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FOR RESIDENT CLERK

YOUR TEL 238 TO TOKYO: FRENCH ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVE.

1. SUBJECT WAS DISCUSSED BETWEEN PRESIDENTS BUSH AND MITTERRAND
BUT DETAILS HAVE NOT YET REACHED ELYSEE OFFICIALS AND ARE UNLIKELY
TO BE AVAILABLE UNTIL AFTER PRESIDENTIAL PARTY RETURN TO PARIS.

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The green light

Last year's crop of 20-year-on books about 1968 were pretty miserable, I thought. Not because they were all miserably written or miserably dull: not at all. But because they all had the common assumption that the "Sixties' children" summed up the era, did the most important things in it, and have gone on being decisive ever since.

They were important, but not really because they were a revolutionary vanguard. In truth, they part kicked against, but more expressed, the irresistibly mounting urge to consume. Some of the British social realist films showed the phenomenon well, if a little self-consciously. They were not just films about the working class, they were about the working class getting and spending (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*) or getting ahead (*Room at the Top*). But the early US imports showed it better: I got my abiding love of American gas-guzzling cars from *77 Sunset Strip*. That, and series like it, seemed so luxurious, so full of splendid waste.

Hedonistic consumption of every kind was not discovered in or by the Sixties, but what a boost it gave to it! It was the decade which took the waiting out of wanting, and introduced the dangerous principle that what everybody wants, everybody gets.

This was Western capitalism, of course. But the socialist world had its own imperatives. "We will bury you!" Khrushchev warned the land of the gas-guzzlers, and he did not mean in volumes of Lenin, nor indeed in a nuclear holocaust, but with greater material plenty. No less than capitalism were the socialist heartlands locked into production: more, arguably, since the ideological basis of their regimes privileged the working class, conceived of as a factory-bound proletariat. Thus the construction of huge industrial complexes served at once an economic and ideological imperative.

These were heroic enterprises – conscious efforts to alleviate the domination of man by man through the domination of nature by man. No matter that Engels had once warned that man should not "flatter ourselves overmuch on account of human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us" (his family had, after all, made its fortune in early Victorian Manchester): Lenin had decreed the conjunction of the Soviets and electricity as the building blocks of socialism, and that was that.

Growth and materialism thus passed into the bloodstreams of both developed capitalism and developed socialism. They shared the guilty secret of despoiling land, sea and air to give their people what they most wanted – more room, more food, more things. Consumption became sanctioned in morality: "I want



World environmentalists have awarded Norway's prime minister Mrs Gro Harlem Brundtland (right) 10 out of 10 for her environmental record. Bottom of the class, scoring one out of 10, is Japan's Noboru Takeshita (left), whose country has the reputation of being the world's worst plunderer of natural resources. Mrs Thatcher scores a mediocre four, yet next week she hosts an international conference on the ozone layer. Has she seen the Green light? John Lloyd traces the history of Green politics

my family to have the best." To put it so was to place it beyond the reach of cavill.

Until our times. For the Green movement has made war on the active ingredients of both socialism and capitalism. It is right for its devotees to claim the status of radicals, for in theory at least they would overturn the deepest of our everyday political assumptions. Jonathon Porritt, director of Friends of the Earth, put it this way: "The malign trends that confront us now grow out of a growth-based economy. Meeting rising needs is so obvious that it is never questioned. It's not just that these trends are already at work, it's that the background assumptions are so solidified that you would need hammer blows to break them up... We must ask ourselves, do we want sustainable development? Do we want equality in the world? If people think five to 10 billion people will live in this world at our level, then it is a mirage. So if we use the word equality we must be clear what it means."

Being clear what it means, rather than soupy-sentimental, Oxfamish about it, is a terrible thought. It means our living standards will fall: we will have less to eat, less with which to clothe ourselves, less power, less shelter. That is part of the platform of the Green Party, of which Porritt is a member. "People say, 'Why do you commit political suicide by saying these things?' But if we don't act on them we

will be committing ecological suicide."

This is a neat syllogism but, as Porritt will at other times say, not a basis for a movement. And it is a movement, of sorts. This article is being written to mark a conference, in London, on the thinning of the ozone layer. It will be chaired by Mrs Thatcher, the environmental movement's most surprising convert, who joined the ranks with an out-of-the-blue Green speech to the Royal Society last September.

The ozone layer got through to the Prime Minister, thinks Porritt, because she got high-level briefings from NASA, and her chemist's training enabled her to take it seriously. According to another occasional visitor, she got an unusually well-argued paper in a box one night from a UN diplomat, and responded in her usual fashion: "No one told me this." Perhaps, others think less charitably, she saw the royal family running with the ecological baton to some applause, and so snatched it up herself.

In so doing she builds on the two decades of often reviled work done by Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the World Wide Fund for Nature and others. Work which once, in the words of Stephen Elsworth, director of Greenpeace's atmospheric pollution division, "used to be perceived as a bit fruity, but has now moved much more into the centre of things".

The World Commission on Environ-

ment and Development's special report, *Our Common Future*, chaired by the other woman prime minister, Norway's Gro Harlem Brundtland, came to see the ecological crisis "not in its restricted context of economic growth in developing countries (but) that a new development path was required, one that sustained human progress not just in a few places for a few years, but for the entire planet into the distant future."

This massive and increasingly popular agenda has inserted new confidence into the ecology nuts. They are now consulted by ministers (who themselves are now rather Green: William Waldegrave was credited with being the first Green minister while he was at Environment, and the brief is being held now with less flair but with much public sincerity by Lord Caithness). They are summoned by select committees, commissions and others to the point where they have to turn down invitations – though "we don't," says Colin Hines, Greenpeace's director of the nuclear-free seas division, "sit down and plan things with the thought: how will this go down before a select committee?"

In the past two months the main groups have banded together to throw down the "Green Gauntlet" – a checklist of 30 action areas in which, they say, the government would have to convert rhetoric to measures before its Greening could be pronounced genuine. The Gauntlet is also, possibly unconsciously, a way of ensuring that the groups stay in business, with a mission, since no government, genuine or not, is likely quickly to take on the ambitious programme which it proposes.

An example: the Gauntlet calls on the government to "set emission standards for power stations on the pollution tolerance of natural ecosystems. This will require a reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions of at least 80-90 per cent..." The cost of providing all coal-fired power stations with "scrubbers" to clean out the sulphur dioxide is estimated in the hundreds of millions. Indeed, the expense of the programme has become one of the largest arguments for nuclear over coal-fired energy.

The example illustrates two things. First, that to become properly Green is such an expensive option in both money and short-term political support that it is impossible not to share the scepticism with which the Greens view political parties' conversion to their ranks. Second, that at the core of the Greens' philosophy and practice is a notion of responsibility – direct and personal; the kind of responsibility which refuses simply to dump the inconvenient or noxious side effects of one's own or one's company's actions →

Action Plan: Politics



Politically active conservationists will know how to lobby within the established political parties.

Others can choose to support a wide range of non-political pressure groups.

Greenpeace: campaigns on nuclear issues, marine mammals, water and air pollution, and promotes the concept of a pristine Antarctica. 30-31

Islington Green, London N1 8XE.

Friends of the Earth: campaigns on rain forests, air pollution and chemicals in agriculture and promotes recycling. 26-28 Underwood St, London N1 7JQ.

World Wide Fund for Nature: paymaster of the conservation movement, WWF has helped save the panda, tiger, vicuna, polar bear and Arabian oryx, and established 330 national parks covering 81 million hectares.

Panda House, Freepost, Godalming, Surrey, GU7 1XR.

Survival International: campaigns on behalf of threatened tribal peoples. 310 Edgware Road, London W2 1DY.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB): 100 years old in 1989, Britain's biggest wildlife group. Campaigns on habitat destruction. The Lodge, Sandy, Beds, SG19 2DL.

Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE): strives to

preserve the essential British countryside against development. Effective lobbyists at Westminster and Brussels. 4 Hobart Place, London SW1W 0HY.

Royal Society for Nature Conservation (RSNC): Britain's largest voluntary organisation with 48 county nature trusts, 50 urban wildlife bodies and WATCH, RSNC's junior wing supported by *The Sunday Times*. The Green, Nettleham, Lincoln, LN2 2NR. Gareth Huw Davies

on someone or something else. It should appeal to Thatcherite values and perhaps an inkling of that is behind the Prime Minister's "conversion". It conflicts fatally, however, with the more politically potent and cross-party notion that self enrichment is always and everywhere and infinitely possible.

Meanwhile, as nations as diverse as the Baltic Soviet republics and Scotland struggle to define themselves nationally once again, they reach for the language of ecology to protest against a fouling of their land by the alien occupier. In Estonia last year I saw the results of the heroic period of Soviet industrialisation: miles of chemical works, huge oil shale mines, polluting both sky and water; responsible – says the burgeoning Estonian Green Party, among the first of the independent parties

to form itself in the Soviet Union – for an unnaturally high proportion of deaths, especially among children. It is easy to make the national-ecological connection. The big chemical and mining enterprises are under the direct control of Moscow-based ministries, largely (until recently) exempt from any republican control; further, most of the management and workers are Russians, not Estonian. The rhetoric used by the Estonian Popular Front can sometimes conflate atmospheric/environmental pollution with ethnic intermixing, in either a deliberate or subconscious way. It is sure that many Estonians, and their next-door neighbours the Latvians, see their stock as weakened.

If the movement is to grow to the point where it will suppress the "outdated" ideologies of capitalism and socialism – its

adherents are no less ambitious than that for it – it will, it is a fair bet, have to mobilise this "dark Green" side as well as the "light Green" forces of reasoning, debating and campaigning. It already has a huge advantage: it can offer almost anyone, from the crofter to the commuter, a loose framework within which to express his or her opposition to "progress" – or that part of progress, be it nuclear power station, Channel tunnel, new runway – which runs through the back garden. In locating the cause of our future discontents and diseases in the water and the earth and the air, the groups invoke the power of fear of unseen things entering our bodies (how many horror films have been based on that common nightmare?). The movement can be at once expert and mysterious, matching anyone's database while retain-

ing the ability to bathe you in a cold sweat.

At its best it holds out a vision, and the start of a practice, of a way of life which would give flesh to many of the ideals by which we sometimes try to live; would let us leave a better place to our children, better than the phoney benison of more things.

I can see that, see it much more clearly, having talked to the Green people and learned that they are not "fruity", though they are a touch pompous. But my inner eye, unlike Wordsworth's which was wholly turned towards the daffodils, has in it a gas-guzzler out of an old American series, a proxy for the wonderful world of things which the Sixties opened up to its real children.

I want to grow up to be Green. But not yet – me and millions like me – not yet.



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