



Spring 1980

Whither Environmentalism - The Future Political Path of the Environmental Movement

Frederick H. Buttel

Oscar W. Larson III

Recommended Citation

Frederick H. Buttel & Oscar W. Larson III, *Whither Environmentalism - The Future Political Path of the Environmental Movement*, 20 Nat. Resources J. 323 (1980).

Available at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nrj/vol20/iss2/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Natural Resources Journal by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, lsloane@salud.unm.edu, sahrk@unm.edu.

WHITHER ENVIRONMENTALISM? THE FUTURE POLITICAL PATH OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT*

FREDERICK H. BUTTEL and OSCAR W. LARSON III**

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to explore the issue of “whither environmentalism?” along a plane far different from that occupied by persons presently debating the question of the viability of environmentalism as a major social force.¹ The focus of the remarks that follow will be on the possible characteristics of, and social forces that might lead to, the institutionalization of varying forms of environmentalism in the United States and other advanced societies. The article argues that the possible forms of environmentalism can be adequately described in terms of the notions of “left, right, and center”—categories we use in preference to those of “socialist, conservative, and liberal” used by Stretton in a recent book that makes an argument parallel to ours.²

The principal assumption of this paper is that the *form* that environmentalism takes—that is, the organization, social bases, ideology, and tactics of the environmental movement in relation to state structure—is extremely important and will substantially shape the impact of environmental reform on different sectors of the society and society as a whole. This assumption is predicated on Stretton’s observation that the “successful” implementation of environmental policy—or, in other words, the transition to a steady-state or “sustainable” economy—may take a variety of political routes. Stretton contends that resource scarcity probably will unleash a new set of socio-economic forces that lead to a variety of types of state struc-

*This is a revised and expanded version of comments presented at a panel discussion at the annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, San Francisco, California, September 1978. We greatly appreciate the useful comments Robert Mitchell and Denton Morrison have made on previous drafts of this paper.

**Assistant Professor and Research Assistant, respectively, Department of Rural Sociology, Cornell University.

1. Important explorations of this issue include Downs, *Up and Down with Ecology—The Issue-Attention Cycle*, 28 PUBLIC INTEREST 38 (1972); Dunlap & Dillman, *Decline in Public Support for Environmental Protection: Evidence from a 1970-1974 Panel Study*, 41 RURAL SOC. 382 (1976); K. E. Hornback, *Orbits of Opinion: The Role of Age in the Environmental Movement’s Attentive Public, 1968-1972* (unpublished thesis, Michigan State University 1974); Mitchell, *The Public Speaks Again: A New Environmental Survey*, 60 RESOURCES 1 (1978).

2. H. STRETTON, *CAPITALISM, SOCIALISM, AND THE ENVIRONMENT* (1976).

tures. As the customary political relationships between classes and groups forged in eras of resource abundance fail to deal with resource scarcity, these classes and groups struggle over how their interests can be met most fully under these new circumstances.

However, Stretton's otherwise useful book provides little insight into how existing social forces might lead to each of the three forms of environmentalism he describes. This paper thus is concerned with developing notes toward a theory of the prospective origins of environmentalism of the left, right, and center.

TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE VIEW OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

There has been a strong tendency for social scientists to adopt an overly restricted definition of environmentalism—one confined to descriptions of the voluntary organizations involved in the environmental movement. This view limits one's ability to specify the role of environmental politics and conflict in future social change. To avoid this and other difficulties associated with defining environmentalism too narrowly, we consider the term to have an essential three-fold character.

The first component of environmentalism is public environmentalism—public preferences for healthier, aesthetically pleasing, ecologically harmonious residential, work, and recreational surroundings. Public environmentalism thus is distinct analytically from (although in practice clearly affected by) organized or voluntary environmentalism, which we define in terms of the structure, ideology, and tactics of prominent voluntary groups (e.g., the Sierra Club, Audubon Society, or the Environmental Defense Fund). While organized environmentalism can and must draw strength from broad-based public environmentalism and seek support for its demands by claiming to represent widely held public opinions, in reality often there is little correspondence between these two components of environmentalism. For example, organized environmentalism has been heavily involved in the effort to preserve remote areas, while the majority of "public environmentalists" live and work in, and hence tend to be concerned with, improving conditions in their largely urban environments.

The final element of the three-fold character of environmentalism is that which Morrison³ has referred to as "institutional environmen-

3. Morrison, Hornback & Warner, *The Environmental Movement: Some Preliminary Observations and Predictions*, in SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND THE ENVIRONMENT 259 (W. Burch, — Cheek & — Taylor eds. 1972); Morrison, *The Environmental Movement: Conflict Dynamics*, 2 J. VOLUNTARY ACT. RESEARCH 74 (1973).

tal movement organizations"—that is, public bureaucracies which have jurisdiction over environmental or environmentally related social policy (e.g., the Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Energy). Institutional environmentalism's distinctive feature is that it is part of the state; advocacy of environmental protection by a government agency must be tempered somewhat because of the many constraints on government action. For instance, the ability of the Environmental Protection Agency to curb air or water pollution is constrained by the policies of other agencies concerned with economic growth, foreign policy, employment, inflation, or energy availability.⁴

Recognizing the tripartite nature of environmentalism has several advantages for placing the "whither environmentalism" question in broader perspective. The first is that it demonstrates that the structure of environmentalism—that is, the relationships between and the prominence or subordination manifest by its components—may exhibit important variations.

Second, the tactics and ideology of organized environmentalism can be seen as a product of the interaction between the class composition and interests of organized environmentalists on one hand, and the structure of government power on the other. For instance, the structural fusion and ideological correspondence between major corporate elites and state officials in Japan has yielded a relatively "closed" decision-making structure, impervious to the demands of interest groups whose goals do not coincide with the rapid growth policies of the Japanese government.⁵ Therefore, voluntary environmental groups are less prominent in Japan than in the more pluralistic government structure of the United States. In the face of massive environmental damage deriving from rapid economic growth, public environmentalism in Japan has become substantially more mobilized than in the United States. This has led to often violent conflicts because of the inability of public interest groups to have an impact on Japanese state policy.⁶ In addition, Japanese environmentalism appears to be far more attuned to issues of direct interest to the urban working class and less preoccupied with rural land use

4. W. A. ROSENBAUM, *THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN* ch. 3 (2d ed. 1977); A. Schnaiberg and E. Meidinger, *Social Reality vs. Analytic Mythology: Social Impact Assessment of Natural Resource Utilization* (1978) (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association).

5. Kelley, Stunkel & Wescott, *The Politics of the Environment: The United States, USSR, and Japan*, in *THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY* (L. Milbrath and F. Inscho eds. 1975).

6. *Id.*; Geisler, *Exporting Pollution: The Case of Japan*, 8 WEST. SOC. REV. 1 (1977).

issues, which are of principal concern to the American environmental movement.

THE NATURE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTITUENCY IN THE 1970s

Consistent with the parochial definition of environmentalism prevalent in United States social science, there is a tendency to conceive of environmentalism as a largely unchanging, monolithic entity. This conception assumes that environmentalists will continue to be drawn from particular social classes or strata (principally the "upper-middle class" engaged in noncorporate employment).⁷ However, since the benefits secured by environmentalists are distributed so broadly, environmentalism has no natural constituency among enduring social categories. Instead, the rooting of environmental concerns in key production and consumption institutions, especially in terms of the ways that environmental controls would affect various groups of producing organizations and consumers, dictates that various groups will adopt an array of environmentally related interests and ideologies.

Continued observation of environmentalism and careful empirical studies have established the moderate-liberal posture of environmentalists and their supporters in legislative bodies during the 1970s. For instance, support for environmental agendas in legislatures came from Democrats far more often than from Republicans,⁸ while environmental activists and sympathizers tended to be Democratic Party identifiers and political liberals.⁹ The ideological character of contemporary environmentalism thus closely corresponds to the ideological predilections of the noncorporate middle class, the major support base of organized environmentalism. The apparent moderate-liberal political moorings of environmentalism during the past decade also seem due to the fact that its reform strategy largely has involved prompting the state to regulate private decision-making more closely—a position clearly in the liberal tradition of American politics.

7. See especially, R. E. Dunlap, *The Socioeconomic Basis of the Environmental Movement: Old Data, New Data, and Implications for the Movement's Future* (1975) (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. However, here as well as in the remaining portions of the paper, we do not wish to imply that these strata are uniformly pro-environmental).

8. Dunlap & Gale, *Party Membership and Environmental Politics: A Legislative Roll-Call Analysis*, 55 SOC. SCI. Q. 670 (1974); Dunlap & Allen, *Partisan Differences on Environmental Issues: A Congressional Roll-Call Analysis*, 29 WEST. POL. Q. 384 (1976).

9. Buttel & Flinn, *Environmental Politics: The Structuring of Partisan and Ideological Cleavages in Mass Environmental Attitudes*, 17 SOC. Q. 477 (1976), Buttel & Flinn, *The Politics of Environmental Concern: The Impacts of Party Identification and Political Ideology on Environmental Attitudes*, 10 ENV. & BEH. 17 (1977); Dunlap, *The Impact of Political Orientation on Environmental Attitudes and Actions*, 7 ENV. & BEH. 428 (1975).

While the elected officials of the Democratic Party tend to be more pro-environment than their Republican counterparts, it is also true that the Democratic Party cannot be too aggressive in its environmental advocacy lest it alienate its working class and non-white supporters.¹⁰ Thus as the 1970s came to a close, it appears that the "environmental decade" has failed to materialize, in the sense that organized environmentalists often have avoided issues related to resource depletion, and little progress has been made in addressing the critical challenges of resource scarcity and survival. At a time in which scarcities of finite, nonrenewable resources are becoming imminent, the overall texture of United States energy policy, for example, remains oriented largely toward supply expansion, rather than conservation or substitution of renewable resources.¹¹ Mainstream organized environmentalism in the 1970s typically was less concerned with the long-range problems of energy and materials scarcity than with more cosmetic (although by no means trivial) issues of land use planning, air and water pollution control, wilderness preservation, waste disposal, and the like.¹²

Once an environmental initiative is recognized politically, its enactment may be expected to have different impacts on various social groups. It is widely accepted that "meaningful" environmental action would necessarily entail curbing economic growth (or at least the energy- and materials-intensive growth that has characterized the United States in the 20th century), and that those working in the large-scale industrial sector would bear the immediate brunt of these reforms.¹³ Disruption of industrial growth and production would mean lower profits, higher unemployment, and perhaps reduced wages.¹⁴ Present strategies for environmental reform, then, precipitate and reinforce a very powerful coincidence of interest among major corporate elites and the affluent working class in resisting such reform. Groups least likely to be affected by reforms include elements of the "middle" or "upper-middle" socio-economic classes, especially the professional, technical, academic, and administrative

10. Buttel & Flinn, *supra* note 9.

11. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ENERGY POLICY (J. Hammarlund and L. Lindberg eds. 1976); L. LINDBERG, THE ENERGY SYNDROME (1977); Walker & Large, *The Economics of Energy Extravagance*, 4 *ECOL. LAW Q.* 963 (1975).

12. Schnaiberg, *Politics, Participation, and Pollution: The "Environmental Movement,"* in *CITIES IN CHANGE* (J. Walton and D. Carns eds. 1973); Sills, *The Environmental Movement and its Critics*, 3 *HUMAN ECOL.* 1 (1975).

13. Morrison, Hornback & Warner, *supra* note 3; Morrison, *supra* note 3; Schnaiberg, *Social Syntheses of the Societal-Environmental Dialectic: The Role of Distributional Impacts*, 56 *SOC. SCI. Q.* 5 (1975).

14. Hardesty, *The Political Economy of Environmental Destruction*, in *ECONOMIC GROWTH VS. THE ENVIRONMENT* (W. Johnson and J. Hardesty eds. 1971).

categories.¹⁵ These groups generally are more insulated from the consequences of environmental reform than are members of the corporate and working classes, because of job security and employment in noncorporate and nonindustrial milieus. This accounts for the strong over-representation of middle class persons in contemporary organized environmentalism.

The fact that our previous comments have focused primarily on organized environmentalism and downplayed the role of public and institutional environmentalism in many ways reflects the constraints on environmental reform in the present liberal or centrist government structure that currently characterizes the United States. Environmentalism in the United States manifests the substantial gap between a public that expresses rather strong pro-environmental sentiments (albeit from diverse bases in ideology and interest) and the narrow social and membership bases of organized environmentalists. This is because environmental agendas have never proven attractive as campaign platforms in electoral politics. Hence, the major recourses for the environmentally concerned are lobbying and court action—strategies more amenable to organized environmentalists with high levels of political and legal skill. The general image is one of organized environmentalists functioning as a pressure group to secure environmentally favorable laws, and then using litigation to ensure compliance with them. Correspondingly, coalitions with other groups are made largely on an ad hoc basis.

In contrast, institutional environmentalism generally has been reactive in character and aimed at mediating disputes between organized environmentalists and their adversaries. Institutionalized environmentalism generally has been submerged within the broader goals of the federal administrative apparatus (the current goals of revitalizing the economy and reducing inflation).¹⁶ Thus environmentalism of the 1970s has been divided into its public, organized interest group, and institutional components.

Nevertheless, in the sections that follow, we develop the argument that the circumstances surrounding environmentalism of the 1970s account only partially for the future course of environmentalism. As much as existing struggles over environmental and energy policy are “real,” these conflicts would seem to lack the urgency and the “peak association”¹⁷ character that we may expect when, for example,

15. R. E. Dunlap, *supra* note 7; Buttel & Flinn, *The Structure of Support for the Environmental Movement, 1968-1970*, 39 RURAL SOC. 56 (1974); Sills, *supra* note 12.

16. L. LINDBERG, *supra* note 11.

17. Lowi, *American Business, Public Policy, Case Studies, and Political Theory*, 16 WORLD POL. 677 (1964). The notion of “peak association” pertains to a situation in which political groups are highly organized around and polarized over a major policy issue.

prevailing scenarios for acute energy scarcity in the mid-1980s come to pass. In the next section we propose that the future of environmentalism cannot accurately be deduced from the characteristics—issue definitions, social and political bases, conflicting interests—of the current form of environmentalism. In so doing, we offer a conceptual scheme designed to anticipate the possible forms that environmentalism might take in coming decades.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL INTERESTS: A REFORMULATION

Our purpose in the present section is to elaborate a view of the major structural components of an advanced society, in order to indicate the interests most likely to be expressed by major participants in the environmental-political process. Table 1 provides a first approximation of how the principal interests of four major structural groups intersect with environmentalism over the short run and long run. The specific referent for distinguishing between the short and long run is the emergence of resource scarcity at some future point, which undermines the traditional trajectory of exponential economic growth.

Our major assumption is that resource scarcity will lead to change in the constellations of interest among four structural groups. This discussion will set the stage for our final substantive section, which emphasizes how these new sets of interests may prompt changing coalitions among the major structural groups and subgroups, as each group seeks to defend or enhance its interests in a new era of scarcity.

We suggest that future patterns of environmentalism can be examined best by dissecting the social structure of an advanced society into four key structural elements, and then drawing further distinctions within these elements. These four major components include three social class categories—the capitalist/corporate class, the working class, and a structurally ambiguous “upper-middle class.” The final component is the state.

The capitalist/corporate class consists of those who own productive property (and who hold high-level management positions within such enterprises), while the working class consists of persons primarily dependent on wage labor and who generally are excluded from decision-making within the productive enterprise. This definition of the working class would include many persons often included in the category of white-collar workers, e.g., most clerical and service

TABLE 1
SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM ENVIRONMENTAL INTERESTS OF MAJOR STRUCTURAL GROUPS

<i>Structural group</i>	<i>Major Subgroups</i>	<i>Short-term environmental interests</i>	<i>Long-term environmental interests (under scarcity)</i>
Capitalist class	Monopoly sector Competitive sector	Production, profit (maximize economic growth and resource flows)	Control (maintain control over resource flows)
Working class	Monopoly sector Competitive sector	Consumption and employment security (maximize economic growth and resource flows)	Social change (alter conditions under which resources are appropriated for or allocated to production and consumption activities); improve health and safety aspects of work and residential environments
Middle class		Enhance social status (expression of "environmental responsibility," status interest, and/or pursuit of nonmaterial aspects of quality of life)	Maintain social status and consumption status (continuity of 1970s environmental advocacy? abandon environmentalism to protect consumption status?)
State	Administrative sector Democratic sector	Principally, enhance profitable capital accumulation and legitimization (maximize economic growth and resource flows)	Principally, maintain social harmony and legitimization; secondarily, enhance profitable capital accumulation (continued tendency toward resource-expansion policies, but this may be altered by conflicts expressed within the state)

workers and many salespeople. As Hamilton¹⁸ notes, the incomes, living standards, work conditions, and political attitudes of such white-collar persons, who have tenuous job security, lack orderly careers, and have little decision-making power in work organizations, are quite similar to those of the blue-collar working class.

The "upper-middle class" is structurally ambiguous *vis-à-vis* the two other major classes. We define this class as including those in salaried employment in "mental," white-collar tasks—for example, professional, technical, and middle-level managerial workers with high levels of job security and orderly career progressions. The upper-middle class (hereafter referred to as the middle class) shares certain characteristics of the working class position in society (primarily lack of productive property) while at the same time it is a materially privileged class and its stability is based to some degree on resource-extravagant economic growth. In other words, the consumption and employment status of the middle class may be imperiled if prevailing patterns of production and capital accumulation are undermined. However, as noted above, the middle class is generally pro-environmental and accounts for a highly disproportionate level of voluntary environmental membership. The structural ambiguity of the middle class, along with the possible contradiction involved in middle class advocacy of environmental agendas that might undermine its consumption status, imply that middle class alliances with other groups will be pivotal in shaping the strategies and ideologies of organized environmentalism.

The final major structural element of the advanced societies is the state apparatus. Following O'Connor and others,¹⁹ we posit that the state has two principal functions: (1) ensuring the conditions for profitable capital accumulation and economic growth, and (2) maintaining social harmony. These two functions are at least partly contradictory; policies that enhance or subsidize capital accumulation (e.g., bailing out declining firms, providing investment tax credits to encourage capital formation) disproportionately benefit owners of productive property over those who do not own property. Moreover, policies that subsidize capital accumulation typically lead to a capital-intensive form of accumulation, in which the capital invested in industry yields relatively little additional employment, or which may actually decrease employment through automation. The accumula-

18. R. HAMILTON, *CLASS AND POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES* (1972); R. HAMILTON, *RESTRAINING MYTHS* (1975).

19. J. O'CONNOR, *THE FISCAL CRISIS OF THE STATE* (1973); Offe, *The Theory of the Capitalist State and the Problem of Policy Formation*, in *STRESS AND CONTRADICTION IN MODERN CAPITALISM* (L. Lindberg ed. 1975).

tion function thus necessitates actions to secure legitimacy on the part of groups marginalized by the increasing capital-intensive pattern of economic expansion (e.g., workers who lose their jobs because of automation), primarily through social welfare programs.

Table 1 also shows important differentiations within the categories of the capitalist and working classes and the state. Galbraith and O'Connor have emphasized that advanced economies have a dual character by distinguishing between what we may term the monopoly and competitive sectors of the economy.²⁰ The monopoly sector consists of a few hundred large, technologically advanced firms which operate in imperfectly competitive markets. The persons who work in the monopoly sector typically are unionized and make relatively high wages. The competitive sector, on the other hand, is comprised of hundreds of thousands of relatively small, usually technologically stagnant firms in relatively competitive markets. Persons who work for wages in the competitive sector generally are not unionized and make relatively low incomes.

The most important rationale for distinguishing between the monopoly and competitive sectors is the fact that government growth policies tend to tilt heavily toward monopoly sector firms, since their technological dynamism offers the greatest possibility for maintaining a healthy, growing economy.²¹ Monopoly sector workers derive considerable benefits from the dynamism of the monopoly sector. The competitive sector, on the other hand, has much less potential for growth because technologically stagnant industries selling largely undifferentiated products have little capacity for product innovation and expanded sales.

A final distinction we wish to make is between the "administrative" and "democratic" realms of the state—that is, between its bureaucratic and parliamentary segments. The administrative branches of the government are characterized by agencies in which decision-making is depoliticized and insulated from popular electoral influence. The democratic portion of the state consists of the electoral and parliamentary systems, where popular preferences (at least in theory) are expressed. Many observers have noted the ascendancy of the administrative over the democratic sector of the government as the span of state intervention in the economy has increased. Alford and Friedland have emphasized the increased prominence of the administrative sector of the state and noted the deleterious consequences for groups such as public or organized environmentalists:

20. J. O'CONNOR, *supra* note 19; J. GALBRAITH, *THE NEW INDUSTRIAL STATE* (1967).

21. J. O'CONNOR, *supra* note 19.

The devolution of political power into autonomous bureaucratic agencies has increased the penetration of specialized dominant interests into the state, facilitating the private control of public power in a manner that has depoliticized decision-making and allocation and has insulated it from partisan electoral controls. . . . The consequence is a structural bias against large, heterogeneous social groups with limited political resources. Fragmentation of policy making encourages policies favorable to particularized private interests rather than socialized collective interests.²²

The significance of all of this is that widely held expressions of environmental concern on the part of the public cannot survive the democratic/electoral/parliamentary system and be translated into effective environmental policy. At the same time, the more dominant administrative sector of the government is insulated from these popular demands. This sector is also concerned with managing the private economy to secure the economic expansion both employers and employees consider necessary.

In the short run, the environmental interests of the four segments are much as contemporary environmental movement researchers have identified them. Essentially, one sees a compelling coincidence of interest in maximizing economic growth—and hence resource flows—among the capitalist and working classes *and* the state.²³ The middle class, on the other hand, is responsible for the major political support for pro-environmental actions over the short run.

Our analysis, however, summarized in Table 1, suggests that the emergence of energy and materials scarcity will produce changes in the environmental interests of major social groups. Morrison²⁴ and Schnaiberg,²⁵ for example, have noted that insofar as resource scarcity undermines the traditional bases of economic expansion, one may anticipate protracted struggles over the distribution of economic resources. We also argue that the key axis of conflict over the long term will be between the capitalist and working classes. These conflicts can be represented as disputes over the conditions in which scarce natural resources are allocated to production and consumption activities.

The interests of the capitalist-industrial class are best served if scarce energy and materials are allocated to industrial production in

22. Alford & Friedland, *Political Participation and Public Policy*, 1 ANN. REV. SOC. 429 (1975).

23. Caldwell & Woolley, *Energy Policy and the Capitalist State* in THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ENERGY POLICY (J. Hammarlund & L. Lindberg eds. 1976).

24. Morrison, *supra* note 3; Morrison, *Growth, Environment, Equity and Scarcity*, 57 SOC. SCI. Q. 292 (1976).

25. Schnaiberg, *supra* note 13.

the traditional way (in which factors of production are combined in centralized—usually factory—locations in order to sell commodities from which profits can be derived). The working class, on the other hand, is likely to favor social change in production and consumption institutions, so the role of natural resources in the economy shifts from production for private profit to production geared toward social needs. Since unfettered economic expansion would be constrained by resource scarcity, the traditional channeling of materials and energy to the production process would not produce the incremental increases in wages and employment that have prevailed in previous eras of relative resource abundance. As a result, the working class is increasingly interested in major institutional change. Examples of such shifts in resource allocation, production, and consumption institutions include public ownership of and control over energy industries, localism in or decentralization of production, and worker-controlled enterprises. In each case, the goal is to increase labor's share of the social product by politically constraining the allocation of scarce resources for private profit.

These emerging conflicts would be played out largely within the state apparatus, and they ultimately could not be resolved by appealing to the major classes to cooperate in achieving economic growth for mutual—albeit asymmetrical—benefit. The implication of an economy of scarcity for social conflict is that the principal function or interest of the government would shift from enhancing profitable capital accumulation to maintaining social harmony. The precise role of the state under these conditions is difficult to specify because of its dual role noted above. Because the state does not own productive property directly, it depends upon the capitalist-industrial class to supply the material needs of the population; however, this class will meet these needs only if it is privately profitable for them to do so. Government officials thus will have to be concerned about maintaining business confidence so corporate owners will continue to invest in the United States (rather than in other nations) and provide employment here.

But as noted above, resource scarcity, in limiting traditional solutions to social problems which emphasized the need for economic growth, means the government faces an even greater potential crisis of legitimacy as far as the working class is concerned. To minimize conflict, the state must attempt to ensure support by groups—particularly the poor and minorities—that bear the major costs of production for private profit.²⁶ These attempts could be made

26. Caldwell & Woolley, *supra* note 23.

through social welfare expenditures, public employment programs, etc. However, these steps conflict with the historic necessity of the state to underwrite capital accumulation through government subsidies, highway construction, defense spending, and the like. Because of the tension between these contradictory roles, the specific way in which the conflict regulation or legitimation interests of the government are implemented will depend on the ways in which the environmental interests of other groups are expressed and on the types of coalitions that develop.

The environmental interests of the middle class in times of resource scarcity are difficult to define. We noted earlier that the middle class is structurally ambiguous because it shares certain material conditions of existence with both major social classes. The important question concerning the future political-environmental role of the middle class is whether it will continue to be a pro-environmental force, and what political direction its perceived interests will take. In Table 1 we note there may be two environmental interests of the middle class when resources are scarce—maintaining social status through, in part, continuity of its 1970s environmental advocacy, and protecting consumption status if future environmental politics threaten its material position.

Before discussing the rival political paths of environmentalism, it is useful to emphasize that our division of society into four groups does not necessarily imply a high level of harmony or unity of interest within each. For example, it is certain that corporations in an economy of scarcity will compete with one another for political advantage within the government. Likewise, relatively privileged working class groups, (i.e., monopoly sector labor) will attempt to maintain their privilege *vis-à-vis* competitive sector labor, the poor, and the unemployed. Thus, as is the case at present, conflicts within groups are likely to develop. Nevertheless, the ultimate goals of each segment or group are likely to fall within the range of interests detailed in Table 1, granting that group consciousness of common interests will tend to be fleeting and transitory.

ENVIRONMENTALISM: RIGHT, CENTER, AND LEFT

Coalitions and State Structures

We now come to the question of how shifting constellations of environmental interests in a milieu of resource scarcity may yield very different forms of environmentalism, because of their rooting in state structures that we may label as right, center, and left. By state structure, we refer to variations in the organization of the govern-

mental apparatus as they relate to the coalitions of social groups which hold state power. We noted earlier a similar analysis by Stretton, but Stretton's work, while provocative and insightful, is mostly oriented toward the elaboration of the everyday details and group consequences of each of the scenarios of environmentalism. Specifically, Stretton is vague on the social forces and group coalitions that might produce change in the structure of the state apparatus and lead to variations in the transition toward a sustainable or steady-state society. In this section we wish to supplement Stretton's analysis by indicating how shifting constellations of interests and group coalitions might lead to each of the political-environmental paths he details.

The starting point for our analysis is the nature of coalitions between major structural groups, discussed in the previous section, in a changing state organizational milieu in times of resource scarcity. We begin by making several assumptions. First, the two major pivots for coalitions of groups that shape different state structures are monopoly sector capital and monopoly sector labor. These two groups are the most powerful sectors of capital and labor, respectively, and those with positions most threatened by resource scarcity. These groups also have the highest levels of internal organization and can respond most rapidly to a changing political-environmental situation.

The second assumption is that while certain coalitions may be in flux during a changing resource situation, capital and labor will continue to have the greatest ties to the administrative and democratic spheres of the government, respectively. This is because those owning capital are few in number and can achieve the greatest leverage over policy within decentralized state bureaucracies which are insulated from popular control. The working class, on the other hand, contains more people and will have its greatest impact through democratic process.

Table 2 indicates the most likely coalitions under the government structures we label right, center, and left. It is well to begin with the centrist or liberal type of state structure since it is virtually synonymous with the structure of the American (and most other Western) government systems. The predominant group coalition in a centrist state structure is between monopoly sector capital and monopoly sector labor. Galbraith, O'Connor, and numerous other social scientists have noted that the historic bargains struck between monopoly sector capital and monopoly sector labor have been the principal non-government aspect of the rise of the liberal or centrist state.²⁷

27. J. Galbraith, *supra* note 20; J. O'Connor, *supra* note 19. The first scholar to detect the crucial importance of the coalition between large-scale capital and their affluent unionized working class employees was C. WRIGHT MILLS, *THE NEW MEN OF POWER* (1948).

TABLE 2
 GROUP COALITIONS, ENVIRONMENTAL IDEOLOGIES, AND ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT
 ORGANIZATION IN THREE STATE STRUCTURES

State Structure	Major Group Coalitions		Prevalent Environmental Ideologies	Predominant Branch of Environmentalism
	With Monopoly Sector Capital*	With Monopoly Sector Labor**		
Center	Monopoly sector labor	Monopoly sector capital	Reduction of waste, wise management, state must balance competing demands by environmentalists, capital and labor	Voluntary, organized
Right	Middle class	Competitive sector labor?	state must assume centralized, authoritarian control; resource decisions should be made by a technically competent managerial elite	Institutional
Left	Competitive sector capital	Competitive sector labor and middle class	necessity for decentralized, egalitarian society; state must encourage new forms of production that broaden participation in natural resource decision-making	Public

*Each coalition would include the administrative sector of the state.

**Each coalition would include the democratic sector of the state.

These bargains essentially amount to major unions agreeing to relinquish control over decision-making in the work place and curbing resistance to automation, in exchange for relatively high wages and job security. Industrial peace means capital can make rapid technological innovations in order to expand markets and increase productivity. At the same time, monopoly sector labor is able to expand upon its living standard differentials relative to the competitive sector working class. At its most advanced level, the liberal state becomes a "corporatist" state; labor leaders become advisors to and incorporated within administrative agencies so economic planning oriented towards the needs of the monopoly sector can be implemented.

On the other hand, the democratic arm of the state suffers a progressive reduction in influence. Furthermore, differentiation between the working class in the monopoly and competitive sectors remains high because of the monopoly capital/monopoly labor bargain. Therefore this class is divided and cannot speak with one voice in the electoral process. So in the end, the democratic process yields power to the more cohesive administrative sector.

There are two dominant group coalitions of a rightist state structure. The first is the link between monopoly sector capital and the middle class, and the second is the coalition between monopoly sector and competitive sector labor. The coalition between monopoly sector capital and the middle class, along with the alliance of monopoly sector capital and the administrative sector of the state, essentially fuses corporate and government decision-making structures. Japan is the advanced society that most closely approximates the rightist state structure. In Japan, for instance, there is a very close identity of interest and purpose between owners of large corporations, government officials, and the middle class.²⁸ This leaves monopoly sector labor with only one possible coalition—with competitive sector labor—in order to employ the democratic-parliamentary process to achieve common goals. A rightist state structure thus potentially results in strong conflicts between the administrative and democratic branches of the government, because each is influenced by polarized class interests.

The leftist state structure also has two predominant coalitions. The most important coalition is among monopoly sector labor, competitive sector labor, and the middle class. The second coalition is between monopoly and competitive sector capital. The origin of a leftist state structure usually will be electoral—it will result from

28. Kelley, Stunkel & Wescott, *supra* note 5.

support from the entire working class and the middle class in one or a few social democratic or radical political parties. In defense of the prerogatives of private ownership of productive property, competitive and monopoly sector capital thus are likely to enter a coalition, to present a common voice within the administrative arm of the government. Sweden is the advanced industrial society that most clearly meets the criteria of the leftist state, although it retains very strong elements of a centrist state structure. In particular, Sweden is not characterized by either a strong middle and working class coalition or by the conflict between the administrative and democratic sectors of the government expected in a more fully leftist state system.

Structure and Ideology in Three Paths of Environmentalism

Table 2 also presents likely ideologies of environmentalism that would dominate under the three types of state structures just discussed. Environmentalism of the right would involve the view that the state must assume centralized, relatively authoritarian control, and that resource decisions should be made by a managerial elite which understands sophisticated technology and complex ecological processes. A further aspect of environmental ideology in a rightist state structure would be that a sharp frugality and general decrease in living standards for consumers are necessary to adapt to environmental/resource constraints.

Environmentalism of the center would continue the present environmental-ideological posture that conservation and environmental control can be achieved largely through reduction of waste and wise management, rather than through any drastic reduction in living standards; centrist environmental ideology also would continue to hold that the government has primary responsibility for environmental control and the state must balance competing demands made by environmentalists, capital, and labor.

Environmentalism of the left would emphasize that a decentralized and egalitarian society is the most appropriate response to resource scarcity and environmental problems.²⁹ Not only must the

29. One obvious question that arises here is why environmentalism of the left would tend to embody a decentralist ideology, rather than the more centralist ideology that surrounds resource management in, for example, the Soviet Union (Kelley, Stunkel & Wescott, *supra* note 5). We feel this would be the case largely because a centralized left structure premised on the pursuit of rapid growth would be as untenable as the centrist form of environmentalism from which it presumably would develop. In other words, a decentralist strategy appears to be the most promising way for a leftist coalition to offer a socially progressive alternative to inequality and threats to consumption standards emerging in a milieu of resource scarcity.

government regulate abuse of natural resources by owners of property, but it also must encourage new forms of production (e.g., worker-owned and/or worker-managed firms, community-based co-operatives, public enterprises) that enable broader participation of the citizenry in decisions allocating natural resources.

Finally, we point out in Table 2 that the right, center, and left state structures would have major influences on which of the three elements of environmentalism—public, voluntary, and institutional—would dominate environmental politics. The nature of the rightist state—its major coalitions and the dominance of the administrative sector of the government—would suggest a key role for institutional environmentalism. As we will note in our discussion below, environmental policy in the rightist state would tend to be administered by a stratum of government officials (ecological mandarins?) in the interest of their principal coalition partner, monopoly sector capital. We would anticipate continued preeminence of organized, voluntary environmentalism in the liberal, centrist state. And it appears that the leftist state allows the greatest expression for public environmentalism because of the heightened importance of the electoral/parliamentary sector.

Environmentalism of the center in some ways might be viewed as a contradiction in terms. Environmentalism in a centrist government must operate in the context of a continuing alliance between monopoly sector capital and labor. This yields a stratified system that is non-distributive with respect to the fruits of growth (i.e., a constant share of an increasing economic pie) and continued (albeit indirect) domination of materials and environmental policy in government agencies by the corporate-industrial class.

The basic political structure of environmentalism of the center is the liberal democratic state and interest-group liberal politics.³⁰ Its dominant ideological force is the cooperation of social classes and groups to restore the growth trajectory characteristic of the bulk of the post-World War II period. Both aspects of centrist environmentalism, as suggested earlier, would be quite vulnerable to a series of economically crippling resource crises such as a protracted energy shortage.

30. The notion of "interest group liberal" politics is taken from T. LOWI, *THE END OF LIBERALISM* (1969). "Interest group liberalism" represents a state structure in which the government plays a positive and expansive role (i.e., is "liberal," in the contemporary sense) and the policy agenda (and ultimately the "public interest") is fashioned in terms of the organized interest groups in society confronting a decentralized system of bureaucratic agencies. See especially Lowi's comments on the limitations of interest group liberalism—in particular, the tendency towards maintenance of structures of privilege and insulation of state decision-making from popular control; *Id.* at 85-93.

A fundamental problem of environmentalism of the center—beyond its attention to only limited aspects of environmental problems—is the tendency of its environmental reform to harm disproportionately the subordinate classes. The generally inegalitarian nature of environmental reform derives from two fundamental factors. First, persistent divisions between the working class and environmentalists (due to the tendency for prevailing environmental reforms to threaten working class economic security) result in environmental initiatives that are insensitive to distributional impacts.

Second, the emphasis on restoring growth serves to limit environmental agendas to those which do not limit the profit-making—and growth-producing—prerogatives of dominant industrial corporations.³¹ Thus under prevailing interest-group liberalism, middle class environmentalists remain one among many interest groups, which itself is limited by its advocacy of measures that would harm—albeit differentially—the two major social classes. Nevertheless, the stability of centrist environmentalism, as noted above, requires the absence of compelling, protracted resource or energy crises that would render its limited scope of ecological reform impracticable for addressing these crises. Centrist environmentalism and liberal democratic politics thus probably will shift toward the right or the left as resource scarcity emerges.

Environmentalism of the right would be shaped by the group coalitions (especially of monopoly sector capital with the middle class) that characterize its state structure. Government environmental policies would tend to produce or aggravate levels of inequality between classes because of the fusion of corporate and state decision-making structures, and the likelihood that environmental policies would be dictated substantially by and for dominant economic interests. Basically, this form of environmentalism would “solve” environmental problems by drastically reducing the living standards of the working class, even through repression if necessary. In other words, environmental problems are addressed in the interest of the dominant class and the middle class as depicted in Table 1.

This form of environmentalism has been argued to be possible—even necessary—by several social scientists. Ophuls, for example, stresses that:

Scarcity in general erodes the material basis for the relatively benign individualistic and democratic politics of the modern industrial era;

31. Perhaps the prototypical exponent of the centrist model or political form of environmentalism is L. K. Caldwell. See especially L. CALDWELL, *ENVIRONMENT: A CHALLENGE TO MODERN SOCIETY* (1970).

ecological scarcity in particular seems to engender overwhelming pressures toward political systems that are frankly authoritarian by current standards, for there seems to be no other way to check competitive overexploitation of resources and to assure competent direction of a complex society's affairs in accord with steady-state imperatives.³²

He suggests two conditions that might give rise to environmentalism of the right. The first is the active cooperation of the middle class with the dominant class, as substantial numbers of the middle class become mandarins who control scarce resources to the benefit of major industrial corporations. Middle class allegiance with the corporate-industrial stratum also may serve to preserve the consumption status of this class. Secondly, this form of environmentalism may well result if accentuated energy or resource scarcity—particularly if it emerges in the form of crippling shortages—undermines the ability of the liberal state to regulate social conflict.³³

Environmentalism of the left is somewhat more difficult to depict because it clearly does not exist in its pure form among present advanced societies. As we noted earlier, Sweden probably meets its criteria most closely.³⁴ Its fundamental characteristic would be that environmental reform or measures that enhance ecological sustainability are consistent with socio-economic quality—that is, its constituent policies reduce class inequalities. Second, and flowing from the first characteristic, these policies are dictated by and for working class groups. Third, the left would see its interests as including environmental reform and sustainable resource policies. As we noted above, the level of overt class conflict, especially within the state, probably would be greater than in the centrist model of environmentalism, and its government officials even may be avowedly anti-capitalist. Dominant political issues would revolve around the desirability and methods of restructuring the economy to facilitate a system of production that benefits persons who do not own productive property—a decidedly difficult and risky activity in a capitalist

32. W. OPHULS, *ECOLOGY AND THE POLITICS OF SCARCITY* 163 (1977).

33. This notion of environmentalism is frequently advocated or felt to be a necessity by scholars such as Garrett Hardin and others who espouse the "lifeboat" ethic. See G. HARDIN, *EXPLORING NEW ETHICS FOR SURVIVAL* (1972); P. R. EHRLICH, *HOW TO BE A SURVIVOR* (1971). Robert Heilbroner in his *AN INQUIRY INTO THE HUMAN PROSPECT* (1974) also grudgingly accepts roughly this same scenario.

34. Schnaiberg, *supra* note 13; C. ANDERSON, *THE SOCIOLOGY OF SURVIVAL* (1976); L. LINDBERG, *supra* note 11. Sweden, however, is relatively farther from the ideal-type of a leftist state structure than Japan is from the rightist form. In particular, Sweden has shown little movement toward decentralization of production and worker or community ownership of productive property.

economy.³⁵ Economic shifts that both decrease resource use and increase employment³⁶ are implemented by government order; industries with investments supplanted by such a shift (especially the automobile industry) become increasingly defensive and politically militant.³⁷

Although a transition toward environmentalism of the left would not be smooth or blissful, this form of environmentalism could achieve two goals largely unmet in the present social structure of the United States: ecological sustainability *and* socio-economic equality. What conditions might make a movement toward environmentalism of the left more likely? Again, such a transition seems inconceivable so long as resource and economic crises can be handled by prevailing interest-group liberal politics; thus, the mutual exacerbation of resource crises (e.g., a severe energy crisis such as that envisioned by many analysts during the mid-1980s) and continued erosion of the ability of the United States economy to provide employment, rising real incomes, and other material benefits well might be necessary but by no means sufficient conditions favoring the transition to environmentalism of the left.³⁸

However, the most crucial requisite is the combining of objectives by labor, minorities, and other "underdogs," and middle class environmentalists. This would not be so much a matter of environmentalists coming to "understand" workers and their environmental concerns, but more so one of workers and the left beginning to understand how environmental problems and their material problems have common roots. The failure of these two groups to reach these

35. R. MILIBAND, *THE STATE IN CAPITALIST SOCIETY* (1969).

36. Hannon, *Energy, Labor, and the Conservator Society*, 1977 *TECH. REV.* 47, has an excellent discussion of sectoral shifts in the economy that would yield *both* energy conservation and higher levels of employment and well-being on the part of workers.

37. Visible proponents of the left path of environmentalism would include B. COMMONER, *THE POVERTY OF POWER* (1976); B. COMMONER, *THE POLITICS OF ENERGY* (1979). See also Deutsch, *Environmental Politics—Participatory Structures and Social Change*, in *THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF CHANGE* (Z. Milnar & H. Teune eds. 1978). Certain environmental or environmentally-related organizations (e.g., Friends of the Earth, Science for the People) and their publications (especially *COEVOLUTION QUARTERLY*) are coming to be proponents of this point of view. See, e.g., Denman & Denman, *Decentralization: Making Small Places Work Again*, in *PROGRESS AS IF SURVIVAL MATTERED* (H. Nash ed. 1977), which appears in a Friends of the Earth publication.

38. A related point is made in L. E. NULTY, *UNDERSTANDING THE NEW INFLATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BASIC NECESSITIES* (1977), published by the Exploratory Project for Economic Alternatives, Washington, D.C. This is another leading organization which seeks to identify strategies for implementing environmental policies in socioeconomically progressive ways (i.e., so that working class persons and the poor are the primary beneficiaries). Another related publication by this organization is R. APPLIGATE, *PUBLIC TRUSTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION* (1976).

understandings in turn may lead to the rightist state and its inegalitarian, authoritarian style of "environmental adaptation."

Some relevant developments with respect to the combination of objectives by the working class and middle class environmentalists are occurring within the loosely organized movements for alternative or "soft" technology, worker-controlled industries, alternative agriculture, regional and community self-sufficiency, and the like. Many of these strategies have derived from the work of Amory Lovins,³⁹ although he, himself, may not agree with the ways that these ideas are employed in the present paper. This emphasizes that the unity of purpose is tenuous for the members of these "alternatives" movements. Nevertheless, these movements indicate the possibility of combining environmentalism with the needs of those near the bottom of the present political-economic structure.⁴⁰ The success or failure of these movements may be extremely important in determining whether the fragility of liberal, growth politics in an age of abundance will yield to an environmentalism of the right or left in an era of resource scarcity.

CONCLUSION

It is exceedingly difficult to step from the confines of one's society in a specific place in history, to provide an analysis of future paths of social change, especially in an era in which the material bases of existing institutions are so tenuous. Nevertheless, it seems clear that anticipating and shaping adjustments to declining resources is important. The emergence of resource scarcity in the coming decades likely will be a pivotal juncture for socio-political change in the United States and kindred advanced societies. It is crucial to recognize that this juncture may yield progressive or regressive social changes; "[i]ndeed, the crisis of ecological scarcity might actually be turned into a grand opportunity to build a more humane post-industrial society; the alternative is to let the shape of the steady-state paradigm be decided for us by accepting the outcome of current needs toward technocracy."⁴¹ Anticipating the range of choices that are available or possible may ideally enable those whose needs are not adequately met by the present society to help construct a more beneficent society over the coming decades.

39. A. LOVINS, *SOFT ENERGY PATHS* (1976).

40. See also Schnaiberg, *supra* note 13.

41. W. OPHULS, *supra* note 32, at 164.