



Political Strategies of American Environmentalism: Inclusion and Beyond

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This article examines and evaluates the strategy of inclusion used by the environmental movement in the United States in light of the imperatives of state action. We try to explain why it is that the United States was the pioneer of environmental policy in the 1970s, but has since become the international laggard. Given the changed position of the state, we try to sort out when particular strategies on the part of the environmental movement make sense in terms of promoting a more ecological society. In addition to inclusion in state processes as an interest group, we examine environmental action in an oppositional civil society, dual strategies, and the possibility of a move toward ecological modernization by both the movement and the state.

Keywords civil society, ecological modernization, environmental movement, political inclusion

In the 1970s, the United States was rightly regarded as an environmental pioneer. Its laws, policies, and institutions were widely admired, and widely copied. That situation has now changed, and the perception, backed by cross-national empirical evidence (see, e.g., Jahn 1998; Scruggs 2001), is that the United States lags behind other developed countries. Here we try to explain this shift in relative position, its

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consequences for what the environmental movement in the United States might reasonably hope to accomplish, and how it might best go about it.

Until the 1980s, there was really no dispute about the best approach to environmental activism in the United States: It was taken for granted by all that effectiveness and influence entailed organization as an interest group, utilizing lobbying and litigation. Come the 1980s, matters changed as radical wilderness defense groups such as Earth First! advocated ecotage and civil disobedience, many in the green movement disengaged from conventional politics altogether, and the environmental justice movement developed a confrontational kind of activism. Here we try to sort out when particular kinds of strategy make sense in terms of promoting a more ecological society. We show why conventional strategies made perfect sense in the early 1970s, and why they then came to make less sense, although mainstream groups were not aware of the reasons for this shift and so continued to professionalize. We show why reengagement with the state is now less effective in the United States than in Western Europe, where ecological modernization as both discourse and policy practice has made substantial headway. We also explore the prospects for a “dual strategy” involving both inclusion and confrontation. Both U.S. history and our argument contradict the popular “life cycle” account of social movements (for example, Offe 1990), in which movements begin as radical protests against the established order but eventually enter the corridors of power as their demands come to be framed in ways acceptable to power holders, and so achieve “success” (Jordan and Maloney 1997). We conclude that the ecological transformation of American society is likely only to the extent that the mainstream can promote a discourse of ecological modernization while more radical activists constitute oppositional public spheres. Currently it is the mainstream that is failing in these terms.

Inclusion Celebrated—and Questioned

The inclusion and access of the mainstream groups is celebrated by their leaders. William Meadows, president of The Wilderness Society, argued that inclusion in the system has grown over the past 30 years. “It’s been well written into the public law to give us those opportunities and that’s what we stress. And at the national level we’re doing it really through all three forms of government” (William Meadows, telephone conversation with the author, 27 August 1999). Dan Beard of the Audubon Society noted that “Twenty and thirty years ago, environmental lobbyists were viewed as pests; they were generally viewed as activists who were out of touch with reality. We’re now a generation later and I think that we are viewed... as genuine or legitimate public interest groups who must be considered when undertaking the decision making processes. Everybody would agree that we’re a legitimate constituency that has to be dealt with” (Dan Beard, telephone conversation with the author, 25 August 1999).

Meeting and talking with legislators—lobbying—is central to inclusion in the state, but access in the executive branch has expanded too, reaching a high point in the Clinton administration. Environmentalists celebrated when Clinton and Gore were elected, and were elated when their leaders could not only get in the door of the White House and various agencies, but be greeted by their first name. Katie McGinty, head of the President’s Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) from 1993–1998, argued that the CEQ during the Clinton/Gore administration was “one of the most open offices in any administration in the sense of welcoming and indeed going out of our way to solicit the insight and opinions of various groups and

various interests. . . . When it comes specifically to the relationship to the environmental movement, I think the leaders of the movement would agree that when they needed or wanted to talk to me or to members of my staff, they were able to do that” (Katie McGinty, telephone conversation with the author, 3 November 1999). Officials at major environmental organizations noted the availability of administration and agency officials. This relationship includes the opportunity to comment and participate in environmental decision-making, and goes beyond that to where “in some cases original research has been utilized by the agencies in making decisions” (William Meadows, telephone conversation).

The development of environmental laws in the 1960s and 1970s brought a third route of access: the courts. The environmental regulatory apparatus was open to public participation and legal challenges. Understanding of the dangers of agency capture led to citizen-suit provisions in most environmental laws. These provisions allow any person to bring an enforcement lawsuit against an agency that does not diligently prosecute violations of the law. They led to the development of numerous public interest environmental law firms, including Environmental Defense (ED), the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund (now Earthjustice), and a proliferation of court cases.

Inclusion, however, does not imply successful influence. The state has core tasks, or imperatives, which must be met regardless of the positions of included social movements. States must keep order internally, compete internationally, raise revenues through taxation, secure economic growth by preventing disinvestments and capital flight, and secure legitimacy for the political economy in the eyes of its population (Dryzek 1996b; Lindblom 1982; O’Connor 1973; Skocpol 1979; Weber 1947). The fate of any social movement—its capacity to influence public policy, the likelihood that it will transform into a more conventional interest group—depends crucially on the degree to which the defining interest of the movement can be linked to a state imperative. If a movement can link its interests to an imperative, then its influence can penetrate into the core of the state. But if it cannot make such a link, then the movement will most likely receive either symbolic recognition and/or marginal rewards. In this case, whenever the movement’s interests come up against the core imperatives of the state, it can expect to lose.

In the Beginning: Effective Inclusion

Environmental interests clearly matched a state imperative just once in U.S. political history, and the result was the massive burst of environmental policy innovation in the 1970s, the likes of which have not been seen anywhere since. On New Year’s Day 1970, President Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) into law on national television, declaring the 1970s the “decade of the environment.” Three weeks later, in his State of the Union address, Nixon called on the United States to “make peace with nature.” In February he signed an executive order directing all federal facilities to reduce their own pollution, and delivered an environmental message to Congress that laid out a 37-point program for environmental protection. In July 1970 he sent a governmental reorganization plan to Congress that proposed integrating dispersed environmental programs under a new Environmental Protection Agency; the U.S. EPA was inaugurated in December of that year. NEPA created the President’s Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), charged with advising the president on environmental affairs. The results included a revised Clean Air Act (1970), Water Quality Improvement Act (1970), Federal Water Pollution

Control Act (1972), Federal Environmental Pesticides Control Act (1972), Coastal Zone Management Act and a Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act (1972), the Endangered Species Act (1973), and the Safe Drinking Water Act (1974).

This was the heyday of environmental legislation in the United States, pushed by a conservative president beholden to industrial interests. Nixon may have been personally reluctant, and William Ruckelshaus, first head of the U.S. EPA, had the impression that Nixon saw the environmental issue as “faddish” (Switzer 1998, 49). But dealing with environmental issues was much easier than dealing with other controversial political issues and movements of the time. Nixon signed NEPA in response to polls that showed strong public support for federal protection of environmental health (Dowie 1995, 32). After Earth Day, polls showed the environment as the second most important problem facing the nation, and the issue remained in the top 10 every year remaining in the Nixon presidency (Switzer 1998, 11). It is crucial to note that Nixon reached out to a movement with broad appeal, less radical than the other movements of that era, but still connected to the counterculture.

The Nixon administration and the American government in general were under fire from a variety of social movements in these years. This outpouring of discontent was widely perceived as a threat to the state and to liberal democracy (Crozier et al. 1975). The threat to legitimation from one direction—the antiwar movement, New Left, and radicalized section of the civil rights movement—could be addressed through inclusion from a different but related direction: environmentalism. The incipient environmental movement was successfully pulled from the grasp of the counterculture. Environmentalism clearly penetrated to the core of the state in the early 1970s. Nixon argued, in his 1970 State of the Union speech, that a focus on the environment—an issue of “common cause”—would move the country “beyond factions.” The imperatives of the state and those of the environmental movement were not identical, hence Nixon’s reluctance, but the environmental issue could be used to regain legitimacy for the political economy, and so defuse the legitimation crisis.

The Waning of Environmentalist Influence

The context changed dramatically in 1973 with President’s Nixon’s growing crisis of personal legitimacy as the Watergate scandal unfolded, and the arrival of an energy crisis with the OPEC oil embargo. However, some momentum was retained with the Endangered Species Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1973 and 1974, respectively. Innovative environmental legislation continued in the early Carter administration in 1976 and 1977 with the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the National Forest Management Act, the Clean Water Act, the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act, and amendments to the Clean Air Act. However, the main story after 1973 is the degree to which economic concerns attending the energy crisis prevailed over environmental ones. Environmental policy victories continued—by now, we would argue, only in areas outside the core imperatives of the state—because the movement’s lobbying organizations were newly but firmly entrenched in Washington’s power structure. After 1980, with the legitimation crisis well and truly over, the Reagan administration could launch an attack on a movement it saw as challenging core economic and security concerns. The environmental movement could only play defense.

Energy supply is essential to economic growth. If that supply is threatened, the economic imperative means that other concerns, including environmental ones, must yield. In many countries, including the United States, nuclear power was heralded as a cheap and unlimited energy source that would alleviate OPEC's stranglehold on the world oil supply. These commitments put the government on a collision course with environmentalists who opposed nuclear power because of its threat to human health, the difficulty of waste disposal, its reinforcement of economic centralization, and its fuel cycle's complicity in manufacture of nuclear weapons.

After 1973, the federal government also sought to expand domestic oil and natural gas production, in the name of both security and economic growth, leading to a further collision with environmentalists. The environmental impact assessment process mandated by NEPA had stalled approval of the proposed Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which would bring oil from the vast fields newly discovered on the North Slope. Congress simply voted to exempt the pipeline from the NEPA process. In 1976, Jimmy Carter was elected to the presidency with the backing of the environmental movement, promising a new energy policy focus on conservation and renewable sources. However, once in office the Carter administration retreated, instead devoting huge sums to the development of synthetic fuels (which subsequently proved a failure) and nuclear energy. Carter's change of course cannot be attributed solely to the force of the state's economic imperative; the related political power exerted by industry also played a part. In his 1982 memoir, Carter lamented that "the influence of the special interest lobbies is almost unbelievable, particularly from the automobile and oil industries" (1982, 99). But one reason these particular lobbies are so influential is that they can play the economic card: The industries they represent are crucial to the operation of the economy. There were other similar disappointments in store for environmentalists in the Carter years—for example, on federally subsidized water projects. Environmentalists had far lower expectations of the Reagan and Bush the Elder administrations than of Carter, and received no pleasant surprises. Both administrations used the economic imperative to erode existing environmental legislation and prevent new policy initiatives. Environmentalist expectations were raised with the arrival of the Clinton administration in 1993. The appointment of prominent environmentalists, an open-door policy, the establishment of National Monuments, and a proposed road-building ban gave Clinton a green reputation. Yet these sorts of appointments and site-specific wilderness preservation gloss over the more important fact about environmental interests in the Clinton administration: Access often came without real influence. As CEQ Director McGinty noted (Katie McGinty, telephone conversation), there is a "distinction between the ability of the environmental movement or any other interest groups to bring an issue very clearly into the spotlight and the ability of that interest group to dictate a solution to the issue. Those are two very different things."

Clinton's 1992 campaign proposals included raising automobile fuel economy standards and elevating the U.S. EPA to cabinet level; neither happened. The administration proposed an energy use tax; it was dropped after pressure from the oil and gas industry. Reforms of below-market grazing fees and the antiquated 1872 mining law were proposed by Babbitt's Interior Department; these were also dropped. A new National Biological Service was developed, but later dismantled. The administration also supported bovine growth hormones in milk production, the replacement of the Delaney Clause (specifying zero tolerance for carcinogens) with risk assessment, and the startup of a hazardous waste incinerator that Clinton had campaigned against. All of these occurred in the initial years of the Clinton

administration, with Democratic control of Congress. As Andrews noted, "Clinton's commitment quickly proved to be shallower and more symbolic than it had initially seemed" (1999, 363).

Environmentalists fared little better when it came to policymaking on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early 1990s, which obviously affected the core economic imperative. The initial proposal for the agreement had no environmental provisions. The movement then split on the merits of NAFTA. The Clinton administration and some of the major groups, led by the NRDC, worked out environmental "side agreements." These groups then tried to persuade other major groups to support NAFTA.¹ Moreover, they directed attacks on environmentalist opponents of the agreement. John Adams once claimed that he and the NRDC "broke the back of the environmental opposition to NAFTA" (quoted in Dowie 1995, 188). Whether or not the NAFTA bargain was a good one for environmentalists is a complex question, though the side agreements saw little in the way of implementation. Adams himself later had second thoughts: "NRDC supported NAFTA, but there were a lot of people who... were upset about that and I understand their position. To this day I'm not certain who was right even though I certainly am sure that we never got the promised environmental benefits from the NAFTA [side] agreements" (John Adams, telephone conversation with the author, 15 September 1999).

The security imperative has also always defined an area of the state immune to environmentalist influence. For example, in the 1980s, proposals to install a vast "racetrack" to move mobile MX missiles around the arid West promised environmental destruction on a scale unprecedented in this region. While the proposal eventually died when its financial cost became hard to justify amid a waning Cold War, this project was off limits to environmentalist objection. Environmentalists have also been continually frustrated by their inability to influence policy that might ameliorate environmental abuses associated with military installations.

Another issue where the security imperative has blocked environmental demands concerns right-to-know legislation in the United States. Under the 1990 Clean Air Act, industrial plants were required to provide the U.S. EPA with data on the amount and type of chemicals stored on site, worst-case accident scenarios, and emergency response plans for such accidents. The U.S. EPA had planned to make this information available to the public via the Internet. The movement pointed out that its ability to publicize such information, such as the existing U.S. EPA toxic release inventory, has led to cuts in industrial emissions. However, the chemical industry raised national security concerns that were then echoed by the FBI and Congressional opponents of right-to-know. The industry claimed that "release of this worst-case-scenario data in an uncontrolled manner would provide targeting tools and new ideas for criminals and terrorists" (Hulse 1999). Based on this argument, in 1999 Congress passed a law suspending release of this information. Environmentalists argued that "national security" is invoked to avoid bad publicity for industry, not to thwart terrorists. Events of 9/11 have strengthened the hand of the security imperative against environmental right-to-know (Beierle and Bell 2001).

The security imperative also takes effect when it comes to environmental issues with an international dimension. The United States has always been a reluctant participant in international environment agreements, with the Senate in particular often unwilling to ratify international treaties. In the Reagan years of the 1980s, and again with the George W. Bush presidency beginning in 2001, the White House too

took a hostile line. The Reagan administration attitude was highlighted by U.S. withdrawal from the Law of the Sea agreement, and the George W. Bush administration by its rejection of enforcement protocols on biological weapons, abandonment of a voluntary nuclear test ban, and most famously its renunciation of the Kyoto agreements on greenhouse gases (though the public justification of the latter was in terms of the economic imperative). This hostility can be explained in part by the way key policymakers in the United States interpret the security imperative, which makes them reluctant to enter into multilateral agreements for fear of compromising U.S. sovereignty.

This is not to say that environmentalists have not had victories—some even significant. Obviously we do not have the space to go through all these victories, but we would argue that many have occurred in areas where the economic imperative is not at issue. For example, gains have been made in wilderness protection—but only at the expense of the now economically marginal, and so politically weakened, timber and mining interests. But gains in what we would call the “periphery” of the state almost by definition fall short of any environmental interest in the transformation of state and society.

Professionalization and Moderation

In instrumental terms, significant environmentalist success comes when movement interests can be attached to core state imperatives, while frustration is guaranteed when these interests clash with an imperative. But success and failure in these terms reveal only part of the story when it comes to the consequences of political inclusion. Other consequences include professionalization and alienation from the grass roots. In their initial embrace of the state in the 1970s, environmentalists attempted to show that they could simultaneously be a social movement and an interest group. During the 1970s, groups were both adversarial, with protests and lawsuits, and part of the growing complex of environmental management. “Environmentalists were activists *and* lobbyists, system opponents *and* system managers” (Gottlieb 1993, 316). But by the end of the 1970s, professionalism crowded out movement tactics.²

Much has been written about the professionalization of the movement in the 1980s. With the growth of federal environmental laws and policies, and the increase in access that came with the accomplishments of the 1970s, many of the major environmental organizations in the United States shifted focus, expanding their Washington, DC offices while shutting down or curtailing regional offices. But the move was much more than physical; in shifting toward Washington, the trend toward bureaucratization was intensified. The major groups hired more lawyers to deal with the complexity of the government and the law, and more MBAs (master’s of business administration degree holders) to deal with the fund raising and money management necessary to sustain a large national organization. The major groups became “the domain of list managers, marketing directors, and organizational development specialists” (Dowie 1995, 61). The impassioned amateurs fueled by moral outrage were gone, replaced by directors and presidents to whom thinking like a manager came more easily than “thinking like a mountain.”

Activists and academics criticized the major groups’ overriding interest in the development of administrative and executive skills, and their hiring of staff more educated in management than environmental ethics. Professional “envirocrats” moved through the revolving door between the major environmental groups, governmental agencies, and industry. It appeared that the most the major groups wanted

from their “members” was a check once a year, as groups took on the same organizational form as business and the state. As Dowie argued, “during the high-flying eighties . . . mainstream organizations created institutions. They continued a 1970s trend toward adding programs and expanding staffs. They spent more effort and resources on developing entrepreneurial and organizational enhancement skills than on environmental issues. The unfortunate end result is a bland, bureaucratic reform movement devoid of passion or charismatic leadership” (Dowie 1995, 61). Jeff St. Clair was a bit more acerbic in his characterization:

Somewhere along the line the environmental movement disconnected with the people. Rejected its political roots, pulled the plug on its vibrant tradition. It packed its bags, it starched its shirts and jetted to DC where it became what it once despised: a risk averse, depersonalized, overly analytical, humorless, access-driven, intolerant, statistical, centralized, technocratic, deal-making, passionless, sterilized, direct-mailing, jock-strapped, lawyer-laden monolith to mediocrity. (St. Clair 1995, 1)

All of this came at a time, in the 1980s, where the movement was constantly battling hostile administrations and, for the most part, playing defense. Professionalization was providing access as one interest group among many, but not authentic inclusion in the development of policy.

Activism in the Public Sphere

The professionalization and moderation of the major groups in the face of diminishing returns from conventional, insider strategies did not signal the end of any “life cycle” for American environmentalism. Activists (especially in local and regional organizations) unhappy with this situation sought alternative sites for political action. We can describe these sites as oppositional public spheres—concerned with public affairs, but not seeking any formal share in state power, and adopting a largely confrontational stance toward government.

Some within the mainstream movement are skeptical about such alternative sites, as are some academic observers. They argue that social movements are effective only to the extent their interests and demands are taken up and adopted in the form of public policies. Goodin (1992), for one, believes that all green movements and parties should properly aspire to is participation in policymaking in conventional fashion. However, not all policy success—let alone success in society more generally—comes from direct inclusion in public policymaking. Movements may influence public policy from the outside, from the oppositional public sphere.

For Torgerson (1999), *The Promise of Green Politics* lies in the green public sphere, featuring discourse on environmental issues, public education, environmental media, public hearings and debates, and changes in environmental practice. Both Cohen and Arato (1992) and Habermas (1996a) point out that the public sphere can constitute a space in which people live their political lives, but it is also a source of influence over policymaking. Habermas himself pointed to issues involving control of nuclear arms and power, genetic engineering, feminism, immigration, multiculturalism, and ecological issues such as climate change and genetic engineering (p. 381). Unfortunately, Habermas (especially 1996b) lapsed into a rather mechanical model of influence via election campaigns and into legislation. We argue that there are many ways in which such influence can be generated and applied.

Such influence “from the outside” can occur in at least three ways. First, movements can change the terms of political discourse, which in turn can come to pervade the understandings of policymakers. Indeed, such change may be *the* enduring legacy of the first three or more decades of organized environmentalism—beginning with Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962, questioning scientific domination of nature and the discourse of industrialism in which it was embedded. The very concept of “the environment” is itself the result of a discursive shift, challenging a previously hegemonic discourse of industrialism and a nature considered solely as “natural resources” (Dryzek 1997). Associated concepts such as ecosystem, resource scarcity, pollution, and wilderness also made themselves felt in association with this shift. Environmental discourse is in no way singular, as it ranges from reformist to radical to apocalyptic (Dryzek 1997; Dryzek and Schlosberg 1998), but its various manifestations have not simply shifted the terms of debate, they have also initiated changes in environmental practices.

Social movements, as Habermas (1996a) pointed out, do not just try to appropriate a share of “administrative power”; they also embody diffuse and pervasive “communicative power.” Part, but not all, of the causal mechanism here involves public opinion. As Torgerson (1999, 140) put it, “the public sphere does not directly govern, but influences government in an indirect fashion through the communicative power of opinion.” The very reason we have something called environmental policy is because a movement established the concept of “the environment” in political discourse. But the effects of discursive shifts are also felt directly in changing individual action and social relationships, without necessary reference to public policy. “Upon entering the public scene, environmentalism disturbed the established discourse of advanced industrial society” (p. 51). The power of the discourse of environmentalism was learned the hard way by Republicans in the United States, first in their attempt to dismantle environmental standards when they took control of the Congress in 1994 and then in the 2001 development of George W. Bush’s energy policy. On both occasions, Republican leaders were hammered by opinion polls and forced to back off high-profile initiatives that contradicted environmental discourse.

A second way in which social movements can exercise influence on the state from afar occurs when they help constitute more tangible forums within civil society. Such forums are now a regular feature at high-profile international gatherings, beginning with the Global Forum at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio. The forum’s movement activists influenced the official proceedings of the conference, gaining media publicity and embarrassing official participants on key issues. Other examples can be found at regional and local levels, addressing issues such as renewable resources (Berger 1985) and toxic wastes (Fischer 1993).

Third, movement protest can draw a policy response due to government’s fear of political instability. In Germany, the antinuclear movement in the 1970s and 1980s caused changes in public policy (notably the cancellation of planned reactors) through creating fear of instability while being excluded from participation in policymaking. In the United States, the connection between protest and policy change is less direct. But it is noteworthy that protests from the counterculture in general drew forth environmental policy responses around 1970 prior even to the inclusion of environmental groups in policymaking.

The collective outcomes that social movements can influence are not confined to public policies. Changes in the terms of discourse can take effect not just in the state,

but directly in society's political culture (Melucci 1989; Torgerson 1999; Young 2000). Movements can be educational, and change the distribution of power in society. The public understanding of the terms "whaling," "working woman," and "gay" now means something very different than it did before the growth of each relevant social movement, and these changed understandings and perceptions can change norms of social behavior. Iris Young (2000, 179) argued that the environmental movement offers an example of "intrasociety change outside of state institutions," changing practices in households, communities, and workplaces. Environmentalism has changed consumer behavior, and reduced the acceptability of particular kinds of actions.³

An additional way that social movements can affect collective outcomes beyond the state is in terms of what Martin Jänicke (1996) called "paragovernmental" activity. Here, movement groups, perhaps acting in conjunction with economic actors such as corporations, can exercise something like governmental power that does not involve even ratification by government. Relationships might be adversarial (as in a consumer boycott) or cooperative (as in a dialogue). For example, some environmentalists in the western United States have turned to collaborative environmental planning, engaging directly with each other, land managers, and corporate users of resources in order to develop conservation plans bypassing governmental processes (Brick et al. 2000; Welsh 2000). Sabel et al. (2000) argued that "communities across the country have organized to reclaim authority over their lived environment" through local cooperative problem solving involving businesses and government officials as well as community activists on issues such as ecosystem management, land-use planning, habitat conservation, and pollution regulation. On a national scale, the concern with organic foods in the United States grew from a social movement to an industry with its own certification bodies over three decades, with no national standards or policy forthcoming from the Department of Agriculture until 2000.

Dual Strategies: Inclusion and Opposition

Environmental activism in an oppositional public sphere, which has grown in large measure as a result of disillusion with the results of inclusion, demonstrates that the life of environmentalism can go on beyond the state. Among political theorists who have contemplated the question of inclusion versus opposition, most conclude that social movements should operate both inside and outside the state. Referring to the exemplary case of the women's movement, Cohen and Arato believed that "The dual logic of feminist politics ... involves a communicative, discursive politics of identity and influence that targets civil and political society and an organized, strategically rational politics of inclusion and reform that is aimed at political and economic institutions" (Cohen and Arato 1992, 550). For Cohen and Arato, the justification of the dual strategy is largely the well-being of civil society: Groups or their supporters influential within the state would help build a constitutional, legal, and policy context for the movement outside. Hilary Wainwright (1994) reached the same conclusion from a more instrumental perspective. Action within the state is needed to supply collective decisions with "binding national and international authority" (p. 195), but without the movement outside, such policy action is unlikely (p. 197). Iris Young, arguing against those who pin their hopes on civil society rather than the state, concluded that "social movements seeking greater justice and well-being should

work on both these fronts, and aim to multiply the links between civil society and states" (Young 2000, 156).

A number of movement activists also advocate a dual strategy. David Brower, the leading American environmentalist of the 20th century, was fond of saying that he was glad someone like Dave Foreman (founder of Earth First!) came along, because it made Brower's position seem more reasonable. Brower's own then-radical presence was once praised in identical terms by moderate environmentalist Russell Train. Mark Dowie (telephone conversation with the author, 26 August 1999) argued that such a recognition is becoming more widespread in the U.S. movement: "I think wise people at both levels, grass roots and national, value the work of the other side and see ways of partnering and working together on some of these issues. . . . I think there is a certain maturity coming now in the movement that has accepted the work of the different styles and different tactics of different people with the same objective."

It is easy enough to conclude in the abstract that a dual strategy emphasizing both state and public sphere is desirable for any social movement. As Dryzek (1996a, 119), argued, the "happiest conceivable outcome may be a clear separation between two environmental movements: one within the state to take advantage of every bit of flexibility in the liberal democratic system, another outside, more democratic and vital." But this is too easy a conclusion to reach; not all situations feature a mix of compatibility and contradiction in the relationship between movement interest and state imperative of the sort that makes a dual strategy compelling. Let us consider the times when a dual strategy may not be appropriate.

First and most obviously, a movement will not be able to follow a dual strategy if it confronts a truly exclusive state; oppositional civil society may be the only option. This situation is rare in the United States. While the Reagan administration in its early years tried to expel environmentalists from the state, the effort failed because of the variety of access channels (notably to Congress) that the administration did not control. Second, if a movement's resources are scarce, it may not have enough to devote adequately to both the long march through the institutions and activism in the public sphere, both of which can be both demanding and frustrating. Third, if a movement's defining interest can be attached to an established or emerging state imperative, then thoroughgoing entry into the state may be a good bargain.

So while we endorse an engagement with dual strategies, we argue for a more reflective, situational understanding of such engagement. We are not arguing that everything can be accomplished in civil society, nor are we arguing that all movements should adopt a dual strategy.⁴ We are simply noting that movements with limited resources should examine situations in order to identify where those resources are best spent, on which issues, and at which time. A blanket exhortation to engage in a dual strategy does not fit all situations equally. If some but not all of a movement's defining interest can be attached to an established or emerging state imperative, while other aspects of that interest challenge an imperative, a dual strategy is clearly desirable.⁵

The content of these imperatives matters a great deal when it comes to movement strategy and movement prospects. We next argue that both economic and legitimation imperatives can be bent in a direction that allows a closer connection between movement interests and state imperatives than has been seen in the United States since the early 1970s. Interest in pollution control and conservation of material resources can be attached to the economic imperative via the idea of

ecological modernization. Interest in public participation and public health can be linked to the legitimation imperative through emerging notions of environmental risks and their consequences. However, we also show why such attachments are currently blocked in the United States in comparison with some Western European countries—which helps to explain why the United States is now something of an environmental policy laggard.

Ecological Modernization and the Risk Society

Environmentalism has long been locked in a zero-sum conflict with the economic imperative of the state, prevailing against it only (we have argued) when legitimation came into play. But proponents of ecological modernization now argue that economic and ecological concerns are potentially complementary; if so, environmentalism may for the first time be linked positively to the core economic imperative.⁶ Ulrich Beck's (1992) risk society thesis suggests a different route for connecting movement goals and state imperatives. Beck argued that environmental risks are no longer regarded by the public as inevitable or treatable side effects of economic growth and technological progress. Rather, they are now widely recognized as sufficiently severe that the very ideas of growth and progress are called into question. We will examine the opportunities for the environmental movement that a risk-induced legitimation crisis may present.

These two developments could conceivably add up to a new state imperative: environmental conservation, on a par with the economic imperative that emerged with the onset of capitalism (and allowed the inclusion of the bourgeoisie in the liberal capitalist state) and the legitimation imperative that emerged as capitalism's instability was revealed (allowing the inclusion of the organized working class in the welfare state.) The emergence of an environmental conservation imperative would democratize the state still further by including environmentalists in the core, creating the green state. It hardly need be said that as yet there is no green state in these terms, and the prospects do not look good in the United States for a transformation any time in the near future. But our point here is not simply negative; rather, it is to highlight the obstacles that must be overcome if the United States is to make any significant moves in a green direction.

Ecological modernization in its basic form, termed "techno-corporatist" by Hajer (1995) and "weak" by Christoff (1996), is based on the idea that "pollution prevention pays." Pollution connotes inefficient materials usage, such that its reduction is profitable. However, collective action is also required to make the environment cleaner and safer, to produce happier and healthier workers and consumers. The precautionary principle is adopted on the grounds that is cheaper to act early in preventative fashion rather than to let problems and their consequences accumulate. Moreover, there is money to be made in new environmental technologies. Thus there are roles not just for production engineers, economists, and accountants. Biologists can help draw up environmental standards, and social scientists can identify harmful social practices. Still, weak ecological modernization is an essentially moderate project, because it requires no adjustment to the prevailing structure of the political economy (Hajer 1996, 253; for a defense see Mol 1996). Thus it is more attractive to public officials than more radical kinds of environmentalism, especially those that clash with economic interests. A weak ecological modernity is defined by managerial solutions to environmental problems (Luke 1999). Politically, it allows effective inclusion of mature groups that reject radical

critique, informal organization, and protest politics. Here there is a comfortable fit with life-cycle theories of social movements, wherein the movement begins in inchoate radicalism that is useful in getting environmental issues on the agenda, but ends in the corridors of power.

Weak ecological modernization is, however, limited in its ability to address ecological crisis precisely because it rules out structural change in the political economy. An excellent illustration is provided by Gonzalez (2001) in an analysis of automobile pollution control policy in California. California policy emphasizes technological changes to car engines that will reduce emissions, and is driven by powerful economic interests rather than environmentalists. However, despite the apparent success of this policy, total emissions continue to grow as the number of cars on the road and the average per-car distance traveled per year both increase faster than technical change can reduce emissions. Land-use planning that would reduce reliance on the car is simply not on the antipollution agenda, because it would require structural change.

To the extent such structural change is necessary, weak ecological modernization fails to deliver on its promise of securely connecting ecological aims to core state imperatives. The difficulty is that only modest goals can be linked to the economic imperative in the absence of a credible movement threat to destabilize existing political and economic institutions, as the legitimacy of the state's complicity in practices that generate environmental risks (such as developer-driven land use planning in California) goes unchallenged. A stronger version of ecological modernization (Chrisoff 1996) begins with economic modernization along ecological lines. However, it resists subordinating ecology to economics, is attentive to interactions among a broad array of political, economic, and social institutions, favors participatory public deliberation, accepts and indeed requires movement activism, and recognizes the transnational aspects of issues.

The requisite ingredients necessary to strengthen ecological modernization in these terms resonate with Beck's description of the "risk society," a "reflexive modernity" where society questions its own fundamentals, including technology and economic growth. Transformative possibilities arise from people's growing awareness that they are living in a society whose habits of production and consumption may be undermining the conditions for its future existence. Beck himself believed that this development can only be met adequately by new forms of "subpolitics" in locations other than the administrative apparatus of government that more effectively engage the citizenry in the selection, allocation, distribution, and amelioration of risks.

Subpolitics would involve stronger public deliberation, for

only a strong, competent public debate, "armed" with scientific arguments, is capable of separating the scientific wheat from the chaff and allowing the institutions for directing technology—politics and law—to reconquer the power of their own judgement. (Beck 1999, 70)

Beck hoped that public science, where "research will fundamentally take account of the public's questions and be addressed to them" (Beck 1999, 70), can help lay citizens win back the competence to make their own judgement.⁷

Beck's arguments are formulated with West Europe in mind. But they have substantial applicability in the United States. The environmental justice, antitoxics, and public interest science movements are risk society phenomena in Beck's terms.

They call economic and technological progress into question, and refuse to accept that hazards can be managed through established policymaking structures deploying scientific expertise.⁸ Moreover, they engage a kind of subpolitics that involves cooperation with activists in other localities, direct action protests, and campaigns against polluters and government, shading into more conventional action such as lobbying, consultation, and court challenges (see, e.g., Cole and Foster 2001; Schlosberg 1999). This sort of analysis validates a “dual strategy” for the movement of the kind we have discussed.

The ingredients necessary to transform weak into strong modernization do then exist in the United States with the vital green public spheres that attend resurgence of grass roots activism in the antitoxics movement, environmental justice movement, and elsewhere. The real obstruction is that ecological modernization in its basic or weak form hardly exists (the California auto emissions example notwithstanding). Currently, the term *ecological modernization* is not part of U.S. policy discourse, nor is there much in policy practice to suggest pursuit under any other name. Although there are sporadic initiatives that join business and environmentalists, such as those associated with Amory Lovins and his *Factor Four* (the idea that prosperity can be doubled while halving resource use; see also Lovins and Lovins 1999), these discussions do not find their way into government policy.

The terms of debate in Washington in the 1990s were set by a conservative Congressional majority that saw environmental regulation as a drag on the economy, with economics and ecology remaining cast in old-fashioned zero-sum terms. “Rather than asking more fundamental questions about how to balance and integrate economic growth and ecological sustainability, policy-makers are mired in efforts to defend or attack the regulatory system that has been in place since the 1970s” (Bryner 2000, 277). President George W. Bush thinks of the economy and the environment in inflexible zero-sum terms. Bush, in discussing his decision to abandon the Kyoto Treaty, said he was concerned about global warming, but “We will not do anything that harms our economy, because first things first are the people who live in America” (Andrews 2001, 3). It is hard to imagine a clearer refutation of the central tenet of ecological modernization. And with few exceptions the politics of land management and wilderness protection still pits old adversaries against one another (loggers, miners, and ranchers on one side, environmentalists on the other). The environmental justice movement may, in Lois Gibbs’s words, have succeeded in “plugging the toilet” on toxic wastes (quoted in Dowie 1995, 134), but there has been less success in getting industry to redesign the basic processes of production, which is crucial to even the weak form of ecological modernization. The approach to pollution regulation remains very much “end of pipe”—if that. In short, if we seek ecological modernization in the United States we find very little, certainly when it comes to the national government and the business mainstream. As Andrews (1997, 41) put it, when it comes to pollution control, “The basic structure of U.S. environmental policy has remained entrenched in the paradigm of detailed federal standards and technology-based permits, rather than evolving further toward pollution prevention and ecological modernization principles.”

The major difficulty in a U.S. transition to ecological modernization comes not with any deficiencies in the character of its civil society that would preclude *strong* ecological modernization, but much earlier, with the system’s inability to turn zero-sum conflicts between economic and environmental interests into *weak* ecological modernization. Here, movement vitality in the public sphere is little help. Radical

movements could help turn weak into strong ecological modernization, but are no help in the absence of the weak form.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we offer a paradox. We have emphasized throughout the dangers of cooptation of mainstream groups that too often have accepted access without influence, especially when it comes to the core of the state. However, when it comes to the contemporary prospects for an ecological transformation of the state, the ball is entirely in the mainstream's court. Grass-roots activists have done their bit in establishing the conditions for shifts in the direction of a greener political economy. But this sort of activism is by itself incapable of securing the necessary intermediate stage: the establishment of weak ecological modernization as both discourse and policy. The majors are well placed to advance this "weak" agenda—but so far have failed to do so. In fairness, it is not entirely their fault. They have a much harder task than their counterparts in northern Europe, where weak ecological modernization is accepted by parties of the right and by business (even in Britain, which long held out). There is nothing inevitable about this ideological transformation. In terms of the international political economy, a stable equilibrium might have room for both an ecologically modernized European Union and an environmentally recalcitrant United States. But such an equilibrium would not bode well for either the American or global environments. The good news is that if the United States ever does come around to weak ecological modernization, the seeds of a more thorough green transformation of the political economy have already been sown.

Notes

1. The original supporters included the National Wildlife Federation, the Nature Conservancy, and the NRDC; these groups successfully lobbied Conservation International, the EDF, Audubon, and the World Wildlife Fund to form the Environmental Coalition for NAFTA.

2. It is worth noting that in their first statement of the resource mobilization perspective, McCarthy and Zald (1973) used the environmental movement as the prototypical example of the professionalized movement.

3. Riley Dunlap, the leading academic on public opinion on environmental issues in the United States, argued that there is ample evidence to support the claim that "environmentalism has brought about a fundamental shift in our beliefs and values" in the U.S. (1989, 121).

4. Though it should be fairly obvious that we, along with Young, Habermas, Torgerson, and just about every other examiner of civil society, are arguing that a sole focus on the state is limited and problematic.

5. The key questions regarding this evaluation—who is to carry it out, and using what decision-making process(es)—can and should be a matter for debate within movements; movement strategy is likely to be the sum of many limited decisions.

6. The basic literature on ecological modernization includes Weale (1992), Hajer (1995), Christoff (1996), and the special issue of *Environmental Politics* volume 9 number 1 (Spring 2000), edited by Arthur P. J. Mol and David A. Sonnefeld, on "Ecological Modernisation Around the World" (also available as a book published by Frank Cass). Theorization of the concept can be traced to the works of German social scientists Joseph Huber and Martin Jänicke in the early 1980s (see Spaargaren, 2000, 46–50).

7. It is ironic that Beck's nemesis, Aaron Wildavsky, issued an identical call for "citizen risk detectives," except that Wildavsky expected citizens to debunk alleged risks. See Wildavsky (1995).

8. There are numerous critiques of the technocentric process of risk assessment, and of the lack of democratic participation in both the direction of scientific inquiry and the application of science to policymaking. See, for example, Fischer (1995) and O'Brien (2001).

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