Part Four

The Green Challenge
Turning Point

It should by now be apparent that green politics is not just another dimension of the disintegrating industrial world order; it is something qualitatively different. This hasn’t as yet dawned on the vast majority of political commentators, and by refusing to accept the limitations of conventional left/right politics we have perhaps been asking for trouble. All political positions are open to misrepresentation, but because it is relatively new to the scene, green politics is particularly vulnerable. Distortions therefore abound, two of which are especially damaging to the long-term development of the whole movement.

The first is the notion that we are intent on taking people back rather than forwards – back to nature, back to the land, back to the bicycle even! I hope I have made it clear that in no way do ecologists contemplate a return to the primitive deprivations and discomforts of the pre-industrial age. Nor does the concept of the ‘stable state’ require that civilization should permanently stagnate in some sustainable stew-pond. What we are talking about is a retrieval of some of the old wisdom to inspire genuine progress through a ‘civilized accommodation to nature’, a state of dynamic equilibrium and harmony. Only in one respect is it correct to say that we would like to move backwards: if it is accepted that the politics of industrialism, which in chapter 4 I likened to a three-lane motorway, has indeed brought us to the edge of the abyss, then it makes a great deal of sense to take a few steps back.
The second major distortion involves the belittlement of green politics by suggesting that it relates exclusively to the physical, non-human environment. I have tried to demonstrate that the politics of radical ecology embraces every dimension of human experience and all life on Earth – that is to say, it goes a great deal further in terms of political comprehensiveness than any other political persuasion or ideology has ever gone before. As such it is the only expression of genuine opposition to the dominant world order. If there is still any doubt in your mind as to the validity of that claim, you may care to cast your eye over the full range of differences that distinguish the two world views or paradigms looked at in Parts Two and Three of this book.

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Even the most cursory glance at such a comparison should demonstrate that the old age is giving way to the new, that the turning point is already with us. Everything that once served to enhance both individual and collective security now serves to undermine it: larger defence budget, more sophisticated weaponry, the maximization of production and consumption, higher productivity, increased GNP, the industrialization of the Third World, expanded world trade, the comprehensive exploitation of the Earth's resources, an emphasis on individualism, the triumph of materialism, the sovereignty of the nation-state, uncontrolled technological development – these were once the hallmarks of success, the guarantors of security. Collectively they now threaten our very survival. E. P. Thompson has described
the determination of industrial nations to carry on down the same road as 'exterminism'. In Germany they use the word 'vitalism' to characterize the alternative.

The full extent of the crisis is now clear. The spirit of industrialism is rapidly losing its grip. The doctrine of scientific rationality and material growth has signally failed to provide people with any lasting ideals or values - so much so that the very legitimacy of the dominant world order is now in question. Duane Elgin refers to this state of limbo as an 'arrested civilization . . . one that is paralysed into dynamic inaction. The social order is expanding all of its creative energy on just maintaining the status quo. The winter of industrial civilization appears to stretch into an endless future.' The writing is indubitably on the wall, but the problem is that for many the ink remains invisible.

**Time is Running Out**

The Chinese word for 'crisis' (wei-chi) means both 'danger' and 'opportunity'. Authors within the green movement are well aware of this ambivalence, yet it is surely significant that so many feel the time is now ripe to stress the opportunities rather than the dangers, be it through the kind of high-technology optimism of Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave* or through the inner potentialities of Marilyn Ferguson's *Aquarian Conspiracy*. In *Muddling towards Frugality* Warren Johnson even manages to make a virtue of the impotence and failure of Governments to meet people's need, in as much as these should provide a stimulus to adaptation through the sort of self-reliance and co-operation that local communities must inevitably resort to. And Willis Herman draws an analogy from the world of psychotherapy to bring hope even to the most despairing breast:

All we have learned of psychotherapy suggests that it is at the precise time when the individual feels as if his whole life is crashing down around him that he is most likely to achieve an inner reorganization constituting a quantum leap in his growth towards maturity. Our hope, our belief is that it is precisely when society's future seems so beleaguered - when its problems seem almost

staggering in complexity, when so many individuals seem alienated, and so many values seem to have deteriorated - that it is most likely to achieve a metamorphosis in society's growth towards maturity, towards more truly enhancing and fulfilling the human spirit than ever before.²

It may be no coincidence that all these authors are Americans. The optimism of the European greens is rather more restrained and sometimes even a little fatalistic: 'Europe will be green or not at all' is one of the more striking of the slogans of the French ecologists. We are perhaps more conscious of the extraordinary lengths to which people are prepared to go in order to avoid the implications of the green analysis, denying the evidence of their own eyes, blaming it all on a range of readily available scapegoats, indifferently pretending it doesn't really matter, or escaping into a world of hedonistic isolation. Many seem resigned to whatever may happen, and many more cling to their dependence on the powers that be.

We may also be more conscious in Europe of the habitual failure of the imagination to cope with radical change. For instance, many literally cannot think their way through to a future that is not dependent on economic growth. Common sense alone should demonstrate the benefits of working and producing things to meet people's needs directly rather than working and producing things to make enough money to meet people's needs indirectly. But the idea of any significant or long-term reduction in the material standard of living is so hard for many to take on board that politicians understandably feel under no obligation to strip down their clapped-out ideologies and start again. This, one suspects, has always been the case; the Industrial Revolution was itself carried through against the interests of the politicians and members of the aristocracy who then wielded the power in the land. The post-industrial 'revolution' will no doubt follow the same pattern: because the politicians have always got more to lose than the people whom they claim to represent, they will change their ways only when people positively oblige them to. What it all boils down to is just how much time we have to effect such a transformation.

Our real fear is not that we shall run out of oil or clean water or
other vital resources, but that we shall run out of time. All societies depend upon a balance of coercion and compliance; if a Government fails to win the hearts and minds of people in persuading them to comply, then the balance inevitably swings towards coercion. And as Governments obstinately turn their backs on the future by attempting to recreate the material successes of a bygone age, we must anticipate an extended period of social turmoil. Economic hardship and personal alienation will provide the surest footing for the spread of authoritarian ideas. As Jim Garrison puts it, 'It is an axiom of history that when the people begin to question the right of their leaders to govern, the leaders question the right of the people to question.' Ever more vociferous calls for a 'firm hand on the tiller' will encourage such Governments to move away from accommodation towards quasi-totalitarian measures of control, which in turn will lead us inexorably into the cycle of protest, repression, further protest, the temporary suspension of certain freedoms and unavoidable violence.

Only the most complacent of commentators could suppose that such a cycle has not already been initiated in Britain: the control of the mass media, an increase in centralized databanks, in personal surveillance and 'precautionary' telephone-tapping, the suspension of certain trade union rights, a 'restructuring' of the welfare state, a widening of wealth differentials, an isolationist, life-boat ethic, a 'survival of the fittest' philosophy, the steady military build-up, an increase in political terrorism, moves towards an armed police force and, above all, the erosion of local democracy, as seen in the rate-capping Bill and the decision taken by Mrs Thatcher's Government to do away with the Greater London Council and other metropolitan authorities in 1986: which are the causes and which the effects of a slide down such a slippery slope? Taken alone, each of these phenomena may not mean much; taken together, do they not betoken a gradual decline into a state of quasi-totalitarian democracy, in which the trappings of a parliamentary system are upheld while the power resides elsewhere?

There should be no illusions about the urgency of this: as more and more people are driven into positions of political extremism, the threat posed to democracy today is as great as the threat to the biosphere. Fascist movements are already hard at work making systematic political warfare on the rights of ethnic and other minorities. A combination of permanent recession and the indiscriminate introduction of new technologies means that many people will not only never work but will feel increasingly encouraged to endorse totalitarian solutions. When personal alienation feeds on ecological breakdown, then all we have to look forward to is a veritable 'technocracy of the ruins'.

Political parties invariably, if understandably, have difficulty in adapting themselves to conditions other than those which gave birth to them, but the cruellest irony of all is simply this: many of those who are most outspoken in their protests against the erosion of democracy are themselves deeply implicated in perpetuating the sort of politics that has inevitably brought us to such a parlous pass. Politicians of left, right and centre are all both parents and prisoners of the current crisis; and in their refusal to help liberate others through liberating themselves, they are all deeply conservative and deeply reactionary. By clinging with growing desperation to the industrial paradigm, by supposing that the politics of plenty (or what Hazel Henderson refers to as the 'politics of the last hurrah') is still the only way to achieve progress, they condemn both themselves and us. To them will fall the increasingly thankless task of dividing up a diminishing economic pie that they have promised should be getting larger; to us will fall the sordid consequences of so profound a failure collectively to get a grip on reality.

Where the Wasteland Ends

The longer we resist the inevitability of change, the less chance is there that we shall achieve it democratically; the sooner we commit ourselves to change, the easier such a process will be. Green politics has come of age just in time. Summing it all up, Lewis Mumford wrote: 'All thinking worthy of the name must now be ecological.' And being the great visionary that he was, he did not mean by 'ecology' some kind of all-purpose, reformist repair kit to patch up and protect the status quo, ascribing purely utilitarian values to the rest of creation, anthropocentric to its
inevitably bloody end; he meant ecology in all its biocentric, holistic fullness, seeing humankind as just one strand in the seamless web of creation, not above or outside creation but miraculously incorporate within it. Even ecologists are only now beginning to realize the revolutionary implications of the seeds that they have helped to sow. Way back in 1972 Theodore Roszak wrote a stunning book called Where the Wasteland Ends (which for me personally was the first book to lift me up out of the slough of industrial despond), in which he posed a crucial question:

Ecology stands at a critical crossroads. Is it too to become another anthropocentric technique of efficient manipulation, a matter of enlightened self-interest and expert, long-range resource budgeting? Or will it meet the nature mystics on their own terms, and so recognize that we are to embrace nature as if indeed it were a beloved person in whom, as in ourselves, something sacred dwells? The question remains open: which will ecology be, the last of the old sciences or the first of the new?

That question is now answered, not just through the birth and growth of green movements and green parties throughout the Western world but also through the crucial distinction such parties insistently draw, often to their own immediate disadvantage, between ‘deep ecology’ and ‘shallow ecology’, between genuine green politics and the sham of reformist environmentalism. In Person/Planet Roszak appropriately answers his own questions:

My purpose is to suggest that the environmental anguish of the Earth has entered our lives as a radical transformation of human identity. The needs of the planet and the needs of the person have become one, and together they have begun to act upon the central institutions of our society with a force that is profoundly subversive, but which carries within it the promise of cultural renewal.

This then is the time when we must pose the full challenge of the green perspective. Despite genuine sympathy and profound respect for the many ‘vaguely greens’ in other parties, for so-called ‘non-political’ greens in a so-called ‘green movement’, for progressive socialists, old-fashioned Conservatives, radical Liberals and innocent Social Democrats, for feminists and peace activists, for defenders of human rights and animal rights, for followers of Christ or Gandhi or the Buddha or Lao-Tzu, and for those who are none of the above but just love their children or just love the Earth – I must now ask why, oh why, are you out there directly underwriting or indirectly condoning the perpetuation of soul-destroying, life-destroying industrialism?

And should I ever have the privilege of asking you that question face to face, don’t put me off with protestations about the time not being ripe or the circumstances not propitious, for I would then be forced to reach for the Green Party’s 1983 election manifesto, Politics for Life, which opens with these uncompromising words of Fritz Schumacher:

We must do what we conceive to be the right thing and not bother our heads or burden our souls with whether we’re going to be successful. Because if we don’t do the right thing, we’ll be doing the wrong thing, and we’ll be part of the disease and not a part of the cure.

The last chapter of this book is for those whose heads are not bothered and whose souls are not burdened by the snares of ‘success’ as interpreted by the present world order, and who are prepared, in their own way, even now, to embrace the radical alternative of green politics. Although I have addressed the challenge primarily to those already involved in politics or in the environment movement, it seems to me that the green alternative makes as much sense, if not more, to those who are less readily defined. It must, however, be said that it will be easier for some than for others!
Whither Socialism?

Herr Kohl’s favourite joke during the 1983 election campaign in West Germany was to compare die Grünen with tomatoes: they start out green and then turn red. Like so many contemporary politicians, he’s got things completely the wrong way round: most of the reds who joined die Grünen in the early 1980s have since gone genuinely green. Most members of the Labour Party in Britain wouldn’t even understand the joke, let alone Herr Kohl’s misapprehension. An article in The Times in April 1984 entitled ‘Let’s Make the Red Flag Green’, written by Robin Cook, Labour MP for Livingstone and one of Neil Kinnock’s ‘kitchen Cabinet’, must have come as a bit of a shock to most of his colleagues who up until then had been firmly of the opinion that green politics was all about looking after the leprechauns at the bottom of the garden.

Robin Cook’s article rightly referred to ‘areas of powerful congruence between socialists and ecological thinking’, particularly in terms of our shared commitment to achieving social justice and of our analysis of the contradictions inherent in capitalism. The consequences of higher productivity in a capital-intensive economy have, however, not yet dawned on most members of the Labour Party. As I have already demonstrated, higher productivity without growth in demand and output means mass unemployment; higher productivity with growth in demand and output means ecological catastrophe. Capitalism can indeed survive only through permanent expansion—which in turn means the accelerating contraction of our life-support systems. But as things stand today, this is just as much of a dilemma for the Labour Party as it is for the Tories. Labour’s ‘Alternative Economic Strategy’ demands exponential increases in economic growth of up to 7 per cent to create just 1½ million jobs! Are we to assume that we need a 14 per cent rate of economic growth to get back to ‘full employment’? This purportedly ‘radical’ strategy shows absolutely no interest in either the destruction of the environment or the quality of the work that might be created by such an emphasis on growth. In Robin Cook’s own rather damning words: ‘Neither the market capitalism of America nor the state capitalism of the Soviet Union has produced an economic model which respects the fine tolerances of nature or grants self-respect to labour.’

This continuing obsession with industrial expansion, against the interests of the planet and therefore of its people, is currently reflected both in the insistence on centralized planning and an approach to Britain’s industrial problems totally at odds with the views of those socialists who still hanker after the inspired decentralism of William Morris, and in the emphasis on extended nationalization programmes and the public ownership of the means of production, for which there is absolutely no case if the objectives to be pursued are as destructive and as narrow as those of privately owned big business. Those who still subscribe to an essentially Marxist analysis of the role of the state and the need to seize control of it, by force if necessary, are unlikely to be ready disciples to the green cause. It is transparently dishonest to suppose that socialists are any better at relinquishing power than those from whom they are accustomed to seize it. As James Robertson points out, if we are truly looking for a withering of the state, then we need to be thinking of a one-stage and not a two-stage process.

This also raises many problems for the trade unions. Their insistence on propping up the formal economy at all costs and enthusiastically endorsing the philosophy of industrialism (which they perceive to be the only way of defending their members’
engaged in the exploitation of the planet, albeit for the ‘best possible motives’, are in the business of destroying wealth rather than redistributing it.

Such aspects of contemporary socialism are hardly surprising, given its uncompromisingly materialistic orientation, its chronic tendency to look to the white heat of technology as the means by which progress will be achieved and its ill-disguised contempt for spiritual and non-economic values. In his book _Green Politics_, Fritjof Capra records this highly significant comment of Roland Vogt, one of the twenty-seven MPs in the West German Bundestag: ‘The materialist-leftist approach is destructive within the Greens. Whenever the visionary or spiritual people make a proposal, the Marxist-oriented greens neutralize it as effectively as acid.’ This need to strip off the materialist blinkers is closely linked in green politics to the emphasis we place on non-violence. Unlike many socialists, we do not see non-violence as just another useful tactic in the ‘struggle to seize power from the enemy’. It is rapidly becoming the cornerstone of all we aspire to achieve. In the words of Martin Luther King, ‘We no longer have a choice between violence and non-violence. The choice is either non-violence or non-existence.’ It is no accident that much of the impetus for this shift of emphasis comes from a flourishing eco-feminist movement, and one cannot help but suppose that many within a predominantly patriarchal labour movement, despite lyrical protestations to the contrary, would find it difficult to accept the emphasis that we place on feminist values and the extent to which they underpin green politics.

These then are some of the green stripes that Robin Cook and other members of the Socialist Environment and Resources Association must imprint on their red flag. The fact that the flag would then be almost entirely green leads one to suppose that there may well be easier ways of achieving the same goal. But the movement from red to green is inevitable, for the current theory and practice of socialism is both unsustainable and unrealistic. The progressive, radical libertarian thrust of socialism has been vitiated by its wholehearted commitment to materialist industrialism: one simply cannot cure today’s problems with the means that have produced them. The task confronting ‘green’ socialists in
Britain is therefore enormous—and they will find that there's a
great deal more to green politics than simply nicking our slogan!

The Extremists in the Centre

When it comes to the greening of the Liberal Party, green
Liberals do not have quite such a formidable task on their hands.
It is my perception that of all the major parties in Britain, the
Liberals are the most likely, both by temperament and by reason
of political expediency, to move towards the green position. This
may seem paradoxical, given the present leadership and outlook
of the Liberal Party, but there are many who believe that this is
nothing like as fixed and unyielding as it may appear. Many of the
problems arise from the present alliance with the Social
Democratic Party (SDP), for in almost every respect the SDP
endorses and reinforces the greyest and gloomiest areas of con-
temporary Liberalism. The key phrase in the Alliance’s 1983
general election manifesto, clearly showing David Owen’s iron
fist in David Steel’s woolly mitten, was simply this: ‘We must
ensure Britain’s economic recovery in a brutally competitive
world.’ Remember Keynes and the need to pretend for another
hundred years that ‘fair is foul and foul is fair: for foul is useful
and fair is not? Remember our model industrialist exhorting those
Durham students to get out there and compete for the world’s
diminishing resources ‘while they’re still there? Those who
choose to live by brutal competition will assuredly die by it.

The Alliance is still fundamentally expansionary, growth-
oriented, conventionally Keynesian and reflationary in its
economics. Both parties within it still talk glibly of a return to full
employment, and both are committed to a massive increase in
world trade. Both are ardent advocates of the ‘free market’, and
find the idea that we may have to control the development of new
technologies utterly abhorrent. They are, in short, un-
reconstructed capitalists for the simple reason that they have not
yet realized that modern capitalism will destroy the planet long
before it manages to meet the needs of the people who depend on
that planet. All their talk about ‘green growth’ is therefore a
transparently obvious and dishonest ploy designed to drape a few
green trimmings over their grey old shoulders. We should not
forget that in 1979 the Liberal Assembly passed a surprisingly
radical ‘no-growth’ motion, which was promptly disowned by
the Parliamentary Liberal Party and has not been heard of since.
Despite all the hard work of the Liberal Ecology Group and the
recent upsurge of green interest among the Young Liberals, the
Liberal Party itself has actually moved back rather than forward
since 1979.

It should also be pointed out that both parties are firmly
‘Atlanticist’ in their outlook, and the influence of the SDP has
done much to delay the long overdue shift within the Liberal
Party to an unequivocally unilateralist stance. Attempts by ordi-
inary members of the party to force their leadership to disown
Cruise missiles and all other American weapons based in the UK
have been consistently thwarted. The Alliance manifesto for the
1984 European elections demonstrates the extent to which both
parties are firmly wedded to NATO and to the special relation-
ship with the USA. The notion of non-alignment is obviously
particularly distressing to David Owen, who for many years has
been a member of the Trilateral Commission, an enormously
powerful group of politicians and industrialists with the specific
role of promoting Western capitalism. (The Commission recently
proposed that Japan, a country whose economic success has been
largely dependent on the fact that it spends almost nothing on
defence, should now be asked to contribute to the huge defence
costs of Europe and the USA: such is the nature of ‘radicalism’
within such an organization.) On top of that, both parties are
fervently in favour of the EEC, and both believe that the sort of
proposals outlined in the Brandt Report to increase our pros-
perity in the process of doing something about the Third World
are the only way of helping the world’s poor.

Both Steel and Owen talk at one and the same time of being
‘moderate’ and yet ‘radical’. As it happens, they are neither. The
reality of contemporary centrist politics, with its inability to be
anything other than an amalgam of left-wing industrialism and
right-wing industrialism, means that the so-called ‘moderates’ of
the Alliance are in fact the most extreme of all today’s extremists.
Their inertia, their nostalgia for the past, their partial vision, their
very reasonableness and establishmentarianism ensure that even in
their most dynamic, insightful moments it is an extreme of conservative reaction that they serve rather than any inspired accommodation with the planet. As we stand on the threshold of a new age, one has to be adjudged an extremist if one still supposes that it is possible to achieve lasting security through dependence on nuclear weapons or the build-up of conventional arms; that it is possible to help the Third World while the First World continues to help itself to the wealth of our finite planet; or that it is possible to maintain present rates of economic growth while simultaneously safeguarding the biosphere.

And it is equally absurd that the Alliance should claim to be radical. In steadily applying itself to the alleviation of the symptoms of industrial decline, centrist politics actually makes a virtue of ignoring the causes or the roots of the problems. To promote that particular blend of institutionalized reformism, to pour the soothing balm of moderation on the so-called ‘extremes’ of right and left, to recycle the tarnished successes of a bygone age—is that really all the future offers? Without acknowledging the primacy of an ecological analysis, the roots that any political party puts down are by definition illusory. When looked at from this perspective, the SDP and those Liberals who support the Alliance are about as radical and as green as a dying elm tree.

Fortunately, many Liberals have realized the speed with which, arm in arm with the SDP, they are disappearing down the cul-de-sac of industrialism. This is no minority, fringe, voice: the Association of Liberal Councillors, at least two newly elected MPs, the Young Liberals and many individual ‘mainstream’ Liberals have all come to the conclusion that their party is in danger of losing its unique purpose and political vision. Given such a realization, there is only one direction in which the Liberal Party can move.

Conservation or Conservatism?

Sadly, no such tendency is as yet apparent among the ranks of modern Conservatism; the likelihood of greening such stalwarts of industrialism as Norman Tebbit, Geoffrey Howe, Nigel Lawson and Mrs Thatcher herself is remote indeed. And if such people retain control of the Conservative Party, then the most probable, and perhaps the most hopeful, dialectic for the future may be seen in terms of the varying shades of green in the Green, Labour and Liberal parties taking on the varying shades of grey in the Conservative Party. (The SDP could go either way or, more likely, simply disappear.) Yet to many individual members of the Conservative Party this must seem rather surprising, for there is much about green politics that is instantly and deeply appealing to a certain kind of Tory.

Genuine concern for the environment and for the land has long been at the heart of what is now considered to be old-fashioned Conservatism. Such concerns are often combined with a deep understanding of the crucial importance of the local community and an often unconscious yet still extremely effective way of working for others through the informal, direct interrelationships that underpin any community. A profound dislike of waste, of profligacy and of the kind of misuse of both human and physical resources that characterizes our society informs many of their political attitudes, and their emphasis on spiritual, non-material values remains of considerable significance in a secular, despiritualized environment. Above all, a certain economic realism (now grievously misrepresented in the heartless vices of monetarism) should commend itself to advocates of the conservers economy. Managing the household budget is important—though any such housekeeping will be immeasurably enhanced if we can ensure that the house itself does not actually fall down around us. Not even the Conservative Party can ignore for much longer the logic of ecology.

It would therefore be foolish and blinkered for greens to suppose that merely because a person thinks and lives conservatively, he or she is incapable of embracing a green alternative. However, it would be equally foolish to suppose that the present manifestation of Conservatism is anything but disastrous both for people in Britain and for the planet itself. This particular Tory Government falls even at the first hurdle: one wouldn’t expect it to understand anything about green politics, but it might at least be doing something about the environment. In its 1983 general election manifesto it had the impertinence to claim that ‘No Government has done more for the environment.’ Such
mendacity must be deeply shameful to many members of the Conservative Party, especially if one thinks of this Government’s efforts to hold up action on acid rain, its decision to get rid of the Waste Management Advisory Council, its long delay in implementing crucial sections of the 1974 Control of Pollution Act, its contempt for the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, its cutbacks in the numbers of environmental health officers and factory inspectors, its neglect of water and sewage systems, its threat to the Green Belt, its delaying tactics as regards the introduction of Environmental Impact Statements, its refusal to amend the disastrous Wildlife and Countryside Act—I could go on for pages. The simple fact is that by doing so little, no Government has ever done more to damage the environment.

All of which presents a peculiar challenge to an environment movement which has long prided itself on political neutrality and even-handedness in its dealings with mainstream political parties. I do not believe that such an approach is any longer viable. It is time that the environment movement acknowledged just how important a role it has to play in terms of promoting social and economic change. Even if it is to win the many vital single-issue campaigns in which it is involved, it must cease to see itself as a bunch of nice people for ever waiting in the wings and cease to operate as if it were peripheral to mainstream political concerns. The environment movement must move resolutely centre-stage, which will inevitably involve a more pronounced confrontation with those who presently monopolize that position. And it must at the same time develop the skills to communicate the immediacy and the universality of environmental concern to people in every walk of life, not just to the well read and the highly motivated.

This will require a far more rigorous analysis of the causes of the environmental crisis and a far more open advocacy of the sorts of structural change that will be necessary to effect any real improvements. Concern for the environment provides as good a starting point as any for green politics. But unless it then encompasses fundamental social and economic issues, it will have contributed little towards eliminating the root causes of that crisis. If it stops at mere reforms in conservation and pollution control, then it will be operating simply as a leaky safety valve for the existing systems of exploitative politics. The sort of environmental engineering we see so much of today (and by virtue of which many politicians clumsily lay claim to some kind of mottled green tinge!) only serves to obscure the real problems.

The political challenge to the environment movement is simply this: it is impossible to end the exploitation of the environment without bringing to an end the exploitation of our fellow human beings. In his book *Ecology and Social Action*, Barry Commoner wrote:

> When any environmental issue is probed to its origins, it reveals an inescapable truth—that the root cause of the crisis is not to be found in how men interact with nature, but in how they interact with each other; that to solve the environmental crisis we must solve the problem of poverty, racial injustice and war; that the debt to nature, which is the measure of the environmental crisis, cannot be paid, person by person, in recycled bottles or ecologically sound habits, but in the ancient coin of social justice.

**Politics for Life**

Yet even that is not enough. To the enduring challenge of social justice we must now add the challenge of spiritual enlightenment. In the same way that environmentalists can no longer deny the radical implications of their commitment, so people involved today in religious and spiritual concerns must appreciate that political action has of necessity to be part of those concerns. The challenge of Christ, of Gandhi, of all great spiritual leaders, has always been as much political as spiritual. From a green perspective it works both ways, interdependently, indivisibly:

> With the holistic sense of spirituality, one's personal life is truly political and one's political life is truly personal. Anyone who does not comprehend within him- or herself this essential unity cannot achieve political change on a deep level and cannot strive for the ideals of the greens.
Seeing Green

Petra Kelly's words do indeed work at a level far deeper than that which contemporary industrial politics is either willing or able to handle. Stripped of a spiritual dimension, politics in today's world is a hollow shell, and religion stripped of its political dimension is irresponsibly escapist. There is no place today where we can escape to, no sanctuary of the soul, no island hide-out, no inner or outer refuge that can prevent us from experiencing the plight of the world and all its people. To suppose that among all this one might remain neutral or disengaged represents the final triumph of industrial alienation. As Paulo Freire says, 'Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.' And power, as exercised today, drags us all inexorably towards the abyss.

So many challenges! I sometimes think that I would never have got involved in green politics had I really understood what it was that I was getting involved in. And I am sometimes apprehensive that what we now seem to be asking of people may appear to be so intimidating that it's easier for them not even to take the first step. I profoundly hope that such has not been the overall effect of this book, for when it comes right down to it, all I am actually asking of people is that they should consider four questions and then take action on the basis of their own answers.

First, how much evidence does each of us require before we realize that the politics of industrialism has irrevocably lost its way and lost its soul, and that today's winners can claim their prizes only at the expense of tomorrow's losers, namely, the vast majority of humankind, the Earth itself and those unborn generations that will have to pick up the pieces?

Secondly, given such evidence, how long will it take us to move from the politics of negation to the politics of affirmation, to move beyond what Marcuse called the 'great refusal', to realize that saying no to nuclear weapons is not enough if we wish to establish the conditions for lasting peace, that saying no to the worst excesses of industrialism is not enough if we want to help today's poor, unemployed and disadvantaged?

Thirdly, given the readiness to make such an affirmation, when will the few become the many in realizing that the only alternative to the politics of exploitation and class interests is the politics of ecology and life interests, and that we must affirm such an approach not just in the way we vote but also in our way of life, in our relationships with each other and in our moral and spiritual beliefs?

And, last, given such awareness, when will we find the courage to do now what is easier to put off until tomorrow, to accept unequivocally that each of us weaves our own strand in the web of life, and that in the power we have to transform our own lives we have also the power to transform life on Earth?

Each of us will have different answers to these questions. Though I have referred at the end of this book to a few books to be read or organizations to be joined, the green model of social and political change insists that each of us should find our own way of living and seeing green. We should not be waiting around for cataclysmic warnings or charismatic leaders: what matters is that we should set out now or push on further down the right road, establishing our common ground as we go, developing our 'common sense' of what it means to be working together for a better future.

To avoid writing the Earth's obituary we must cease to see the future simply as an extension of the present, and we must think as much about what should be as about what actually is. We must think again of the links between ourselves and the Earth, and of the way the Earth speaks to us through an ideal of life. We must seek ways creatively to disintegrate the economic and industrial constraints that are turning our world and our lives into a wasteland. Above all, we must learn to blend our concern for people with our respect for the Earth through the post-industrial politics of peace, liberation and ecology: the politics of life.
Fragile Freedom

5. Roszak, *Person/Planet*, p. 15.

Common Ground


Select Bibliography

Recommending books to anyone else is a remarkably risky business, so I’ve simply settled on the twenty-five books (arranged alphabetically by author) that have meant the most to me personally over the last five years, in the hope that such a list may be useful to others going down the same road.


If you’re prepared to work your way, step by step, through the whole non-nuclear defence case, this is the best possible book. It is authoritative in its research, cogent in all its considerations, and extremely convincing in its conclusions.


Bahro is the most influential and most interesting of the many socialists who now see green rather than red. The interviews that make up the book are an honest and fascinating insight into that complicated transition.


Those with any sympathy for the anarchist antecedents of the green perspective will find Bookchin’s writing absorbing and highly entertaining; those who assume no such sympathy should allow Bookchin’s punchy prose to show them the error of their ways.


This is an extraordinary synthesis of the best of the Worldwatch Institute; though a little short on the political implications, its insight and