have chained themselves to trucks carrying calves. Their knowledge is diffused thanks to training sessions whose organisers claim that it would help to "*increase the chances of success of your group by discovering new ways of protesting peacefully but efficiently*". The relationships between the Green Party and groups such as Earth First! are problematic because the latter clearly intend to get involve in any illegal or destructive action which, according to them, would be in the "superior interest of non human beings".

Participation in protest activities is an indicator of a willingness to increase participation but does not really constitute a distinct repertoire. However, it raises crucial questions to alternative political parties. Opponents to the NVDA strategy have indeed expressed concerns that such actions were inconsistent with claims that the Green Party could govern the country. They ask how a party can be involved in breaking the law and disrupting public order while at the same time asking to be elected to make laws it doesn't respect. On the contrary, one of its advocate points at the non violent principles at the core of the NVDA philosophy:

The connection between non violence and green action is very close indeed : if you're taking action because you cherish the Earth and you

believe that all things on Earth are interconnected, then you believe that the people you meet on an action are part of the Earth themselves, and that you defend all of the Earth, you defend the bits of it that have leaves on it, the bits of it that are wearing policemen uniforms, all without prejudice, so for that reason non violence is absolute, but yes we are extreme, we are confrontational and, connected indirectly to Earth Firts! is the more shadowy organisation the Earth Liberation Front, the Elves or the little people who will, under the cover of darkness, be trashing the machinery and causing economic sabotage, much as the Animal Liberation Front has been doing for some time and again this is very extreme, very radical but still utterly non violent, we won't touch a living thing, we won't place a living thing in danger. But the machines, the tools of destruction, we will destroy them at every available opportunity and you know some say it is the little people from the hills coming back to help humanity. Some say it's a bunch of trustees going out into darkness smashing things (Alex).

Taking part in protest activities may encompass some physical risk. Not only are demonstrators sometimes hurt in clashes with the police but many have faced arrest. Threats are rarely sufficient to convince people not to take part (Opp, 1986). Police intervention does not seem to deter activists but rather serves as an incentive when people identify (Hirsch, 1990, p. 252) with the heroes active in the struggle against the "system".

Traditional forms of participation do not allow to the same extent the development of solidarity. Here, danger and isolation foster feelings of belonging while only electoral campaign sometimes provide similar circumstances. Thus, to a certain extent, the Criminal Justice Act had the exact opposite effect of what was intended. It contributed to the development of new links between groups and in the expansion of the green network. It provided arguments to strengthen solidarity while activists' enthusiasm was boosted by testimony of altruism. Green Wing reported in October 1995 about a dozen "places of resistance" and urged its readership to join in. In February 1996, the Newbury bypass had attracted about a hundred and fifty demonstrators living in trees and scattered between nine camps. Co-operation is an essential component of the long lasting "third battle of Newbury". The Oxford Green Party, among other groups, organised regular trips to bring food and equipment. Some even decided to stay for a few days and share the experience and the excitement.

Civil disobedience is a highly symbolic action which is not undertaken unless there is an audience who can witness and report what has happened (Rucht, 1990, p. 160). Because they help in the organisation and planning of such protests, the Green Party contributes to the creation of a

green identity closely associated with protest movements. Such actions, especially when the outcome is predictable, are intensely expressive. The British protesters have taken advantage of the photogenic nature of their struggle and have mastered mediatization of their conflicts with road builders and the police. In many cases, reports of the protests have been limited to a few pictures with subtitles. They may well live in trees but they are connected on the internet and use cell phone to contact journalists. They carry video cameras to film what happens when the police attack their camps. They use danger to create a momentum.

Protests belong to an expressive repertoire. This stems from the desire of the greens to convince the public as well as from an effort to reaffirm the values and principles which inform their actions. Dramatization is a consequence of the greens convictions. NVDA is meaningful in itself and very few participants are naive about the chances of success. They only hope they can delay the project, increase the costs and raise awareness in the population. Moreover NVDA demonstrates that the greens are close to the social movements, clearly distinct from traditional political parties. They believe in what they are playing, in the reality they create through their action.

Conclusion

The institutional framework as well as informal conventions constitute opportunities and constraints which influence the strategies of green parties, their success or their failure. Ideological organisations, green parties evolve and change their strategies according to inner debates and factional balances. However, they are not isolated from their environment which transformations contributes to the evolution of interpretation frames. Beyond what can be analysed as relatively stable characteristics of a given polity, political contingency and conjuncture can alter considerably the context in which a group or a movement evolves.

In recent years, the Green Party has moved to a strategy including at the same time a commitment to standing in elections and participation in new radical environmental protests. The shift to direct action has been possible because an important fraction, who strongly opposed it, left the party. The rigidity of the last conservative government on several symbolic road developments triggered the creation of networks inspired by the performances of American eco-warriors. Radical ecologists remain a very small minority of the environmentalist movement in Britain. However, their visibility, their capacity to block the system and challenge it represent, for

Green Party activists disillusioned by decades of vain campaigning an attractive alternative to their traditional means of putting the message across, i.e. election campaigns. At a time when the party had been pronounced dead and buried by the media²¹, they seized this opportunity to prove it was still alive and kicking.

New constraints have influenced environmental challenges but changes in the balance of internal factions have also induced a transformation in the frames of interpretation. Having lost their monopoly over the political wing of the French green movement, Les Verts tried to find allies. The advocates of a strict independent strategy left the party after 1993, leaving space for a realist non isolationist strategy. This new orientation was influenced not only by a more accurate analysis of the electoral system constraints but also by a strong desire not to appear sectarian. The internal balance of power and the choices of means of action are interdependent. They are linked to external factors such as institutionalised and informal procedures, the configuration of power. They must be taken into account and analysed simultaneously in order to understand green parties' changing strategies. Finally contingent and contextual events and elements often decide whether the changes are relevant to the fortune of the party.

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²¹ The press first wrote the obituary of the Green Party in 1992, after the poor general election results, then after the resignation of Sara Parkin. The issue was brought back by the disappointing European election performance of 1994.

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