

BEYOND THE POLITICS OF LEFT AND RIGHT:

Beliefs and Values of Environmental Activists in British Columbia

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INTRODUCTION

WHEN THE BRITISH COLUMBIA New Democratic Party returned to power in the early 1990s, conflict between two of the party's core constituencies came to the fore. Key NDP commitments during the 1991 campaign were to labour, including the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) union, and to citizens and organizations concerned about the environment. In government, the NDP has been less than successful in meeting these, often conflicting, commitments. Indeed the management and use of Crown forests has been one of the most persistent and vexing policy problems the NDP government has faced.¹ Environmentalists have voiced bitter criticism of the government's forest policy, arguing that it has sacrificed the health of forests and communities to appease the IWA and powerful corporate interests.

That a left-of-centre government would be plagued by dissension from the environmentalist elements of its constituency would not be surprising to students of environmental politics in Europe. These analysts have argued that environmentalism is part of a new politics, independent of traditional left-right party cleavages (Ofie 1985; Dalton 1994). But the schism dividing the NDP and the environmental movement in British Columbia is intriguing, given the results of recent research that links environmentalist and leftist perspectives in western North America and in Canada generally (Ellis and Thompson 1997; Blake et al. 1996-7; Kanji 1996). Do environmentalists and the NDP occupy different branches of the left? Do environmentalist objections

¹ See Hoberg (1996) for a discussion of the strains in the NDP coalition associated with forest policy.

to NDP policies solely reflect disagreements on environmental issues or do these objections stem from more fundamental political differences? The answers to these questions depend in part on the nature of the political orientations of those active in the BC environmental movement. Their orientations towards politics will shape the environmental movement's political agenda, tactics, and response to government policy initiatives.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the political beliefs and values of those who comprise the environmental movement in British Columbia. We draw on fifty-one interviews with environmental activists in the province to examine their political orientations. We explain how the concept of political culture aids in describing the political beliefs and values of environmental activists. Following analysis of the interviews, we draw conclusions as to whether there is a political culture of environmentalism in British Columbia and the implications for political behaviour and conflict in the province.

POLITICAL CULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

The subfield of political science that attempts to characterize belief systems deals with the study of political culture. Political culture refers to those beliefs, values, and feelings towards the political system that are widely shared by a political community. Such beliefs consist of empirical and affective orientations regarding the goals and conduct of political life as well as orientations towards the system's authoritative claims and outputs (Ullman 1979). A key premise of political culture is that belief systems constrain the political actions of individuals and institutions (Kornberg and Clarke 1992). Thus, an understanding of the political culture of a community can aid in predicting and explaining its political behaviour.

Most research on political culture focuses on nations, subnational entities, and ethnic communities. Elkins and Simeon (1979) have argued that distinct political cultures may be observed in a wide range of collectivities (e.g., regions, social classes, political parties). Our study of environmental activists attempts to characterize the political culture of a social movement.² Social movements may be defined as

² The study described here is part of a larger project aimed at determining whether the environmental movement is characterized by a political culture that transcends national boundaries or whether the environmental movement in particular nations reflects the political culture of the nation in question. In subsequent research we will be comparing

sets of actors, linked through informal networks and united by a shared belief system, who challenge an existing social or political order (Diani 1992; Kuechler and Dalton 1990). It is the shared belief system that is the focus of our analysis. This belief system need not be universally held within the movement (Elkins and Simeon 1979). It is sufficient that a particular set of beliefs and values about politics and the environment function as assumptions that participants in the movement adhere to and address in their political activism.

Many scholars note that particular beliefs about nature and the environment define an environmental belief system. Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) proposed a set of measures to describe the "new environmental paradigm" (NEP). The NEP comprises attitudes related to three elements: (1) the fragility of the balance of nature; (2) limits to growth; and (3) the inherent value of plants and non-human animals. Numerous authors have used these and similar measures to assess the extent of environmentalist thinking in populations throughout the world.³

But researchers disagree on whether environmentalism is tied to a particular set of political beliefs and values or whether it is compatible with varying political orientations. Political ideas are those that address how groups of people make decisions about the aspects of life that they share. Any deliberation, discussion, or decision-making process focused on collective life is political. Political activity occurs in communities of various kinds (families, corporations, nations) and at several scales (villages, provinces, multilateral institutions). This conception of politics is inclusive and departs from more traditional (and narrow) definitions that conflate politics with government.⁴ Our purpose in taking a broader view is to acknowledge that political arenas need not always be associated with governments. Political activity may be addressed to one's fellow citizens as well as to businesses. For example, environmentalists in British Columbia often cite their efforts to organize a boycott of BC forest products as one of their major tactical successes. Environmentalists used arguments about the

the political culture of environmental movements in British Columbia and the US Pacific Northwest.

³ See, for example, Milbrath (1984), Dunlap et al. (1993), Blake et al. (1996-7), and Pierce et al. (1992).

⁴ Dyck (1993, 4) defines politics as "activity in which conflicting interests struggle for advantage," but his analysis is restricted to such activity as it is focused on government. Similarly, Gibbins (1990) links politics to conflict and focuses on government. Our definition is more in line with that of Young (1990, 9), for whom politics includes "all aspects of institutional organization, public action, social practices and habits, and cultural meanings insofar as they are potentially subject to collective evaluation and decisionmaking."

ecological destructiveness of forest companies' harvest practices to convince executives of companies who used wood and paper products to refrain from purchasing BC goods. Thus, the boycott focused on manipulating the purchasing decisions of North American and European corporations in order to influence the behaviour of forest corporations operating in British Columbia.

Political ideas, or ideologies, are conventionally arrayed on a left/right continuum. In North American politics, the left has been identified with the attempt to use government to promote a more equal distribution of wealth.⁵ In contrast, the right is associated with an economy based on private enterprise and a government that actively supports such enterprise. This conception of left/right politics forms the basis for recent research that links support for environmentalism with a left political orientation.⁶ This empirical linkage is counter to Paehlke's (1989) argument that environmentalism is independent of conventional left/right politics and so is compatible with a range of political orientations. He contends that environmentalists may occupy both progressive and conservative positions on a left/right political map. For Paehlke, the key questions for environmentalism centre on the nature and use of technology. What kinds of technologies shall we employ? What ecological criteria should guide our decision-making regarding the use of technology? One's answers to these questions are not necessarily related to one's values regarding an equal distribution of wealth or an autonomous private enterprise economy. A private enterprise environmentalist may favour the use of taxes and incentives to promote environmentally benign technologies, while an environmentalist on the left may favour a more direct government role in making such decisions.

Paehlke's theoretical argument finds some support in the empirical work of Blake and his colleagues (1996-7). Their results suggest that the ethos of the environmental movement in British Columbia invokes populist values, a central feature of BC political culture. Populism stresses individual responsibility to one's community and direct action as well as hostility to government regulation and red tape, thereby appealing to both the left and the right on the political spectrum. Populists are sceptical of large organizations and concentrated power, whether in the public or private sphere. In an earlier study, Blake

⁵ Paehlke (1989) characterizes the left/right dimension of politics as a continuum of positions on the role of government with regard to distributing wealth and power.

⁶ See, for example, Ellis and Thompson (1997), Blake et al. (1997), and Kanji (1996).

(1985) concluded that BC political culture is rooted in contrasting individualistic and collective/communitarian subcultures. Although these orientations provide the basis for fierce partisan conflict, their prevalence in and across social groups and their mutual reliance on populist values give a distinctive flavour to mass political behaviour. Social movements that root their appeals in populism can attract supporters from both the left and the right in British Columbia. This suggests that the environmental movement in British Columbia, to the extent that it challenges big corporations and big government, may draw its supporters from across the political spectrum.

Though Blake and his colleagues (1996-7, 1997) found a positive relation between populism and environmental concern, their results also link environmental values and activism to a left political orientation. They note that political activity aimed at influencing corporations or public officials is linked to ideological beliefs. Those who score low on an index of neoconservatism are more likely than those who score high to engage in environmental political activism. The strongest association between political ideology and behaviour is evident in an individual's willingness to pay for environmental improvements (e.g., for supporting higher environmental taxes and for closing businesses that fail to comply with environmental standards). Neoconservatives are less likely to support such policies than are citizens who support government programs to protect the environment.⁷ Blake and his colleagues conclude that the relation between ideology and environmental orientation warrants further study.

Two studies that explore this relation are those by Ellis and Thompson (1997) and Kanji (1996). The former, drawing on surveys in the US Pacific Northwest, finds egalitarianism to be strongly related to a new ecological consciousness and to support for environmental spending. The latter, using data on Canada and the US from the World Values Survey, notes a significant relation between left-libertarianism and environmental concern.⁸ Both studies employ multiple regression to assess the association of left orientation with some measure of environ-

⁷ Blake et al.'s (1997) neoconservatism index uses three items: government should do more to protect the environment, even if it leads to higher taxes; to prevent destruction of natural resources, the government must have the right to control private land use; and protection of the environment requires more extensive government regulation of business. Affirmative responses to these items result in low neoconservatism scores. Explicit reference to environment or natural resources in each item renders interpretation of the index as a strictly ideological measure problematic. By constructing the index in this manner, Blake and his colleagues conflate the two dimensions they attempt to correlate – environmental concern and ideological conservatism.

⁸ Kanji also analyzed data on Mexico, but the left-libertarianism variable was not significant.

mentalism, but the kinds of left politics they measure differ. Ellis and Thompson, drawing on Wildavsky's (1987) typology of cultural biases, measure egalitarianism as support for the redistribution of wealth.⁹ Kanji builds on Kitschelt's¹⁰ work on new social movements in Western Europe to measure left-libertarianism, which is characterized by a rejection of centralized state action as the means to solve the environmental problems created by industrial society.¹¹ Left-libertarians attribute environmental problems to the state-corporate partnership that has governed industrial society. Furthermore, they see this partnership as invasive of personal autonomy. Thus, while environmental protection is a priority for them, they are sceptical of coercive, state policy solutions. In contrast, egalitarians favour state action as the instrument of economic redistribution. From the left-libertarian point of view, individuals and communities need to adopt lifestyles that minimize adverse impacts on the environment.

Both studies include a measure of ideological self-placement; Ellis and Thompson (1997) use it as a separate variable, while Kanji (1996) includes it in his left-libertarian index. Ellis and Thompson distinguish between ideology and cultural bias; they wish to measure the effects of an egalitarian bias independent of ideology.¹² In contrast, Kanji, following Kitschelt, sees new left-libertarianism as an ideology that has begun to displace the old left.

The distinction between political culture and ideology is not a clear one. Indeed Ellis and Thompson (1997) acknowledge some question as to whether they are measuring ideology or culture. Our own decision to use political culture as an organizing framework rests on three premises. First, political culture is a property of a community or collectivity (the collectivity in this case is a social movement). We do not attempt to measure the ideology of each activist but to describe

⁹ Their index of egalitarianism includes three items: the world would be a more peaceful place if its wealth were divided more equally among nations; we need to dramatically reduce inequalities between the rich and the poor, Whites and people of colour, and men and women; and what our country needs is a fairness revolution to make the distribution of goods more equal (Ellis and Thompson 1997).

¹⁰ See Kitschelt (1990) and Kitschelt and Hellemans (1990).

¹¹ Kanji's (1996) index of left-libertarianism includes five items: left placement on a left-right political scale; low confidence in government; low confidence in civil service; low emphasis on material goods; and desire to live a simple and natural lifestyle.

¹² The Ellis and Thompson item, which is not consistently significant, asks respondents to array themselves on a scale from strongly conservative to strongly liberal. This is a conventional scale in studies of US politics, but we should note that, reflective of the mainstream of US political discourse, there is no left on this scale. Ellis and Thompson's egalitarian scale arguably offers more opportunity for the expression of a traditional left orientation.

a culture(s) in which the activists are embedded. Second, political cultures include affective and empirical orientations towards *particular political systems* as well as broader notions about political processes in the abstract. We are interested in the activists' assessments of political processes and institutions in British Columbia and Canada as well as their more abstract political ideals. Third, we prefer the term "culture" to "ideology" because we do not want to limit our investigation to established ideologies; rather, we want to be open to emerging orientations without regard to ideological consistency or issue constraint.¹³

The research described above suggests that if there is a shared political culture among environmental activists in British Columbia, then some form of left politics is a central element of that culture.¹⁴ We will explore the extent to which the egalitarian cultural bias observed by Ellis and Thompson (1997) in the US Pacific Northwest, or the left-libertarian perspective Kanji (1996) found among environmental supporters in the US and Canada, effectively captures the cultural orientation of activists in the BC environmental movement. Thus, we examine whether a commitment to economic redistribution is a key requisite of environmental activism in British Columbia. Furthermore, we ask whether environmental activists identify as leftists, are wary of government and bureaucrats, and are committed to an environmental lifestyle.

METHODS AND ACTIVIST PROWLE

Studies of political culture are generally of two sorts. The first uses extended interviews with a small sample of people to identify attributes of the belief system that are prevalent in a particular political community (Bellah et al. 1985). The second surveys large samples of individuals in order to identify patterns of beliefs and values that are statistically generalizable (Abramson and Inglehart 1995). While the first type of study facilitates intensive examination of the subjects' understandings of politics, the interviewers' interpretations are unconstrained by measurement rules, and research designs are culturally

¹³ For Converse (1964) an individual's belief system exhibits constraint when attitudes on a wide variety of issues are easily predicted by attitudes on a few issues. An individual who subscribes to a well-developed ideology would exhibit high issue constraint.

¹⁴ Bakvis and Nevitte (1992) also used survey data to examine the relation between ideology and support for environmental protection in Canada. While they found a positive relation between left identification and environmental concern, ideology was not a strong predictor of environmentalism.

static and seldom permit replication. The second type imposes the investigator's conceptions of politics by using pre-defined categories in the survey instrument. Furthermore, responses to close-ended questions may not convey the subjects' understanding of response categories.

The following analysis draws on a set of semi-structured interviews with fifty-one environmental activists in several regions of British Columbia.¹⁵ Our decision to use an intensive interview strategy was shaped by two considerations. First, because political culture is an attribute of a collective, an understanding of the social context of an individual's activism is essential. Such an understanding is more likely to be gained through extended conversations than through responses to close-ended survey questions. Second, since nearly all of the previous research on the political orientations of environmentalists in British Columbia has employed mass surveys, it seemed that the use of personal interviews might generate new insights. Alternatively, if the same results were generated by a different method, then confidence in the conclusions of previous studies would be strengthened.¹⁶

The sample of individuals was designed to capture the range of environmentalist thinking in the province and, thus, includes activists who vary across a set of demographic attributes and who work on a range of environmental issues.¹⁷ We drew on public records, directories and newsletters of environmental organizations, and key informants to identify potential interviewees. Each person interviewed was asked to suggest other activists. The fifty-one participants include residents of the Lower Mainland, the West Kootenay and Okanagan regions, Powell River, and Vancouver Island.¹⁸ Their issue involvement spans a range of environmental concerns, including: urban and suburban land use and transportation issues, wildlife habitat, pollution associated with pulp mills and automobiles, wilderness preservation, fish harvesting and habitat, global change issues, biotechnology, and sustainable forestry practices. Furthermore, the sample varies by sex, ethnicity, age, education, and occupation.¹⁹

¹⁵ Interviews were conducted between September 1996 and March 1998. A schedule of twelve substantive and eight demographic questions guided the interviews, which lasted from one to three hours.

¹⁶ See Salazar and Alper (1998) for an attempt to meld both approaches.

¹⁷ Our intent was *not* to secure a probability sample that would generate statistically generalizable results; rather, we attempted to interview a set of activists who reflected a range of potentially important attributes.

¹⁸ Our focus on the southern part of the province reflects the fact that the movement (both organizations and individuals) is concentrated there.

¹⁹ While including a demographically diverse set of activists in the sample makes it less likely that we will miss important political orientations, the small size of the sample limits

The activists interviewed for the study range in age from twenty-two to eighty (Table 1). Roughly half are women; most have graduated from college; and slightly less than one-third are employed by environmental organizations.²⁰ Conventional religiosity tends not to be an important part of their lives, although several are church members who attend church regularly and many others emphasized their commitment to non-traditional forms of spirituality.²¹ But most dismissed our question on religious orientation, seemingly anxious to move on to other matters. Four of the activists are Chinese-Canadian, four are Native, and forty-three are White. Among the latter group, most trace their ancestry to Northern Europe. Sixteen interviewees were born outside of Canada, six of these in England, five in the United States.

We found considerable variation among the interviewees with respect to their own identification as environmentalists and their perspectives on the movement. Several noted that environmentalist referred to a very broad range of people, issue concerns, and activities. They identified some environmentalists (“wilderness” types or “tree people”) with whom they disagreed and would not want to be associated. These people were referred to as elitist and self-centred. Several urban activists noted their disagreement with, or alienation from, the wilderness part of the movement. Their comments indicated fundamental distrust over both policy and political tactics. Similarly, some wilderness environmentalists argued that they had little in common with those concerned with urban quality of life.

In spite of these divisions, all of the interviewees saw their activism as contributing to environmental protection and/or the environmental movement. Thus, we are confident in referring to the sample as one that consists of environmental activists. Furthermore, the sample captures much, if not all, of the variation in environmental/political perspectives within the movement.

our ability to make comparisons across demographic categories such as age, sex, and ethnicity. Thus we avoid such comparisons except when a pattern is exceptionally clear.

²⁰ These organizations engage in a broad range of activities, including public education, policy analysis, political organizing or campaigning, lobbying, and litigation.

²¹ A recent study in the US found a conservative Christian theological commitment to be negatively related to support for environmental protection (Guth et al. 1995). Consistent with this finding, none of the activists indicated membership in a conservative denomination. The sample included eight members of Christian denominations: two were Unitarians, one was Anglican, three were Roman Catholics, one was Mennonite, and one was a member of the United Church of Canada. Two of the indigenous interviewees participate in the traditional spiritual practices of their nation. Four of the activists identified as Buddhists, several others as pagans or pantheists (though none of this last group participated in ritualized spiritual practice).

ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICAL CULTURE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The first question we pose is, can we discern an orientation towards politics and the political system that is widely shared among environmental activists in British Columbia? That is, is it reasonable to talk about an environmentalist political culture in the province? In answering this question, we attempt to find a set of beliefs and values that is generally held by the activists we interviewed. Public opinion researchers commonly distinguish between beliefs, which are empirical, and values, which are normative (Milbrath 1989; Kempton et al. 1995). Values reflect moral guidelines or principles; they indicate commitments to what is right or just. In contrast, beliefs are assertions of that which is assumed to be fact. Our interview questions were intended to probe beliefs about the nature of power, politics, and government in British Columbia, especially as these are related to environmental protection. Furthermore, we attempted to elicit values that related to how political decisions should be made and, in particular, to the criteria that should guide environmental decision-making. The interviews suggest that, indeed, there is a set of beliefs and values common to nearly all of the interviewees. This belief system, or political culture, centres on commitments to democracy and personal responsibility, and a critique of global capitalism. Furthermore, three subcultures were apparent; the first we call municipal populism; the second, social anarchism; and the third, market environmentalism.²²

Environmentalism as a Culture of Democracy

The most uniformly held value among our sample of activists was a commitment to democracy. This commitment was expressed in discussions of the organizations in which the activists participated, assessments of BC political institutions and processes, conceptions of citizenship, and critiques of the BC political economy.

Praise of the grassroots mode of organizing and of particular community environmental organizations was a common theme in the interviews. Grassroots, or community, organizations were touted as democratic and as reflecting the will of the people. The Slocan Watershed Alliance and the Friends of Clayoquot Sound, in particular, were described as epitomizing effective, democratic organizations. Interviewees

²² These orientations reflect observed tendencies and correlations rather than mutually exclusive categories that identified clear groups of interviewees.

who participated in these groups described them as fluid, persistent, and responsive to their members. Both organizations have employed modified forms of consensus decision-making and were described as inclusive of all who desired to participate. Both organizations have also addressed forestry issues for more than a decade. One interviewee described the background of community organizing:

We started with consensus way back before it was a fad. Coming out of the first time that we felt we might have to use direct action and we bought into training for direct action, which is a lot of communications skills and decision-making. That's the first time we heard about consensus. That was from the mid-eighties, eighty-six maybe. So then ever after the whole group has operated by consensus.

This respondent noted that even though the group had developed procedures to deal with situations when consensus could not be achieved, these procedures were seldom used. Members worked together to achieve consensus in the interests of the community.

The activists overwhelmingly rejected partisan politics and government-run stakeholder processes as undemocratic. Several had been closely associated with the NDP while it was in opposition and were bitterly disappointed with its environmental policies once in government. One former NDP activist stated: "What I learned in the Kemano fight is that it really didn't matter what political party was there." Most of the activists believed the party was more responsive to multinational corporations than to the interests of BC citizens. Whether a conservative party explicitly supported the multinational corporations or a social democratic party was constrained by them, many respondents viewed their behaviour in government as nearly indistinguishable.²³ The following comment was typical of this view: "I think the big companies basically have the political parties over a barrel. They either have them in their pockets, which is most of the right wing parties ... The social democrats aren't in the pockets so much of the big corporations, but they are also influenced by them."

Other activists objected to political parties because these often prevent legislators from representing their constituents and voting their consciences. These activists were particularly critical of the parliamentary form of government and its tradition of party votes. Several

²³ Many either had voted Green or intended to do so. A few said they did not see voting as useful. One argued that majoritarian systems were fundamentally undemocratic because they privilege numbers rather than good or right policies. In a numbers game, minorities always lose (as a function of their small numbers) regardless of the justness of their cause.

cited the relatively undisciplined US party system as more democratic. Activists also supported mechanisms of direct democracy, such as the initiative and recall. They saw these processes as means to overcoming entrenched party systems.²⁴

Most interviewees dismissed government-initiated roundtables as empty processes designed to use up citizens' time and energy. Nearly all of the activists had a story about a process in which they had participated, spending months or years to reach a decision that was subsequently ignored by government.²⁵ Moreover, several opposed having their political work and participation characterized as that of "stakeholders." Stakeholders were seen as interest groups and were, therefore, associated with interest politics. According to this view, interest groups and the politics in which they engaged were identified with personal interests, while the environment was viewed as the responsibility of everyone. One respondent stated:

I'm not a stakeholder ... I'm here because you guys are destroying the environment and you've got to stop doing it. You've got to protect it. It's sort of like Solomon's baby. I'm not here to discuss whether you cut off three fingers or five fingers; you'll leave the baby alone. Take care of the baby. That is the responsibility of everybody. It is not to divide up the pie ... I just don't believe in that.

Environmental protection was viewed as a public goal, and those who fought for it were seen as public-spirited. In contrast, stakeholder processes were seen as facilitating a strategy of bargaining and compromise in the service of private gain.

All of the interviewees saw responsible citizenship as being comprised of political activism and lifestyle behaviours favourable to the environment. Some saw massive citizen activism as the way to change public policy; others were less sanguine. But even those who believed there was little hope of fundamental change claimed that it was their responsibility to try. Making the effort was the right thing to do and

²⁴ A few argued that if British Columbia adopted a system of proportional representation, then the parties would be more responsive and representative of diverse constituencies. But by far the most strongly voiced sentiment was disgust with political parties.

²⁵ This view runs counter to that described by Harrison (1996), who found environmental group representatives supportive of stakeholder processes. The difference in findings may be a consequence of the time periods during which interviews were conducted. Our interviewees had the benefit of longer experience with these processes and with the more confrontational, and less environmentally inclined, Clark government. Furthermore, unlike Harrison's interviewees, most of our interviewees were not "representatives" of environmental organizations. Even those who were officers or employees of environmental groups were asked for their personal, rather than their organizational, perspectives.

would set the right example for their children. Some of the activists, especially those who had participated in direct action related to logging, had incurred considerable cost to protect the environment and their communities. One interviewee described her decision to participate in civil disobedience.

While we were down there we got a newsletter from the Friends saying that they were going to resume clear-cutting in the Clayoquot Sound. They had been under a moratorium for a while ... [The newsletter] talked about blockading ... I didn't want my daughter to do it because she was young and if she gets a criminal record ... Who cares if I have a clean record? When we came back, I went on a blockade and I was arrested in the first group of people and I was in prison four and a half months.

Other interviewees cited lawsuits and other forms of intimidation by government and business. A major corporation had sued at least one for participating in civil disobedience. This activist incurred legal costs as well as the threat of losing his home. Others told of government approval of environmentally unsound timber harvesting that could be construed as an effort to punish a particularly active community. But the most common cost incurred by the activists was the long hours devoted to learning about the technical aspects of environmental management and attempting to promote their perspectives on environmental protection to the public and to government. Anyone who has ever read an environmental impact statement, a scientific paper, or a ministry report can understand the commitment of time and psychic energy made by these activists.

In addition to activism, lifestyle constituted a second mode of responsible citizenship. Living in a manner consistent with natural limits was seen as a political act and as central to activists' identification as environmentalists. They emphasized the individual's personal responsibility and power to promote social change through his/her lifestyle choices. Thus they made efforts to use alternative transportation, to consume little, to purchase organic food, and to grow their own food. One activist described citizens' responsibility to the environment: "The underlying thing is to have the least impact on the earth as possible ... Only use what you need, don't over-consume ... It's important to try to have the least impact by watching everything you do."

Younger activists, especially those in urban areas, were the most adamant and consistent about lifestyle politics, avoiding the use, and

sometimes the ownership, of automobiles. Activists in rural areas were more likely to grow food and live on income from part-time employment. Consumer boycotts were seen as a collective form of a fundamentally individual responsibility. Refusal to participate in conventional economic institutions was seen as a way to undermine an environmentally and socially destructive political economy.

Nearly all of the activists articulated a critique of the BC economy in the context of global capitalism. This critique focused on the multinational forest companies. They saw these companies as outsiders who controlled the government, pillaged the forests, and polluted the air and water. Furthermore, given the globalization of the economy, these companies were behaving as was to be expected. Some interviewees offered quite sophisticated analyses of the international banking system and of multinational trade agreements. These institutions were seen as serious threats to democracy. The following are representative of the critiques of global capitalism expressed by respondents:

I think a new form of governance is required ... the old form of capitalist democracies and/or socialist democracies and/or socialism are outdated because of the globalization. They're totally inappropriate. There are no such things as the US and Canada any more. When you have the World Trade Organization, you have NAFTA ... which is a government process, you don't have ... national countries that can make laws and implement them. Where trans-national corporations have more of a say than you casting a ballot in terms of what's going to happen with your state oil, or your state forestry resources, or your state rivers ... You tell me whether or not a democracy exists when you look at it from that point of view. It doesn't exist.

We're not governed by government anymore. We're governed by corporate mandate. Right here in British Columbia the vast majority of British Columbians don't want clear-cutting. But ... that's what we're going to have is clear-cutting. The vast majority of people don't want these sex hormones in cows, in beef cattle or in these milk cows ... But we're going to get it whether we like it or not.

This said, most of the activists did not reject capitalism. Several were business owners; most were sympathetic to private property²⁶ and an economy based on private entrepreneurship. It was the exercise

²⁶ Though most offered that landowners ought to pay as much attention to their responsibilities as to their rights.

of political economic power by outsider corporate bureaucracies that most troubled them. Comments from two interviewees make this point:

I thought, "Those are public lands." They belong to the people of this province. They don't belong to MacMillan-Bloedel. They don't belong to the damn government. The government's supposed to be protecting this land for the people of British Columbia and they're not doing their job.

And it's just like the whole thing of people owning – corporations or companies owning – something that we couldn't be a part of. I think what really fuels my sense of environmentalism as well is Alcan, a big aluminium company, virtually owning the Nechako River. It belongs to the fish and the Natives first, and it belongs to a lot of us second. It doesn't belong to Alcan, and they have complete control over it.

Most of the activists described their politics as social democratic or left of centre. But the left they defined did not have redistribution of wealth at the top of its agenda;²⁷ rather, these activists are demanding the redistribution of *power*. Thus, while their views might incorporate many elements of egalitarianism, none emphasized this aspect of their politics. To the extent that inequality is a burning issue for them, it is in the context of corporate as opposed to citizen control of public resources. Their efforts to seek equality focus on equal access to political power; democracy is the centre of their politics.

Though united by a commitment to democratic governance, the activists differed with respect to their beliefs about the degree to which democracy could be achieved within the context of existing political institutions. These differences form the basis of three political subcultures within the BC environmental movement.

Municipal Populism

The first subculture, *municipal populism*, emphasises distrust of bureaucrats and experts. Municipal populists believe that citizens mobilized by grassroots organizations can pressure government officials to be more responsive to the public will (rather than to private interests). This orientation is consistent with BC political culture

²⁷ Even this affiliation with the left was not uniform. Several reported voting for the Reform Party in the 1997 federal election; several others were affiliated with the provincial Liberal Party.

and has strong roots in parties of both the right and left (Blake et al. 1991). Municipal populists were clustered in the Lower Mainland and tended to focus on local land use issues. One activist expressed a common belief that local politics offered more potential for democratic decision-making: "Municipal politics is more important than any other form of government in this country. Because we're the people. And we can get close to the decision-makers, where you can't get close to Chretien and his boys. You can't get close to Glen Clark."

Although sceptical of current governments, these activists expressed confidence that Canadian institutions are fundamentally democratic. Municipal populists stated a strong conviction that their organizing efforts revealed the community will and that organized government (parties, bureaucrats) had to be pressured to accept that will. One interviewee stated: "We just knew that what we were doing was right. We knew that in our hearts it was something that everybody wanted. We were grassroots democracy. We were the community." This interviewee contended that bureaucrats run the government and have to be forced to listen to people like her. The belief was that politicians and parties behave expediently, and, thus, grassroots politics are about educating and organizing citizens to create overwhelming force. Another interviewee cited an old organizing maxim: "Politicians are like wind vanes. You don't talk them into changing directions; you have to blow in their face." Activists who voiced this belief saw party affiliation as unproductive. Intriguingly, municipal populists offered no solution to the paradox that fundamentally sound political institutions promote politicians who are corrupt and self-serving. In their view, government can be made to work and electoral political activity²⁸ is worthwhile. For them, active citizen participation is the key to securing democratic governance. Comments made by two activists reflect this belief.

Politically, I think it's sad that people don't realize how lucky we are to have this system and that we're not using it correctly. We're not all being responsible. I like the idea of the old town meeting, where everybody went once a week or once a month to discuss subjects of general interest to the community. My political philosophy is that community is very important and we should all be involved. If we don't, we will lose democracy.

²⁸ Several of the activists had served in elected positions or run for them. Many others had participated in election campaigns in support of other candidates.

We have to take responsibility for what democracy is to us and how people perceive it and what they do with it. We can't rely on others, politicians and bureaucrats, making those decisions for us, because they don't know any more than we do.

The activists who most clearly articulated this municipal populist perspective tended to be older and to have come to politics because of a threat to a particular community/environment. Several were passionate about the importance of protecting community; others were passionate about the primacy of the ecosystem. Some of each group linked the two, asserting that nature is an essential element of community because it (nature) contributes to a sense of place. Several of these activists were willing to sacrifice their own place in a desired community/environment in order to protect it. As one interviewee stated emphatically, "I would rather move away and protect it than be able to afford to live here and ruin it."

Social Anarchism

In contrast to the municipal populist acceptance of Canadian institutions, a *social anarchist* subculture offered a fundamental critique of institutions such as private ownership of land and parliamentary democracy. The blending of social anarchist with environmentalist beliefs generated an emphasis on decentralized structures of governance as a primary means to ensure sustainable resource management. Furthermore, the social anarchist perspective tended to link social justice and ecological principles, arguing that the two are interdependent. Finally, those who articulated this perspective also tended to celebrate decentralization within the environmental movement.

While nearly all of the interviewees were highly critical of the provincial government and of multinational corporations, some suggested that private property and government in general were problematic. These activists supported community and/or worker control of natural resources and governance through a pyramidal structure of regional councils. But their rejection of existing structures, as well as their advocacy of political economic transformation, was tempered. They did not expect, nor did they try to achieve, immediate abolition of multinational corporations or of private property; rather, their efforts were directed at incrementally undermining these institutions. Thus consumer boycotts and other efforts directed at the profitability of the multinational forest companies might lead these companies to give up their forest tenures, leaving them for community groups.

Indeed, community control of forests was the most commonly proposed reform of the tenure system: "It comes back to community again, decision-making power within the community. Because you know more out here than you do in Victoria."

While social anarchists were critical of private property economies and offered extensive analyses of the environmental destruction resulting from private ownership of land, they were ambivalent about how to transform this system. One activist described her vision of subverting private ownership of land by changing people's values about the meaning of such ownership.

But, if people started taking responsibility for the land they own that would be the first step. Over time, owning it would become less important than taking responsibility for it. You sort of get a gradual movement of culture. Land ownership in North America came and flourished. It's been 300, 400 years. It gives you some hope that it might disappear in 400 years, but chances are slim.

Thus the social anarchist subculture within the BC environmental movement is more pragmatic than doctrinaire. When activists spoke about ideal governance structures, they often described a system of nested councils representing increasingly broad bioregions. Community resources would be governed by community councils. Communities would elect representatives to regional councils. These councils would then elect members to represent them at the next level of governance. Decision-making would be by consensus at each level. While several interviewees spoke with great enthusiasm about such a system, none suggested that it would be achievable in the near future.

Social anarchists also raised issues of social justice in their discussions of environmental policy. One interviewee argued that her environmentalism was an extension of her socialism because concern for the least powerful is a defining attribute of socialism. She contended that this concern logically extended to plants and animals: "You care about anything, whether it's humans, plants, animals, if you're a socialist." Another argued that, in British Columbia, when someone's consciousness is raised about the devastation of forests, he/she will begin to question the political economic system that has produced that devastation. Thus, for this interviewee, environmental awareness leads to social awareness. Another interviewee noted:

I realize just how intertwined environmental issues and social justice issues are ... People taking things that aren't theirs or people having too much control over public resources; it's all intertwined. It is very difficult if not impossible to properly deal with environmental issues without looking at social [in]justice as a kind of foundation for a lot of the exploitation that goes on.

Most of those holding this social anarchist perspective had been involved in other social movements and/or civic activities before they became active in environmental politics.²⁹ One activist noted that her choice to work in the environmental movement reflected her belief that environmental injustice is more tangible than social injustice. She contended that people react viscerally to a clear-cut, while they have been desensitized to starving children. She believed the environmental movement could more effectively mobilize people and promote social equity through efforts to give workers and communities more control over their lives. Another activist, a labour union official, offered a class analysis of environmental politics. She was concerned that workers' interests were being excluded from environmental policy-making and fought what she argued was an elitist bent in the wilderness segment of the BC environmental movement.

One interviewee, with a history of international development activism, was drawn to environmentalism by a conference on green cities. His concern was that urban development ought to be locally driven and meet the needs of local residents. He thought people ought to be free to work with their environments in a mutually supportive way, and he contended that centralized power structures inhibited this process. His focus on empowering individuals to lead more environmentally benign lives was consistent with activists' broader focus on lifestyle environmentalism. "Every chance I get I want to inject a little bit of anarchy to it, to see how it works. It's a long-term living experiment. Definitely my lifestyle has become more anarchic and my dealings with my surroundings have become more anarchic."

Though these activists express scepticism towards government, describe their politics as left of centre, and promote environmentally benign lifestyles, we choose not to follow Kanji (1996) in referring to this perspective as left-libertarianism. The activists in our sample did not emphasize individual autonomy, a value central to libertarian thinking, but individual responsibility to community and the

²⁹ International travel was also a common experience for interviewees in this group.

importance of empowering community governance institutions. Their ideas, while not consistently ideological, were more characteristic of social anarchism than of libertarianism.³⁰

Market Environmentalism

Market environmentalism, with its emphasis on the use of incentive-based policies to achieve environmental protection, constituted the final subculture. A small number of interviewees emphasized the importance of crafting public policies that would offer benefits to private firms for engaging in environmentally beneficial practices. The notion of “user pay” for environmental pollution and resource use was seen as central to an enlightened environmental policy. The following statement is typical of analyses that focus on the use of market signals to promote sound environmental management: “I think the problem is that we don’t have ... private enterprise and private markets; [people] forget that private enterprise is badly subsidized. The problem is that we need to remove all the hidden subsidies and get people to pay the real costs.”

The specific contexts of these comments included encouraging farmers to protect wildlife habitat and manufacturers to minimize air and water pollution. A few interviewees argued that businesses would often be better environmental stewards than government. Several noted the importance of private property rights and the imperative of compensation for loss of such rights.

I believe people should have their little bits of land ... I don’t see that it serves anything for everybody to hold everything in common. I think people care for things better if they’ve got a stake in it. And the way we’ve given people a stake in things is to give them what we call ownership of the land ... But I don’t see that it should be unrestricted ownership, no.

Finally, some of these activists contended that economic growth was important and that environmental protection was not inconsistent with that goal. The trick was to devise policies that would achieve both. As one respondent noted: “I’m trying as much as possible to be pro-business, in the sense that I have to understand that people need to work. Strong communities are built on full employment.” This activist, along with several others, emphasized the importance of elim-

³⁰ Given the items in his left-libertarian index, there is no evidence to support Kanji’s (1996) choice of the term “libertarian” rather than “anarchist” to describe his respondents.

inating subsidies for environmentally destructive practices. Only a few of the activists articulated a model of environmental policy based on market signals. Those who did had some direct experience, education, or regular interaction with for-profit businesses. But, in what may be an indication of the political reach of liberal economic thinking, many of the interviewees offered some comment about the importance of a user-pay system or the elimination of subsidies to corporations as well as to individuals.

Environmental Activists and the Left

Historically, the left in North America has focused on issues of the distribution of wealth. In contrast, environmental politics generally focus on resource allocation.³¹ But environmental policies also have distributive, or equity, implications. In an effort to elicit activists' perspectives on distributive issues and to discern the nature and extent of egalitarian commitments, we asked them about the costs of environmental protection and how these costs ought to be distributed. At an abstract level, we found them to be almost unanimous in supporting equal distributions. However, when the activists were confronted with more specific contexts, they expressed little support for, or interest in, equal distribution. When asked to discuss the potential tradeoffs between jobs and forest protection in rural British Columbia, activists presented three types of response.

A small group of activists, with long experience in the environmental and other social movements, was perhaps most sympathetic to the plight of families and communities dependent on the wood products industry. These activists believed that reductions in timber harvest would result in local disruptions and supported including local communities in forest policy processes. They saw the development of policy as a process of making difficult choices among sometimes conflicting values, and they were committed to working through these conflicts with their neighbours who worked in resource extraction and processing. These activists acknowledged that such interaction might require them to change some of their own positions.

A second group of BC environmental activists saw no social priority as more important than protecting the environment. These activists tended to blame individuals working in the resource extraction

³¹ Resource allocation refers to how environmental resources will be used. Economists contrast allocation with distribution, which refers to who will benefit from, and who will pay for, particular policies.

industries for resource decline. Furthermore, they tended to be sceptical of tenure reforms that would place authority with communities with a history of economic dependence on the timber and fishing industries. While these activists are committed to a socially just society, their vision of social justice focuses on creating community economies that are sustainable in the long term and are not in the expressed, short-term interests of many rural, working people.

Finally, a third set of activists believed that environmental protection would not result in economic costs for those least able to bear them. They expressed impatience with the jobs-versus-ancient-forests formulation and blamed job loss on multinational forest corporations and globalization of the economy rather than on environmental constraints on timber harvests. Many cited a study, sponsored by the Suzuki Foundation,³² that found job losses could be attributed to mechanization, lack of investment in forest management, and global competition. These activists thus faced no contradiction between their commitments to social justice and to forest preservation. For them, the issue was empirical. Once they answered the question of the cause of economic decline in forest-dependent communities (the corporations and the international economy), their policy preferences produced no value conflict for them.

DEMOCRATIC IDEALS AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The activists' responses to questions about social justice, as well their general scepticism about government, make it difficult to evaluate the extent to which the environmental movement is a movement of the left. If left is taken to mean a political agenda with the redistribution of wealth and extensive government involvement in the economy as central elements, then left does not adequately capture environmental political culture in British Columbia. While the interviewees expressed satisfaction with the Canadian social safety net and commitment to social justice, these issues were not the most salient for them. Moreover, when confronted with the immediate equity implications of some environmental policies, many of the activists preferred to look to the long term, arguing that, in the short term, some would have to sacrifice to build a sustainable society. In their

³² See Schwindt and Heaps (1996). This study was issued several months before the interviews commenced.

view, such a society would de-emphasize material wealth. Accordingly, good citizens of the Earth should consume fewer goods and much less energy than is characteristic of the lives of most Canadians. With regard to the role of government, the activists were ambivalent. While disgusted with the policies of the current provincial and national governments, and sceptical of government in general, most nonetheless saw the need for government at some level. While many supported more community control over resource management, they argued that local authority ought to be constrained by provincial or national guidelines. This ambivalence reflects activists' efforts to achieve their environmental goals in light of their intellectual commitments to small-scale organization and in the context of their political experience. Ideological consistency is not an obvious element of their positions on the role of government or on other political questions.

If the BC environmental movement comes out of left politics, then it is a left that is evolving and that reflects pragmatism more than ideological purity. The central political priority of this left is the redistribution of political power. There is no uniformity about how this would be achieved or about precisely how truly democratic institutions would look. But the lack of democratic responsiveness in BC politics was a key element of the activists' critique. This critique found fault with government-initiated stakeholder processes, political parties, and multinational corporations. Stakeholder processes, while touted as a means to minimize inequalities in power and to reach past conflict, were seen as institutionalizing these inequalities. Furthermore, activists claimed government could not be held accountable to the participants in these processes, since government had no legal commitment to abide by their recommendations.

The model of democracy on which our interviewees converged has two elements. The first is an idealization of face-to-face consensus decision-making as *the* democratic model. This ideal was cited as a key reason for the success of grassroots environmental organizations. It is much like Mansbridge's (1983) model of unitary democracy, which assumes common interests and decision-making by consensus rather than voting rules. Stakeholder processes, which environmentalists generally reject, are an outgrowth of this model, but with an important difference. The stakeholder processes bring together interest groups (or stakeholders) with ascribed roles and power bases. In an analysis of the Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE), Burrows

(1997) concludes that in the absence of common values, the consensus-based stakeholder process turns into a strategic negotiation among actors with unequal power. Stakeholder processes, which have been a common feature of BC politics in the 1990s, have not been embraced by environmental activists who are inclined towards more inclusive grassroots forms of organization.

Second, the activists held a strong belief that citizens had a responsibility to participate in politics and to refrain from environmentally destructive behaviour in their private lives. This vision of democracy is based in the idea of a self-governing community of citizens united by a belief in collective responsibility for stewardship of the commons. Participation, according to this view, enhances the power of communities and enlarges their scope of action (Pateman 1970). This kind of democracy, referred to as "strong democracy" by Barber (1984), rests on the idea that citizens are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their participatory institutions.

What these activists add to theoretical models of democratic citizenship is a belief in the centrality of lifestyle politics. Not only does the good citizen have a responsibility to vote, attend public meetings, write letters to newspapers and public officials, and participate in other public fora, she also orders her private life so as to serve public ends. She will consume as little as she can. She will use paper products made from recycled, unbleached materials. She will bicycle or use public transit. She may grow her own food or purchase locally grown organic produce. From the interviewees' perspective, each of these private decisions reflects a political commitment. Furthermore, this commitment is central to most activists identifying themselves as environmentalists.

Beyond these shared beliefs about democracy and citizenship, the interviewees expressed differing perspectives on the extent to which existing political economic institutions can be made more responsive to citizens. The subculture of municipal populism was characterized by a belief that an organized community could effectively pressure government to achieve change. Thus, while political and economic leaders may be corrupted by power, an active citizenry can ensure democratic governance. The support of environmental activists for referenda and other forms of direct democracy is consistent with this belief. Municipal populism highlights structural reforms as well as changes in citizen behaviour as requisites for more democratic governance.

Market environmentalism, which is rooted in classical liberalism, advocates the use of incentive-based policies in order to protect the environment. Market environmentalists support private ownership of resources and user-pay systems for pollution and recreation. Realizing their vision of the sustainable society would require only policy reforms specific to environmental management and would entail no structural changes. Behavioural change would result from these policy reforms.

Social anarchists were much less confident in existing governmental structures than were members of other environmental subcultures. They advocated a fundamental restructuring of institutions. Some of their suggestions included the abolition of private property, community and/or worker control of natural resource management, and governance through a pyramidal structure of regional councils.³³

Though the activists differed in their view of the extent of structural change that is needed, they were unanimous in their assessment that political power must be reclaimed from the multinational corporations. Moreover, most of the environmental activists interviewed for this study have fundamental differences with the NDP. These differences go beyond environmental priorities and reflect different conceptions of democracy. The activists generally disagree with the party about how public decisions should be made as well as who should be included in decision-making processes. In contrast to the NDP's use of provincially controlled stakeholder processes and consultations with capital and labour, environmentalists argued that public decisions ought to reflect the will of the people as expressed through grassroots organizations. Moreover, they have different conceptions of the ends of social/political life. The NDP continues to support the social democratic agenda of an expansive welfare state and, thus, reflects conventional left thinking about redistributing wealth (Blake, et al. 1991; Sigurdson 1996). The activists we interviewed prioritize quality of life over materialist values. They envision a new conception of wealth.

The NDP's pattern of offering incremental concessions to environmentalists (a park here, a wilderness there) is unlikely to win the enthusiastic support of environmentalists. But neither is this strategy likely to doom the party. Indeed, this strategy may successfully coopt environmentalists for whom wilderness is the primary issue. Moreover, those environmentalists for whom social issues have high priority

³³ This last feature is similar to Macpherson's (1977) model of participatory liberal democracy.

may be willing to forgive the NDP its environmental transgressions if other concerns are addressed.

CONCLUSIONS

Generalizing from a sample of fifty-one individuals requires caution. But our intent is not to make inferences about the distribution of particular worldviews within the population of environmental activists in British Columbia; rather, our purpose is to describe the political culture of the environmental movement – the community that activists have created and in which their ideas develop. We have attempted to achieve this end by conducting a series of extended conversations with activists who vary with respect to demographic attributes, geographic location, and issue interests. These conversations indicate that there is indeed a set of beliefs and values about politics that is common to participants in the environmental movement. But there is also variation among the activists.

Furthermore, our interviews do not support the contention that environmentalists are motivated by egalitarianism and other commitments of the old left. It is more accurate to characterize them as radical democrats with varying perspectives on the extent to which Canadian political institutions can be made to respond to popular will. We do not claim that there are no egalitarians or old leftists among BC environmentalists; rather, we argue that the most salient element of the political culture of the BC environmental movement is a commitment to democracy. Those who wish to understand the political culture of environmentalism in the province would do well to dispense with left/right models and to explore more fully how environmentalists conceive democracy and what those conceptions imply for the future of public policy.

TABLE 1.
Demographic Profile of Environmental Activist Interviewees

SEX		EDUCATION	
women	25	completed secondary	20
men	26	college/university degree	18
		graduate/professional degree	13

AGE		BORN IN BC?	
20-29	5	yes	20
30-39	10	no	31
40-49	11		
50-59	17		
60-69	4		
70+	3		

OCCUPATION		SECTOR OF EMPLOYMENT	
policy advocacy/ community organizing	14	private non-profit	18
technician/trades	9	for profit	11
scientist/policy analyst	8	public	5
teacher/educator	5	not employed full time	17
artist/writer	4		
retail sales	4		
farming	3		
software engineer	2		
health care	1		
lawyer	1		

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Would you describe your involvement in environmental issues? How long have you been involved? How did you become involved? What kinds of issues have you worked on? What kinds of political activity have you engaged in related to environmental issues?
2. As respondent describes involvement, follow up with questions addressing the following: role of scientific knowledge in decision-making, role of experts and expertise, private property rights, growth.
3. Protecting the environment sometimes conflicts with other social needs. For example, some people say environmental protection causes people to lose jobs and raises the cost of living. How do you feel about those kinds of things?
4. Conflict between First Nations citizens who want to develop natural resources and White environmentalists who want to preserve these resources is common in British Columbia. How do you think environmentalists should deal with this kind of conflict?
5. What do you see as the most important environmental problem in the _____ region? Why? If this problem is not properly addressed, what consequences might follow?
6. What do you think is the most important environmental problem in the province? Why is this problem important?

7. (ask only if forests not mentioned in 5 or 6) What do you think of the forest issue in BC? Are there problems associated with forest use and management?
8. Do you think of yourself as an environmentalist? If yes, how/when did you become an environmentalist? If no, why not? Do you think of yourself as part of the environmental movement? What does it mean to be an environmentalist?
9. How would you describe your politics generally? Are you affiliated with a political party? Which party did you vote for in the last provincial election? Federal election?
10. Do you think your political perspective and your environmental views are related? Why or why not?
11. Do you think any of your personal attributes (e.g., ethnic background, sex, age) has shaped your environmental views or the nature of your activism?
12. Is being Canadian important to you? What does it mean to be Canadian?

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