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From Protest to Pragmatism Stabilization of the  
League in Finnish political culture

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2022

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Karimäki, J M 2022, ' From Protest to Pragmatism Stabilization of the  
Finnish political culture ', Contemporary European history. , vol. 31 , no. 3 , pp. 456-468 . <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000382>

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/352007>

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777321000382>

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## **From protest to pragmatism – Stabilisation of the Green League into Finnish political culture and party system during the 1990s**

### Introduction

The breakthrough of post-material value-change-driven ‘new politics’ occurred in Finland in the form of an environmental party during the 1980s. First, a Green municipal council member was elected in 1980, then the first two MPs were elected in 1983, and then a Green party – the Green League (GL) – was established in 1988. The silent revolution that gave birth to movement-based, green politics Europe-wide signalled an ambition to revolutionise the old party system and to enhance open, decentralist patterns of intra-party decision-making over top-down party organisation. System-wise, the aspiration was to disperse the old party state, open up policymaking to a new pluralism of interests and increase opportunities for plebiscitarian decision-making.<sup>1</sup>

Through a process of consolidation, the environmental movement transformed into a representative, party political actor in the Finnish political system and culture. During the 1990s, the GL became an ‘ordinary’ party with a formal hierarchy and central leadership, even if grass-roots members still had an important role within it. As Jukka Paastela maintains, the age of innocence was quickly over, though some still cherished the myth of a ‘primitive congregation’ in which all were brethren, and no-one wanted to use any political power.<sup>2</sup>

This article analyses the GL’s development in the context of the Finnish political culture and party system and focuses particularly on the stabilisation, adaptation and conformation of the GL during the late 1980s and the 1990s. The significance of this piece draws from Jon Burchell’s argument that analysis of the Green parties has put a lot of emphasis on theoretical roots, the ‘newness’ of the parties and identifying what it means to be Green. However, similar levels of attention have not been devoted to what it means to be ‘a small, new political party struggling for recognition and

attempting to represent a distinctive and broad-ranging “Green” ideology within established party systems.’<sup>3</sup>

The avant-garde nature of the GL makes it an excellent subject for a case study to present a more comprehensive account of the Green self-conception behind the evolution of the Green party family and politics. With continuous parliamentary representation from the early 1980s onwards, government participation on a national level in 1995 and strong connections to the European Green party family, an examination of the reasons and reasonings why the GL became a stable part of Finnish political culture offers new insight into the evolution of Green parties in Europe. In the following discussion, the research literature is engaged in dialogue with the leading green actives of the era in question. The argumentation and conclusions are based on empirical, qualitative analysis of GL archival material, consisting of the party congress, the commission and national executive (NEC) protocols and the annual reports and strategies, as well as on media sources.

The birth of the Green party family is traditionally connected to the emergence of a post-material value change supported by favourable socio-political structures. Post-material value change entails a transition from the survival values of traditional agricultural and industrial societies towards the welfare values of post-industrial society, such as emphasising quality of life and maximising subjective welfare and individual expression. Alongside macro-level factors, such as the economy, the welfare state and stable democracy, micro-level factors, like trust, tolerance and individual wellbeing, were all interconnected.<sup>4</sup>

The rise of post-materialist socio-cultural parties was also dependent on socio-political structures. The greatest support for Green parties was in affluent countries with large welfare states, significant social democrat government participation and ‘labour corporatist’ systems of interest mediation. In modern welfare states, labour market organisations and strong leftist parties prevented the promotion of post-materialist values through established political structures, promoting the birth of

new political parties and activism.<sup>5</sup> These features were also proof of stable economies and political systems that supported and enabled a focus beyond material welfare.<sup>6</sup>

As a part of the Nordic framework, Finnish political culture is characterised by the absence of clear-cut boundaries between the state and civil society. As Henrik Stenius argues, associations and movements are widely accepted phenomena with only moderately polarising implications. This has upheld the ideal of a one-norm society and led to a transformation of the ideal of conformity into a universalistic figure of thought.<sup>7</sup> Dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the combination of a strong state and a vital civil society with dense networks of institutional interdependencies has led to a 'state–society alliance' that contributed to the adaptation and conformation of the GL to the Finnish political culture and party system.

At the end of the twentieth century, Finland was an advanced society with a multiparty system and a polity of a rather corporatist nature, which together facilitated ideological convergence between the parties aspiring to enter government. The fragmented nature of the party system forced parties to make concessions. Democracy was stable and deeply rooted. The Finnish electoral system is a proportional list system with compulsory preferential voting; the proportionality of the system enables even small or new parties to gain seats, especially as there is no legal threshold for entry into parliament.<sup>8</sup>

From the 1980s onwards, rapid social and political transformation created opportunities for new political organisations, and support for new parties increased as diminished class-voting, increased electoral volatility and the growing pertinence of environmental issues and internationalisation altered the Finnish party system.<sup>9</sup> Despite these changes, and a high degree of party system fragmentation with a large number of parties having parliamentary representation, the core of the Finnish party system has remained stable. Parties established at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as the Social Democratic Party, National Coalition Party, Centre Party, Left Alliance

and Swedish Peoples' Party, still muster a significant, although declining, share (51.2% in the 2019 general elections) of the popular vote.

From two seats out of a total of 200 (1.47% vote share) in the 1983 general elections, the GL doubled its number of MPs to four (4.03%) in 1987 and again to ten (6.82%) in 1991. The upturn ended in 1995 with a loss of one MP (6.52%) but was regained in the 1999 general elections when the Greens gained two seats (7.27%) – as a government party, no less. As a mixture of cadre party and amateur-activist party, the GL has a low member–voter ratio (1,125 members in 1998 and 194,846 voters in 1999; 8,768 members in 2017 and 354,194 voters in 2019). Funding for the party comes from state subsidies; the importance of membership fees is minimal.<sup>10</sup>

From the Nordic and Western European perspective, the Finnish green trajectory compares best to that of the German and Swedish Greens.<sup>11</sup> The Green wave in the 1970s and 1980s was manifested in parliamentary entrance in all of these industrialised, relatively post-materialistic countries. Born out of the same societal conflicts, the parties have a lot in common in terms of ideology, organisation processes and debates between society-focused 'realos' and ecology-emphasising 'fundis', and the Finnish and German Greens have been especially similar in having been forerunners of Green government participation. From the beginning, the Finnish Greens have had strong connections to their European counterparts, with, for example, Heidi Hautala serving as a member of the European Greens secretariat and Pekka Sauri as the co-chair of the European Federation of Green Parties.

In general, Green parties have moved out of the niche of protest and fringe politics into the centre stage of national and supranational decision-making, and green issues, such as environmental protection, climate change, global justice, immigration, and equality, are all at the forefront of national and international politics. The Green strategy of institutionalising new conflict dimensions established them as a serious political actor with an attitudinally and socially congruent electorate.

A new, highly educated middle class comprising young, urban and notably female socio-cultural experts and students proved to be a coherent electorate for the Greens.<sup>12</sup> Rooted in the environmental movement, the party presented itself as the urban liberal alternative, with high tolerance towards immigrants and sexual minorities. From early on, the Finnish Greens have stood out as a pragmatic centrist or liberal party rather than a dogmatic or single-issue movement.<sup>13</sup>

Thus far, research has provided a rather comprehensive picture of the emergence and general development of Green parties<sup>14</sup>, their electoral performance<sup>15</sup>, accounts of the Green electorate<sup>16</sup>, their road to and performance in government<sup>17</sup> and their ideological developments<sup>18</sup>. In these regards, the Finnish Greens conform to or even outpace the overall Western European trajectory: they are among the most electorally successful and were the first to enter government. Ideology- and electorate-wise, the party conforms to the norm of focusing on new politics issues with a centre-left tendency and relies on a young, urban, female-dominated, highly educated electorate.

Contradictions in authority and agency during the late 1980s

Disputes causing intra-party distress during the 1990s originated from a conflict over ideological and organisational emphasis: the minority that emphasised ecology and preferred efficient party organisation and the more socially inclined majority that preferred movement-based politics. Enthusiastic activists representing all strata of post-material political interests had individual, heterogeneous reasons for participating in the environmental movement and subsequent party politics. The roots of the Finnish Greens varied from ex-communist to ex-liberal party members and from Eastern mysticism to the anti-nuclear movement and environmental protection.<sup>19</sup>

The typical Green party organisational and ideological debate was three-fold. The debate over ideology reflected the general purpose of the Green movement as well as its ideology and desired organisational type: was the overall purpose to unite all alternative movements or to focus on deep ecology and preventing eco-catastrophe, and would green issues be better advanced through a

political party or a movement? The civil-society-building Greens stressed social justice as an essential part of the green ideology, whereas the eco-fundamentalists took social justice as granted in a welfare state like Finland; for them, it was more pertinent to focus on the primacy of nature and sustainability.

During the late 1980s, ecologists such as Eero Paloheimo and Pentti Linkola regarded humanism as self-centred anthropocentrism that placed less value on nature and the environment. They put a primary emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature. The ‘fundis’ were, however, criticised for not tolerating other opinions and wanting to reduce the Green movement solely to nature conservation. Future MP, minister and party chair Satu Hassi claimed that the ‘fundis’ portrayed authoritative attitudes that built on hierarchies and confrontation. She emphasised that the Greens shared a mutual goal of a more sustainable future – the question was how to get there. Osmo Soininvaara – also a future MP, minister and party chair – made a similar claim. He did not oppose the eco-fundamentalists or ecologism *per se* but disliked their desire to evict from the Greens those who did not agree with their ideological preferences.<sup>20</sup>

The alternative and challenge to the existing parties that the GL and Green parties in general presented was an attractive combination for merging responsive, constituency-representing, issue-centred movement politics with responsible parliamentary and governmental influence.<sup>21</sup> Since parties and politicians are ‘office-seeking creatures’ who aim for executive power in order to realise their policy goals, finding a balance between idealistic principles and compromise-demanding realities was at the heart of the intra-party evolution and conflicts.

Besides ideological preferences, the ‘greenness’ of Green parties has always been about organisational features and a distinctive Green political style. Green parties are policy-oriented, and their leadership does not enjoy the same freedom of authority in bargaining as do most party leaders.<sup>22</sup> The Green protest to the established parties had as much to do with politicising new

issues as with challenging the old partisan structures of political participation.

At the organisational level, eco-fundamentalists were more willing to form a political party for the sake of efficiency, whereas the civil-society-building Greens placed more emphasis on participatory practices and the fluidity of movement politics. To accept party political self-identification and become ‘a self-satisfied, loud-mouthed, unity-pretending’ traditional party was something to be avoided at all costs. For some, forming an organisation for the sake of it was not a strong enough reason to establish a party.<sup>23</sup> As an example of this dichotomy between movement ideals and intra-party pressures to form a party, a future two-time party chair and minister Pekka Haavisto urged the majority to seize agency from the minority and stabilise the status of the GL, even if it meant forsaking the movement in favour of the party. ‘A boat rowed by thousands was now rocked by a small minority,’ Haavisto stated.<sup>24</sup>

A sign of the problematic transformation from movement to party was the declaration of procedure accepted by the party congress that guaranteed that ‘although the Green League transforms itself into a party, it is still only a tool. The Greens (...) do not necessarily represent it and obey its orders. (...) We do not follow such party or group discipline as would always guarantee common judgements.’<sup>25</sup> Such a declaration was needed to reflect the anti-authoritarian anti-party sentiment intrinsic in the movement-based ‘new politics’ at a time when the establishment of the party signalled a very different direction. The tension caused by the ideological and organisational rivalry was resolved when the eco-fundamentalists tore themselves from the GL to embark on ‘their own wild nature adventure, and the larger socially minded majority stayed within the party.’<sup>26</sup>

After the socially minded majority had secured authority and ideological agency within the party, the Green ideology and manifesto required idealistic, yet sufficiently pragmatic, streamlining. The annual report of 1987–1988 presents a revealing, self-critical and ironic account of the task ahead: ‘the Green agenda has been so self-evident, all-encompassing and memorable that the party has



been unable to describe it, neither to itself nor to Finnish citizens.’<sup>27</sup>

Due to intra-party conflicts, the first ever Finnish Green manifesto, ratified in 1988, had been a short and abstract ‘theological profession’ that, rather than presenting any concrete solutions or policy objectives, focused on describing how ‘the future of planet Earth was in jeopardy due to ecological crisis, nuclear armament and third world poverty (...) Man had crowned him/herself as the Sovereign of creation.’<sup>28</sup> For the GL to become a stable, credible actor, the party leadership emphasised the need to evolve from an ‘idea-generator’ to a ‘reformist’. Osmo Soininvaara expressed this sentiment by stating that ‘from now on, amateurism was unforgivable; focus was to be on policy issues, agendas and presenting convincing alternatives’ instead of intra-party quarrelling.<sup>29</sup>

As a testament to the aspiration of becoming credible reformists, the manifesto ratified in 1990 was based on four typically green key principles: ecologically balanced economy, companionship among individuals, non-violence and grass-roots democracy. The electorate was offered an economic policy that was an alternative to socialist and capitalist proclamations of economic growth. It was a ‘third way’ in which environmental aspects carried considerable weight when forming and assessing economic policies. A sustainable future welfare state would be built with environmentally conscious taxation and basic income as the basis for social security.<sup>30</sup>

The manifesto was criticised for being too bureaucratic, long, complex and conventional and, at the same time, too sweeping. To the majority, it was what was needed to become a stable part of the party system, and, to some, it was an overly straightforward attempt to attain government positions and conform to that system.<sup>31</sup> Despite criticism, growing acceptance of the Green ideology and stabilisation of the GL progressed as the vote share of the party in general elections grew from 4.03% in 1987 to 6.82% in 1991 and the number of MPs from four to ten.

Rather than a single-issue movement, the Greens were now seen as a coherent party that combined

societal, economic and environmental agendas, stated Party chair (1991–1993) Pekka Sauri. The GL had made a breakthrough ‘as a noteworthy part of the Finnish party system.’<sup>32</sup> Rising support provided the confidence to claim that ‘Green objectives have transformed from utopia to realism (...) The Greens have to offer realistic solutions and be ready to co-operate with new and potentially unconventional partners.’<sup>33</sup> This ambition for credibility and influence was also reflected at the European level as the Finnish Greens supported and pursued closer European co-operation and a joint European Green manifesto. After active engagement in international activities, the founding conference of the European Federation of Green Parties was held in Finland in 1993.<sup>34</sup>

During the early 1990s, besides streamlining its ideology and agenda, the party organisation also gradually adjusted to resemble that of a ‘traditional’ party. Although still employing leadership rotation to prevent the accumulation of power and dismissing demands for group cohesion, a three-tier party structure and a national executive committee (NEC) – to some, signs of oligarchic, obsolete tendencies – were established, and the rule forbidding an MP from being the party chair was abolished.<sup>35</sup> The NEC was to be an operative tool, whereas the party congress and party council were responsible for policymaking.

These changes were made primarily to ease the workload and to better respond to the demands of the electorate, media and electoral competition. Although supporting the diffusion of power, the party chair not being an MP made it unnecessarily difficult for them to act as the public face of the party – parliament was the centre of political debate and public interest. District organisations remained essential for ensuring electoral performance, but, as Benôit Rihoux stated, the acceptance of a traditional party model and the overall mainstreaming of the Green party was essential to becoming a credible coalition partner.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the wilful pursuit of influence cannot be disregarded as motivation for party change. Ideology-wise, however, the most significant change was the abolition of growth criticism at the 1992 party congress. As long as it was qualitative and ecologically sustainable, economic growth was accepted as a precondition for sustainable

development and the funding of welfare subsidies, and the previous anti-growth attitude mellowed to mere criticism in the 1994 manifesto.<sup>37</sup>

The quest to become more credible was ultimately criticised as being too publicity-seeking, leaving green issues un-politicised and potentially leading to electoral defeat.<sup>38</sup> Critics, like MP and former leader of the 'fundi' minority Eero Paloheimo, claimed<sup>39</sup> that environmental values were no longer the spearhead of the Green agenda but had been replaced completely by social policy.

By the beginning of the 1990s, Finland had a long tradition of a consensus- and compromise-seeking political culture in which conflicts were mediated and political newcomers were either marginalised or, if willing to compromise, engaged in parliamentary and governmental responsibilities. The economic depression during the first part of the 1990s hit Finland hard. It was preceded by a debt-financed bubble, caused by credit expansion that was initiated by financial market deregulation, which burst in 1990 when interest rates started to increase. Simultaneous disintegration of the Soviet Union reduced Finnish exports and worsened the situation.<sup>40</sup>

The depression strengthened the consensual tradition. Economic realities were no longer subjected to ideological debate, and ensuring economic growth and competitiveness became a necessity. The boundaries of policy were determined by the economy. To tackle the crisis, a centre-right government, led by Centre Party chair Esko Aho, implemented unpopular reforms, like reductions in almost all welfare entitlements and public services.

Before the recession, there were, undoubtedly, individual Greens more inclined to accepting growth as a precondition for sustainability, but the dire economic situation ultimately encouraged the Greens to abolish their anti-growth attitude. Growth criticism vanished from the party newspaper, *Vihreä Lanka*, and the annual strategy of 1992 acknowledged that 'the situation in Finland and in Western industrialised countries is not favourable to Green objectives. Economic depression shifts the focus from the common good to individual adversities.'<sup>41</sup>

Electoral success increased influence and offered a promise of incumbency, yet the depression eroded the basis for the environmental growth critique and thus compelled ideological adjustments. Non-existent growth was hard to criticise; at the Western European level, Jon Burchell also observed a change in Green manifestoes: during the 1990s, the importance of socio-political issues and pragmatism increased at the expense of environmental protection.<sup>42</sup>

As Jukka Kanerva, a political scientist and Green council member in Jyväskylä, stated in 1995, the Finnish Greens were in limbo between innocent amateurism and pragmatic experience.<sup>43</sup>

Ideological and organisational changes made in order to become a credible and pragmatic party meant relinquishing some of its anti-establishment anti-party principles; an aspiration to challenge and restructure Finnish political culture turned into an effort to rectify perceived injustices from within the system.

#### Adapting to achieve incumbency – Finnish Greens into government

The consolidation of the GL was a two-fold process of convincing the membership of the advantages of becoming a responsible governing party and convincing the other parties of the Greens' trustworthiness and ability to govern. Since the intra-party actions towards becoming a governing party were also those needed to become credible in the eyes of outsiders, these tasks were intertwined.

Corporatist consensualism, the parliamentarisation of Finnish politics from the early 1980s onwards after a long semi-presidential era and the legacy of the ability of a parliamentary minority (67 MPs) to defer any legislative bill beyond the next elections led to oversized cabinets being the preferred option.<sup>44</sup> A change from conflict to consensus as the overarching principle of Finnish political culture took place. The degree of ideological polarisation lessened, the divisions between various political parties diminished and significant change in cabinet stability took place; Finland embarked on a prolonged period of majority parliamentarism. These changes created room to politicise new

issues and the need for ‘new politics’ parties.<sup>45</sup>

The politics of oversized coalitions requires coalitional flexibility that also enables government participation by small parties, even in non-pivotal roles. The Finnish party system has undergone an evolution from the contingent party system of the Cold War era, when government participation was, in practice, conditional upon the ‘endorsement’ of exogenous actors – the president and Moscow – to the present state of party system convergence and ‘anything goes’ coalitions.<sup>46</sup>

When the subject of government participation was visited for the first time in 1989, it was considered more a question of intra-party decision-making than a contemplation of suitable coalition partners. Since it would have long-term effects on the party, Heidi Hautala – party chair (1987–1991) and a future MP, MEP – argued that government participation could not be a routine decision. Becoming a coalition partner required extensive deliberation, and, therefore, neither the parliamentary group (PG) nor the council could take the decision alone. As party council member Helena Smirnoff maintained, MPs, as prospective ministers, might be more inclined to favour government participation, whereas the party as a whole would have to bear the potential negative consequences of such an endeavour.<sup>47</sup> Thus, to prevent excessive office-seeking, the right to preside over government participation was shared between the party council and the PG.<sup>48</sup>

The ideological and organisational adaptation of the GL was recognised when the SDP issued an invitation to negotiate future co-operation between the parties. Aware of the promising Green party pre-election forecasts, the GL was reluctant to enter undisclosed negotiations, suspecting that the purpose was only to portray the SDP as a ‘green-friendly’ party. Party chair Heidi Hautala and party secretary Pekka Sauri therefore maintained that the SDP had no prerogative as a co-operation partner and underlined that the Greens were open to public discussions with any party.<sup>49</sup>

After the successful 1991 general elections the GL was invited to participate in government negotiations led by the Centre Party chair, Esko Aho. Although sceptical of reaching a desirable

outcome, the party council members and newly elected MPs were ready to negotiate. Party secretary Sauri argued that the situation was, in fact, very favourable: either a satisfactory, Green government manifesto was drawn, or the Greens would have good grounds for retreating into opposition.<sup>50</sup>

Commitment to ambitious measures and schedules for implementing energy efficiency and environmental taxation were significantly higher priorities for the GL than among the main coalition parties – the Centre Party and National Coalition Party – and, as a result, the GL did not participate in the Aho coalition. Had the government adopted the Green energy policy, Sauri argued, Finland would have taken a substantial step towards a sustainable economy.<sup>51</sup>

Inability to agree on a manifesto was not, however, the only reason for the GL's non-participation: intra-party conflicts over whether the actual aim of the negotiations was to participate at all had affected the process. After the resolution to retreat into opposition, one of the key negotiators, party secretary Pekka Sauri, stated that presenting demands in the hope that they would be rejected was not a fruitful tactic. Although the party leadership and most of the MPs were sincerely engaged in the negotiations, Sauri implied that there was strong opposition in the party council and membership at large. Those against felt that participation would have required too much flexibility and compromise.<sup>52</sup>

Studies show that there are at least three phenomena that precede Green party government participation; the resolution of conflicts over authority and ideology, the election results of 1991 and the pre- and post-1991 general election negotiations are empirical evidence of two of them. As Benoit Rihoux claims, reaching a certain level of electoral performance makes Green parties potential coalition partners, and, perhaps more importantly, the organisational mainstreaming of a Green party is interpreted as a sign of the party becoming a 'civilised' coalition partner.<sup>53</sup>

The idea of government participation was further underscored as Paavo Nikula, a Green MP and

former minister for the Liberal Peoples' Party, offered the reminder that to reject the idea of participation would be letting down the electorate. The purpose of a party was to enact change, and that was best executed as a government party.<sup>54</sup> The third phenomenon to advance Green party government participation became evident after the 1995 general elections. As Hanna Bäck and Patrick Dumont explain, Green parties are more inclined to enter government after an electoral loss; since staying in opposition does not increase support, those opposing government participation are more easily persuaded.<sup>55</sup> The GL lost an MP in the election, after which the Paavo Lipponen 'rainbow coalition'<sup>56</sup> was established and the GL became the first Western European Green party to enter a coalition government.

After the one-seat defeat – caused, presumably, by unsuccessful candidate selection and the overall climate of depression and preference for the opinions of middle-aged men – party chair (1993–1995, 2018–2019) Pekka Haavisto was understandably sceptical of Green government participation. According to Haavisto, the GL had reservations concerning all three main parties: agreement on environmental protection would be hard to find with the Centre Party, advancing environmental taxation was an issue with the National Coalition Party and too close a co-operation with the SDP and labour movement could lead to the Greens becoming a sidekick in a leftist government. Haavisto was wary of the Swedish example of the Greens being too closely associated with the Left.<sup>57</sup>

With the party leadership already showing office-seeking tendencies, the electoral defeat and a feeling of being side-lined from public debate – following failure to nominate a presidential candidate in the presidential elections of 1994 or make a decision regarding EU membership in 1994, which would have demanded group coherence – pushed the GL towards government participation.<sup>58</sup> To continue in opposition was unlikely to increase party support – or authority.

The Greens insisted on two cabinet positions, and the GL *sine qua non* issues reflected the

depression-ridden society – demands for active employment policy, balancing the state economy, reducing income taxes and focusing on environmental protection.<sup>59</sup> These conditions were met to a satisfactory degree, and the only Green portfolio – the portfolio of the minister for the environment – was reinforced with development co-operation, to lessen the disappointment.

Although not a decision-making body, the NEC voted for government participation, and, to persuade the opposing council and PG members, made its decision public. In the subsequent council and PG meeting, the negotiation result was approved, and the GL became a coalition partner for the first time. The decision was almost unanimous – only six out of thirty-seven voted against, among them two MPs, Erkki Pulliainen and Ulla Anttila. MP Tuija Brax, and party chair and minister, Pekka Haavisto, both ensured that, despite disagreement within the PG, no group cohesion demands would be made.<sup>60</sup>

Those in favour saw government participation as an opportunity, and those opposed said the negotiation result was weak and one minister was not enough. Some wavered, thinking that the government had too light a green colour, and some were inclined to support participation because at least some green issues were taken into account.<sup>61</sup>

Overall, the negotiation was executed with a more sincere aspiration to become a coalition member than the previous one. The party leadership was now more determined to see the process through to a desired outcome, and the membership was more ready to accept the negotiation compromise. Even if painful at times, the transition from amateur activism, deconstructive intra-party conflicts and passionate efforts to resist becoming ‘traditional’ and ‘established’ to a deliberative, stable and compromise-seeking party is, nevertheless, a common trajectory in the Green party family.<sup>62</sup>

Protesting conformation

The evolution of the GL reflected a balancing act between ideological goals and commitments on



one hand and electoral opportunities and possible incumbency on the other. The transformation of the GL from opposition to an implementer of Green politics also engendered intra- and extra-party criticism of the process of stabilisation. Studies indicate that government participation increases intra-party imbalance – intra-party power shifts away from the council and congress towards the PG and ministers. The Green party's typically highly educated membership, with its emphasis on participatory democracy, is, however, inclined to challenge this tendency.<sup>63</sup>

The Greens had to decide whether there was more to be gained than lost from participation. The first term as a government party brought constant deliberation on the prerequisites for exiting the government, conflicts over intra-party decision-making and agenda-setting, and extra-party challenges in the form of the radical animal rights movement.<sup>64</sup>

Even though the decision to participate in the Lipponen government was made almost unanimously in April, significant criticism was already being expressed in November. Those in favour of distinctly 'greener' policies were disappointed, such as with the government's decision not to intervene in the planning process for a large reservoir in northern Finland. The fiercest critics, such as party council member Timo Krogerus, implied that the GL should exit the government. To defuse the situation, the PG chair, MP Paavo Nikula, admitted that feeling inadequate was to be expected in politics. As a pragmatic, Nikula called for patience and realism; a self-made crisis would not accomplish anything. To promote environmental protection in the opposition together with the Centre Party would be even harder and less successful, reminded minister Haavisto.<sup>65</sup> When the nature had intrinsic value for the Greens, the Centre Party view it more as a utility.

The motivation behind the criticism was fear of being reduced to a 'green alibi' in the government – the GL giving the government a green colour without it actually implementing green policies. The GL was a partner in a coalition devoted to balancing the depression-ridden state economy through economic growth, and, to the critics, this alone was a sign of the GL relinquishing its principles and

being unable to further a distinctively green agenda.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the criticism, the majority of the GL was in favour of the coalition. Pragmatists claimed that the Greens had to be politicians instead of single-issue advocates, and focusing on differences and building contradictions within the party could lead to severe altercations.<sup>67</sup> At the spring congress of 1996, party chair (1995–1997) Tuija Brax repeated the party leadership's opinion: to exit would be foolish. Being in opposition with the Centre Party would not make executing a green agenda any easier, since the two parties had a very different conception of the need for environmental protection. MP Osmo Soininvaara maintained that compromising at the expense of ideological purity was a pragmatic necessity in politics.<sup>68</sup>

Although remaining in the government was supported by a vast majority – sixty-eight to six – the debate had concrete implications within the party. The perceived imbalance of intra-party agenda-setting power brought about by the criticism of government participation led to a change in party leadership.

In 1997, MP Satu Hassi challenged party chair Tuija Brax for her seat and won. The campaign was not about age, gender or the Green agenda in general – both candidates were MPs, women, roughly the same age and supported the GL remaining in government. The difficulty of adapting to the role of a government party was at the root of the discontent. Who had the authority to set the Green agenda – the minister, the PG, the council, the congress or the membership? Who, if anyone, had the authority to compromise and to what extent?

GL Vice-Chair Harriet Lonka urged the council and the membership in general to take back the agenda-setting power that now seemed to have slipped solely into the hands of the minister and the PG. Party secretary Sirpa Kuronen argued that, in principle, the problems were due to the undefined relationships between the different intra-party bodies.<sup>69</sup> As an opposition party, willingness to compromise was always discussed on a purely theoretical level, yet, as a coalition partner,

compromises were the reality and, often due to pressing schedules, had to be made without an opportunity for broad intra-party debate.

In fact, the party chair campaign was a reflection of the concerns voiced during the organisation process. The core principle and ambition of green anti-party grass-roots democracy was to avoid the accumulation of power, and, in this regard, the GL seemed to have failed. Although sympathising with the critics, Party Chair Tuija Brax defended the compromises made and the need for them. Satu Hassi called for more principled discourse on the role of the GL in the party system and as a government party. The GL had, to a disproportionate extent, conformed to the 'old' ways of governing, and it was time to focus on a distinctively green style of policymaking.<sup>70</sup> The GL was becoming too established for the liking of the membership.

Although Satu Hassi's election had hardly any concrete repercussions, it was an indication of discontent and a reminder of the power of the Green membership. At least in words, if not in actions, Hassi understood the need for more idealism over pragmatism. She was also the first party chair to come from outside the Helsinki region, which was not an insignificant factor – she voiced the opinion of the 'provinces'.<sup>71</sup>

Alongside intra-party conflicts, government responsibility meant accepting coalition constraints that unavoidably estranged some of the movement's activists, who wished to pursue more direct action and ideologically pure policies. As the fierce government participation critic Timo Krogerus stated, these activists felt alienated as the GL moved further away from citizen activism and civil disobedience<sup>72</sup> – a common trajectory within the Green party family, as Thomas Poguntke has observed.<sup>73</sup> Becoming a stable coalition partner had alienated those in favour of single-issue movement politics.

The GL consolidation process during the 1990s was also a demarcation between parliamentary politics and radicalism. Pursuing stability and credibility was not appealing to those inclined to, for

example, radical animal rights activism, which peaked around the mid-1990s.<sup>74</sup> The GL was left appeasing the passionate activists and offering reassurance that not all environmental or animal rights activists were prone to illegal actions, such as attacking fur farms and releasing the animals into the wild.

As a Party Chair Tuija Brax was unwilling to condone illegalities. Releasing animals into the wild was not animal welfare but unwise cruelty, and the radical activists' candidacies for the 1996 municipal elections were thus rejected.<sup>75</sup> However, newly elected Party Chair Satu Hassi was more amicable and, without legitimating illegalities, argued that constructive discourse between the GL and the activists was advisable. The GL could offer a legal, parliamentary channel to promote the agenda.<sup>76</sup> In essence, the question was about the means, not about the issue per se, and, as a result, one of the prominent activists ran for parliament in the 1999 elections.

## Conclusions

The Finnish – and Nordic – style of disarming opposition movements by engaging them, through government responsibilities, in the static political culture and embedding elements of their criticism into the common agenda has integrated the Finnish Greens into the model of pluralistic democracy and made them more centripetal and moderate. Lessons learned in local politics, especially in Helsinki, proved valuable when entering government coalition – with power comes responsibility.<sup>77</sup> The process of stabilisation and consolidation had an impact both on the GL and on Finnish political culture and agenda, with increasing emphasis on the environment, equality and global justice.

Electoral success at beginning of the 1990s proved that the general sympathy for post-modern values had turned into growing adherence, and the Green strategy to institutionalise new conflict dimensions had prevailed. Overall, over the past thirty years, Western European Green parties have re-evaluated their manifestoes, organisations and strategies – a process through which they have

become established political actors in liberal democracies.<sup>78</sup>

The examination of intra-party reasons and reasonings reveals that the process of adaptation and conformation is never a question of either-or, but a testament to conflicting interests. Although the compromise- and consensus-seeking Finnish political culture and party system exerted external pressures on the GL, forcing the party to conform to existing procedures and traditions, the growing intra-party willingness to adapt was expressed in the streamlining of the organisation and ideology, increased office-seeking tendencies and the accentuation of stability and credibility as preconditions for incumbency.

To pursue a strategy and ideology based on gradual reforms, an emphasis on social justice and a pragmatic relationship with nature – instead of radicalism and deep ecology – was a conflicted, yet conscious, choice. Relinquishing reliance upon the prioritisation of environmental issues and focusing more on social issues was pertinent to achieving electoral success, credibility and incumbency. The organisational evolution towards resembling traditional parties demonstrates both the need and the will to conform.

The process of transformation is not evidence of the Greens losing their identity or being devoured by the mainstream, as Jon Burchell claims, but rather an indication that the Greens have recognised the ground upon which they need to compete.<sup>79</sup> Instead of pursuing radical change to the existing political system, the transformation of growing support into incumbency required adaptation and conformation. In addition to engendering intra-party conflicts, government responsibility meant accepting coalition constraints that unavoidably estranged some of the movement activists who wished to pursue more direct action and ideologically pure policies. Becoming a stable coalition partner alienated those in favour of single-issue movement politics.

Despite transformation or evolution from a post-material value-change protest to a pragmatic and stable part of parliamentary and government politics, the Green accession to power was not a

revolution, but rather an example of how intra-party ambitions and conflicts, extra-party pressures and the enabling of societal and institutional structures are incorporated into partisan politics. The relinquishing of eco-fundamentalism and the decidedly elite-led pursuit of stability and credibility has transformed the GL into a centrist, 'catch-allish' party that, in studies regarding the Green party family, is presented as something of a success story.<sup>80</sup>

Despite critical assessments that predicted declining support due to excessive office-seeking and conformation, ideological and organisational adaptation were instead perceived as decisions well-made. The ability to emphasise both environmental and social policies as key issues for the party has contributed to both advocacy and stability – and made the Finnish Greens an international example in this regard.

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<sup>2</sup> Jukka Paastela, 'The Finnish Greens: From Alternative Grass-Roots Movement(s) to Governmental Party', in E. Gene Frankland, Paul Lucardie, Benoit Rihoux, eds., *Green Parties in Transition: The End of Grass-Roots Democracy?* (Farmham: Ashgate, 2008), 64.

<sup>3</sup> Jon Burchell, *The evolution of Green politics: Development and change within European Green parties*. (London: Earthscan, 2002), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald F. Inglehart., *Cultural Evolution. People's motivations are changing and reshaping the world*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018), 25-59.

<sup>5</sup> Kitschelt, 'Organization and Strategy', 127; Kitschelt Herbert, 'Left-Libertarian Parties: Explaining Innovation in Competitive Party System' *World Politics* 40, 2 (1988b), 209-211.

<sup>6</sup> Carter, 'Green Parties.', 382.

<sup>7</sup> Stenius Henrik, 'Nordic Associational Life in a European and an Inter-Nordic Perspective', in Risto Alapuro, Henrik Stenius, eds., *Nordic Associations in a European Perspective*. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Lauri Karvonen, *Parties, government and voters in Finland. Politics under fundamental societal transformation*. (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2014), 60-61

<sup>9</sup> Karvonen, 'Parties, governments', 44-45.

<sup>10</sup> Paastela, 'The Finnish Greens'.

<sup>11</sup> Niklas Bolin, 'Green parties in Finland and Sweden. Successful cases of the North?', in Emilie van Haute, ed., *Green Parties in Europe*. (London: Routledge, 2016); Sebastian Bukow, 'The Green Party in Germany', in Emilie van Haute, ed., *Green Parties in Europe*. (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Carter, 'Green Parties'; Martin Dolezal, 'Exploring the Stabilization of a Political Force: The Social and Attitudinal Basis of Green Parties in the Age of Globalization', *West European Politics* 33, 3 (2010); Daniel Oesch, 'The Changing Shape of Class Voting', *European Societies* 10, 3 (2008); Daniel Oesch and Line Rennwald, 'The Class Basis of Switzerland's Cleavage between the New Left and the Populist Right', *Swiss Political Science Review* 16, 3 (2010); Chris Rootes, 'Environmental Consciousness, Institutional Structures and Political Competition in the Formation and Development of Green Parties', in Dick Richardson, Chris Rootes, eds., *The Green Challenge: The Development of Green Parties in Europe*. (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Karvonen, 'Parties, governments', 47.

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