

**All the Colours of the Rainbow, or Red with a Green Halo?**  
*Is there a 'Green' ideology and how is it being realised?*

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## All the Colours of the Rainbow

With the end of the cold war, and prior to that the end of the mass integration class parties throughout Western Europe, one might perhaps be forgiven for arguing that ideology ought to be a relatively obscure and irrelevant issue in political studies at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is much evidence to suggest that ideological conflict within the political systems of Western Europe, and perhaps more so in Scotland and Sweden have evolved far beyond the 'pure' and 'original'. It will be argued that ideological conflict has arrived at a point where it is based on the competition between reformist socialists and neo-liberal conservatives. Their battleground is the political centre ground, and this is a key factor in explaining why the Greens and various other political parties have been able to successfully place themselves along the left-right political continuum. However, it must be pointed out from the beginning that the focus of the argument is on Green parties, and that other political parties will only be mentioned if and when deemed necessary.

The aim of the essay is to discuss and explore Green ideology and more importantly Green party policy within the overall context of traditional Western European political ideologies. Furthermore an attempt will be made to place the Scottish and Swedish Green party on the uni-dimensional left-right scale. This is clearly highly controversial, and fits in well with the debate and/or conflict between eco-centrist radicals and anthropocentrist reformers (Bennie et al. 1995:217, Garner 1998:29, Porritt 1997:63, Young 1993:30).

The essay will carry out an initial secondary analysis of the main literature on the topic of political ideology in general and Green political thought in particular. The secondary analysis will provide the appropriate backdrop against which it will be possible to contrast party political manifestos, party press releases etc. The method by which this will be dealt with is content analysis of party political manifestos and party press releases; this will give us a more accurate picture of Green political thought in practise. An initial overview of Green political parties working within parliamentary or legislative coalitions throughout Europe gives off the impression that they are more inclined to support left-of-centre governments. This initial assessment would lend credibility and support to the argument that Greens are, in reality, "crypto-socialists" (Porritt 1997:62) or Reds with a Green halo. However, this remains to be proven and there are undoubtedly evidence to suggest that Green parties

promote a 'new' kind of politics 'above and beyond' the old and traditional (tired?) left-right cleavage that has governed Western European political systems since the advent of universal suffrage.

### The Relevance of Ideology

Green party manifestos often refer to the ability of Green party policy to transcend traditional political cleavage structures (Miljöpartiet de Gröna 1997:11, SGP 1999a:1). Can it thus be argued that Green parties provide a qualitatively 'new' force within politics as a counterweight to the 'old' politics represented by more traditional political parties? Key features of this argument around 'new' and 'old' politics are ideology and political thought. The ideological traditions of the main parties in both Scotland and Sweden has perhaps not always developed in a linear fashion, but it can be argued that they have a clear conceptual origin. Consequently Green party policy should then be able to trace its roots to a new ideology, perhaps ecologism, which is radically different and new. We will now proceed to analyse and discuss these arguments and questions in relation to a selection of the main strands of Western political thought; a) Conservatism, b) Socialism, c) Liberalism d) Marxism, e) Social Anarchism. This will enable us to gain a fuller understanding of the real origins of Green political thought. In the extension it ought to enable us to decide whether or not ecologism can be seen as a qualitatively new, and separate political ideology.

#### ***Conservatism:***

It has been argued that conservatism and Green political thought have some powerful similarities, even though there are equally powerful disagreements (Garner 1998:52). In light of this what are the main characteristics of conservative thought and ideology? According to Williams the two main pillars of conservatism are; a) order and b) authority. Furthermore he goes on to describe conservatism, in its traditional form, as sceptical of rational reasoning and reforms stemming from this. The reason behind this resistance to reform is the view that it has the potential to begin the unravelling of the complex web of interdependencies that make up the constituent parts of the social organism (Williams 1995:160).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was argued that only conservative realism, expressed through benevolent paternalism, was able to counter the sectional and divisive demands of self-interested materialists, represented by the emergent middle- and working classes (Williams 1995). Perhaps this particular strand of conservatism is best described as a cautious and pragmatic promoter of the status quo. The role of the state is in this instant reduced to a ‘social lubricant’ that acts to ameliorate the worst excesses stemming from individuals or other market forces. This will thus ensure the organic evolution of society.

### ***Socialism:***

Socialism is a rather wide definition of political thought than can be said to encompass everything from anarchism to Marxism to reformist socialism. However, in this context socialism is taken to be synonymous with reformist socialism or social democracy, as this is the prevalent manifestation of this –ism in both Scotland and Sweden (Labour Party and the Social Democrats).

Reformist socialism has at its core political/moral values such as: justice, rights of individuals, equality, liberty, participation, and solidarity (Williams 1995:184). These are values that most, but not all, Green political thinkers would see as central to any attempt to solidify Green political thought into a coherent ideology. However, socialism is generally referred to as anthropocentric (Pepper 1993:58, Garner 1998:30) which in essence means that there is a tendency to regard the natural world as a human asset rather than humans as an integral and equal part in the global eco-system. The issue of unlimited and continuous growth is another area, which is intimately connected with anthropocentrism. Economic growth is a central tenet of reformist socialism, as expressed both by British Labour and the Swedish Social Democrats. Is this position inherently unacceptable to Green parties, or is it at all reconcilable with their economic policies?

### ***Liberalism:***

The concept of moral consideration being extended to non-human beings are often cited as both a logical extension of liberalism, and furthermore as evidence to support the argument that liberal thought have influenced Green political thinking (Garner 1998:54-55, Martell 1994:141, Clarke and Linzey 1990:135-140). A significant amount of John Stuart Mill’s writings on happiness can be viewed as fundamental to

any attempt at producing a Green ideology. Mill attributes the following to happiness, which in this form is a clear forerunner to the post-materialist thesis; personal affection, social feeling, art, poetry, history, and mental culture (Williams 1995:123).

Apart from the work of J.S. Mill there is a significant body of literature which considers liberalism in such a way as to make it difficult to reconcile it with ecologism et al. The most telling examples of this are; the belief in continuous economic growth and the ability of scientific progress to lead the way to a more equitable and 'sustainable' future. This is clearly a technocentric approach which, depending on your opinion, may be seen as representative of Green politics today.

### ***Marxism:***

Having already mentioned socialism it might be argued that a separate mention of Marxism is not justifiable. However, it has been pointed out that socialism in this context is representative of the reformist elements or the kind of social democracy that have been dominant in both Sweden and the UK. Marxism or more crudely, communism, has at its core certain features that are at once central to ecologism and unpalatable to reformist socialists. An understanding of the concepts of change and ownership is crucial to any understanding of Marxism and ecologism (Garner 1998:58, Pepper 1993:59-151, Williams 1995:139). Garner goes so far as to argue that "Marxism and socialism offer the kind of state or community intervention and regulation which most Greens think is necessary to deal with environmental problems" (Garner 1998:55).

Certain strands of radical Green political thought clearly promote the idea of revolutionary social and political change, but this is a rather contested point of view, and as Jonathon Porritt puts it:

"...for what it is worth, an overwhelming majority of environmental activists, writers and philosophers over the past twenty-five years have been staunch defenders of the values of liberal democracy, notwithstanding the almost perverse fascination of academics and commentators with the handful of activists, writers and philosophers who have chosen to argue that even the fruits of liberal democracy must be subordinated to the achievement of a sustainable future for our species." (Jacobs ((ed.) 1997:65))

However, an analysis of party political manifestos show a clear tendency within both the Scottish and the Swedish Green party for a move toward radically restructuring economic, political and social institutions in ways similar, but not directly related to Marxist policies (Miljöpartiet 1997:3-4, SGP 1999a:9). With this in mind we must ask ourselves if Marxism influences Green political ideology, and if so – to what extent?

### ***Social Anarchism:***

Anarchism is often considered part of socialism in its widest sense (Cook 1990 in Pepper 1993:163), but to what extent is this true? It can be argued that anarchism is most adequately described as a faction of each and every one of the more traditional – isms. Leon Baradat argues that even though “anarchism is often equated with anarchy” (Baradat 1991:127) it rather concerns itself with good governance without the oppression from above, that is institutional government. Social anarchists such as Bakunin, Godwin, Kropotkin and Proudhon aimed to reduce the power and reach of governmental institutions so that individuals could flourish, restructuring society into voluntary associations. However, it is important to note that these social anarchists are not the only anarchists. Individualist anarchists would like to see the elimination of government structures in order to promote and advance some sort of Social Darwinism; a society that celebrates what can be gained for the self (ibid 129-131).

The socialist form of anarchism, which opposes not only *too much governance* but also the harmful effects of capitalism, does perhaps provide the most suitable ideological basis for Green political thought. This is one of many interesting avenues open to the Green political thinker as well as the Green party policy maker as we stand at the beginning of yet another decade of Green electoral activity. Having produced a very brief overview of the core issues within each of the five ideologies that were selected it is now time to turn our attention to the ideological positions of the Greens. This will be done against the backdrop of a secondary analysis of some of the most influential academic literature. Additionally initial findings from personal research will be presented, both from a pilot study of SGP Council members, and from a content analysis of party political manifestos etc.

The ideological origin of the Green movement, and in the extension Green parties is a controversial topic. This is something that is perhaps best illustrated by the variety of academics and commentators that have written on the subject

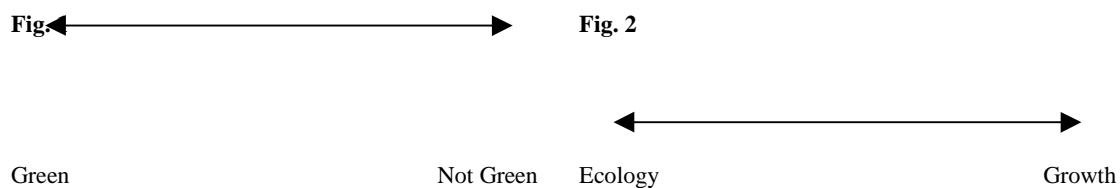
(Bramwell 1989, Dobson 1990, Eckersley 1992, Hay 1988, Martell 1994, Pepper 1993). This part of the article will incorporate both a secondary analysis of the literature on Green political thought and a content analysis of official party publications, mainly election manifestos. This will then hopefully serve as a focal point for subsequent analyses of whether or not 'Green ideology' has added anything qualitatively 'new' to politics and an insight into if it is replacing traditional left-right cleavage structures.

How would one define Green political thinking, what are the values that lie at the centre of ecological ideology? The answer to this question might seem obvious and straightforward, but equally one may consider it virtually impossible to come to any worthwhile conclusion. This problem stems from the fragmented nature of the environmental movement, but the problem is in no way insurmountable. The problem all but disappears when considering the fact that we are dealing exclusively with two Green parties, and not the environmental movement at large. However, to yet again confuse things we will look at what Porritt regards as Green core issues (Porritt 1984:10-11).

- a) a reverence for the Earth and for all its creatures;
- b) a willingness to share the world's wealth among *all* its peoples;
- c) prosperity to be achieved through sustainable alternatives to the rat race of economic growth;
- d) lasting security to be achieved through non-nuclear defence strategies and considerably reduced arms spending;
- e) a rejection of materialism and the destructive values of industrialism;
- f) a recognition of the rights of future generations in our use of all resources;
- g) an emphasis on socially useful, personally rewarding work, enhanced by human scale technology;
- h) protection of the environment as a precondition of a healthy society;
- i) an emphasis on personal growth and spiritual development;
- j) respect for the gentler side of human nature;
- k) open, participatory democracy at every level of society;
- l) recognition of the crucial importance of significant reductions in population levels;
- m) harmony between people of every race, colour and creed;

- n) a non-nuclear, low-energy strategy, based on conservation, greater efficiency and renewable resources;
- o) an emphasis on self-reliance and decentralised communities.

Most literature on the issue of ecology as a political ideology touches upon the conflict between, on the one hand, eco-centrists and anthropocentrists within Green parties, and on the other hand between Green and traditional political parties (Pepper 1993:34, Martell 1994:162). In a sense it is possible to construct a scale, which would provide an indication of how 'green', the Greens are (fig. 1).



Applying a 'greenness' scale within the environmental movement does somehow seem to come into direct contradiction to the much publicised growth-ecology dimension (fig. 2) that is allegedly replacing the left-right dimension (Bennulf and Holmberg 1990:165-182). As a substitution for, or complement to a strict adherence to either the left-right dimension or the growth-ecology continuum we can use a 'tweaked' model of political cleavages. The 'tweaked' model would consider the Green-Not Green dimension on an atomised policy level, and on the aggregate level the more traditional left-right cleavage would remain the uni-dimensional, although supplemented, political fault line within the system. This 'Green/Not Green' model would not be applicable on the aggregate level, and as such it is not comparable to the 'growth-ecology' dimension. The reason behind this, as I will attempt to show, is that there is not enough 'Green' policies within core areas of the political programmes, and too much over-lap with policies from most of all the political left, but also the political right.

This 'tweaked' model would represent an opportunity for Green political thinkers and Green policy makers alike to reconceptualise, within a new ideological framework, what is Green. There is a substantial community of academics and commentators that argue this ought to be done using socialism as its bedrock (Jacobs ((ed.) 1997:34-46, Eckersley 1992:131). It is possible to interpret Luke Martell's



argument surrounding the mutual benefit of a close theoretical and political alliance between ecology and socialism as recognition of ecologism as a strand of socialism rather than as a separate ideology (Martell 1994:153-154). One of the main practical political reasons why the Greens ought to embrace, rather than shy away from socialism is the potential ability to appeal to, and attract support from within socially disadvantaged communities. Ryle proposes that a more equitable burden sharing with regards to socio-economic and political costs would provide Greens with the necessary social justice credentials (Ryle 1988:61-62).

Current Green political manifestos and election strategies tend to emphasise the centrality of sustainable economic development rather than opposing the whole concept of economic growth (Miljöpartiet 1997:11). This is a momentous shift in political ideology since the Greens have in the past been seen to advocate no-growth as the basis of our economic systems (Goldsmith et al. 1972:25-32). However, to what extent can it be argued that this presents new economic policies? It is thus important to analyse and discuss current Green political economy in order to place it within an overall ideological framework. It is also within Green political economy where we ought to be able to find policies and manifesto pledges that are not in line with socialism if we are to lend any credibility to the ‘not left, nor right – but Green’ argument. Considering that there has perhaps been a shift in Green party policymaking we can ‘ground’ these policies within an ideological framework through analysis of the main themes that occur in their manifestos.

The economic policy programme put forward by the Swedish Green Party in 1997 does start off by emphasising the positive contributions by both the left and the right in Swedish politics. The second paragraph of the economic programme highlights what it considers worthwhile adopting, social justice and equality from the left, personal freedom and individual opportunities from the right (Miljöpartiet 1997:11). This enables us to make an, admittedly crude but working distinction between what can be attributed to Green, left- or right-of-centre political thinking. It is a crude distinction due to the fact that it does not consider the policies from an ideological point, which was discussed earlier. This does not however preclude us from taking our analysis this one step further in the end.

**Table 1: Swedish Green Party and its economic platform**

<u>Left</u>	<u>Green</u>	<u>Right</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not allowing profit to rule in order to steer the economy towards sustainability and social justice.</li> <li>• A more equitable redistribution of resource.</li> <li>• Re-introduction of a truly progressive system of taxation.</li> <li>• State planning and steering of economy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sustainable economy built on non-negotiable laws of nature.</li> <li>• Green taxes on both energy and natural resources to finance lower taxes on labour.</li> <li>• Basic income scheme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within political parameters the market and the individual must be allowed to operate freely.</li> <li>• Reduced national insurance contributions.</li> </ul>

**Table 2: The Scottish Green Party and its economic platform**

<u>Left</u>	<u>Green</u>	<u>Right</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A fairer system of land ownership, in rural areas, towns and cities through land redistribution.</li> <li>• Introduction of a truly progressive system of taxation.</li> <li>• Not allowing profit to rule in order to steer the economy towards sustainability and social justice.</li> <li>• The re-evaluation of third world debt.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic income scheme.</li> <li>• New economic indicators; using ISEW instead of GDP.</li> <li>• Green taxes on both energy and natural resources to finance lower taxes on labour.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residency requirements for land ownership.</li> <li>• Reducing employers' national insurance contributions.</li> </ul>

These two tables serve as a potent reminder that Green party policy does indeed include elements from a variety of ideological origins. However, these findings are obviously open to discussion and no doubt there are different interpretations of where exactly these policies belong.

The theory underpinning this article is that there is a great deal of 'overlap' between reformist socialism and Green political thought, and especially when dealing with Green political parties, and not the Green movement at large. There is clear

evidence to suggest that Green policy is in conflict with traditional industrial socialism (Shull 1999:38-39) however much of the language contained within manifestos suggests a close relationship to modern socialism. An example of this is that both the Scottish and Swedish Greens share a common view on ownership, which is more akin to socialism than any other of the political ideologies that were discussed at the outset of the article. These two political parties advocate the following features of ownership; decentralised and small scale businesses complemented by co-operatives would replace multinational corporations. Both the Social Democrats in Sweden and New Labour in the UK have gone from a belief in large scale manufacturing to an emphasis on small businesses etc (Socialdemokraterna 2000:1-10). This is most likely attributable to a move away from corporatism. Conservatives and liberals alike do not have decentralisation and community ownership particularly high on the political agenda. Conservatism, both its traditional past and neo-liberal present oppose the radical socio-economic and political changes that are needed to change ownership structures (Garner 1998:52, Martell 1994:140-141).

The only features of the Green political programmes that have any real relevance to the political right are the commitments to individual freedom (within the economic market) and the reduction in employers' national insurance (NI) contributions. However, the Green commitment to the reduction in employers' NI contributions is intimately linked to a so called Green shift in taxation which clearly does not envisage a lower overall level of taxation (Miljöpartiet 1997:14). Considering the Green economic programmes it becomes clear that Green parties share a very close link to reformist socialists, and that they have little in common with conservatism, liberalism, Marxism and social anarchism. It is at odds with social anarchism because the Greens, at least in the short to medium term, stress the need for strong governmental intervention. Paradoxically enough this is the reason why they avoid Marxism. Greens do not want to curb individualism, and individual entrepreneurs, rather it promotes it but only within the political parameters they propose. Depending on how you define liberalism one can either argue that there is a great number of ideological issues that are shared, but equally it is possible to argue that there is very little ideological overlap (Garner 1998:54-55, Williams 1995:121-132).

Trying to come up with an answer regarding whether or not Green political parties actually do contribute something new to political ideology is a particularly interesting and yet tantalisingly difficult task. A brief discussion around five traditional ideologies set the background against which it was later attempted to analyse Green political thought and Green political policies. This proved, if only inconclusively that a separate Green political ideology is not likely, and that it is instead being co-opted into socialism. This argument is supported by the actions of Green parties and politicians around Europe. The Swedish Greens are part of a legislative coalition with the minority Social Democrat government and the Leftist Party since 1998. This is more formalised in both Germany and France where the Greens are part of executive coalitions whereby they hold ministerial posts in governments where the senior coalition member is the PS or the SPD. Perhaps the least inconclusive piece of evidence to suggest the interchangeability between Green and socialist ideology can be derived from content analysis of manifestos and party press releases. This is however in need of a more detailed and longitudinal approach whereby the researcher would utilise party political manifestos dating back to the formation of both parties. What findings such a study might be able to come up with one cannot say for certain, but an educated guess would be that it would highlight a pattern of diminishing opposition to socialist ideology.

This has to an extent only begun to answer the question whether or not the Greens represent a new ideological force within Scotland and Sweden, or indeed for that matter Northern Europe at large. Party political manifestos can only tell us what is the settled will of the majority, but not how the members as a whole perceive the ideological stance and policy orientation of the party. This is an area of research that I hope to be able to 'dip' into via quantitative surveys of party members etc. It would provide a more holistic approach to the wider question of whether or not these two Green parties signify a qualitatively new contribution to politics both on the individual and systemic level. It is hoped that this will then lend itself to a discussion surrounding wider organisational and electoral issues.

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