



COVER SHEET

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THE PROBLEM OF THE PRO-WAR GREENS

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Abstract

The Green Parties or Greens have emerged as an important political force in recent years. A crucial policy element of the Greens is a commitment to peace and nonviolence. Yet a close analysis of the actions of the leadership of the Greens indicates that this commitment is not as clear as would appear. It is concluded that the leadership of the Green Parties is either manipulative of peace concerns or ignorant of what is involved in genuine commitment to peace and nonviolence. Those committed to peace and nonviolence ought to think carefully before supporting the Greens.

Essay

The Green Parties or Greens have emerged as an important political force in various developed countries, especially Germany, Australia and New Zealand. The Greens are by name an environmentally oriented political party, although an equally important aspect of policy has been an avowed support for peace and nonviolence. Bob Brown and Peter Singer indicate that one of the general principles of the Greens is to "adopt and promote non-violent resolution of conflict".¹ Jan Pakulski has referred to the Greens as being representative of a wider "eco-pax movement", involving a combination of peace and environmental concerns,² and a commitment to peace and nonviolence generally figures centrally in Green Party policy documents.³ One important problem for the Greens, however, is the emergence of pro-war support within sections of the Green leadership in recent years. This is something that has not attracted much attention in public discourse, possibly because of a dearth of critical analysis of Green policy and actions.⁴ This essay examines five episodes of the leadership of the Green Parties that give cause for reflection about the commitment of the Greens to peace and nonviolence.

The first episode involves the leader of the Australian Greens. The Greens have an especially

strong base in Australia and it is therefore significant that one of the earliest pro-war or at least problematical statements should come from the leader of the Australian Greens, Bob Brown. In the aftermath of Gulf War I, on April 4 1991, as a then member of the Tasmanian Parliament, Bob Brown moved a motion that "The House calls upon the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, to act immediately to put pressure on Australia's allies to intervene in Iraq to stop the slaughter of the Kurds and establish their right to self-determination."⁵ This was no doubt a noble aim, and yet the ensuing debate in the Tasmanian Parliament over Bob Brown's motion⁶ reveals that the intervention that he was thinking of quite clearly comprised military action. The implications of what Brown was saying were not lost on the Chamber. The Deputy Premier at the time, Peter Patmore, expressed disquiet that the motion was "in effect, a cry to crank up the war machine again in Iraq".⁷ Indeed, at the conclusion of the debate, Brown actually chastises the US military for not taking action and only "watching" Iraqi helicopters.⁸ Interestingly, the call for military intervention receives no publicity in the voluminous material dealing with Bob Brown. The irony of this situation is that since that time, and especially with Gulf War II, Bob Brown has positioned himself as a peace advocate.

The second episode is Green support for the Kosovo War. The 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia from 24 March to June 10 1999 involved some 39,400 sorties, including 10,484 strike sorties, and the dropping of some 26,614 air munitions on Kosovo and Serbia.⁹ The German Greens, led by Greens Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, were supporters of the programme of bombing against Serbia and Kosovo. Indeed the military campaign marked the first external involvement of the German air force (Luftwaffe) since World War II. Was the military action in Kosovo a war? Those involved certainly thought so.¹⁰ The Kosovo War was ostensibly to prevent inter-ethnic violence, although, predictably, the bombing exacerbated the plight of ethnic Albanians within Kosovo, with the ethnic cleansing increasing after the bombing commenced.¹¹ Moreover, the nature of the resolution of the conflict, with the granting of a limited autonomy for Kosovo and UN rather than NATO occupation, suggests that the bombing campaign itself was never necessary.¹² The long-term results were an increase in the ethnic violence, the killing of civilians in bombing, the usage of depleted uranium munitions in Kosovo, an occupied Kosovo and, most seriously, the revival of enthusiasm for military intervention.¹³

The third episode is Green support for military involvement in Afghanistan. The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan by an American-led coalition was the opening military action of the so-called War on Terror. The German Government, with the support of the German Greens,

joined with fellow NATO partners in committing troops to the military invasion and subsequent occupation of Afghanistan. The Greens' support for the war in Afghanistan was evidenced by [23/24] a vote by Green Bundestag members on 16 November 2001 and support by the Green Party national conference at Rostock on 24 November 2001.¹⁴ Predictably, the war has not produced the hoped-for results. Osama Bin Laden is still at large. Even the optimism regarding the emergence of a democratic Afghanistan has now diminished. Afghanistan itself is now subject to increasing violence, warlordism, widespread corruption and banditry.¹⁵ The large-scale cultivation of narcotics has recommenced. It is a strange situation for the Greens, with the Australian Greens calling for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, and the German Greens supporting the deployment.

The fourth contentious episode is the nature of Green action over political detainees. The detention of combatants from the war in Afghanistan, contrary to the rules of war, has been a continuing cause of human rights concern. However, the actions of Australian Greens Senators Kerry Nettle and Bob Brown, in heckling President George Bush over this issue during his address to the Australian Parliament on 23 October 2003, revealed an extraordinary ignorance of diplomacy, detainee advocacy and indeed nonviolent direct action. Bob Brown has since attempted to justify his action on the grounds that human rights are more important than good manners.¹⁶ Yet the Greens Senators seemed to ignore a basic precept of action in obtaining the release of political prisoners, namely, one never insults the person to whom one is appealing for the release of the detainee.¹⁷ All that insulting an authority achieves is a determination by the authority not to change their course of action. The actions by the Australian Greens did gain publicity for the party,¹⁸ yet the sad reality is, but for this extraordinarily self-centred and self-aggrandizing action of the two Greens, it is quite likely that both the Australian detainees would have been released long ago.

Finally, the contradictions in Green policy on peace issues also become evident in the policy on the future of Iraq. The Australian Greens profess a commitment to international standards and law¹⁹ and yet also support the immediate withdrawal of Australian troops from Iraq.²⁰ It is well established in international law that occupying powers have a responsibility for the maintenance of order²¹ and protection of civilian life²² within occupied countries. In other words, an invading force is responsible for the provision of internal security within that country. Very few would contest that the invasion of Iraq itself was contrary to international law, although, once having invaded the country, the USA and Allies are now responsible for providing security. The

logic behind this is quite simple. Through the process of invasion, one destroys a nation-state and the apparatus for internal security. If one does decide to invade a nation-state, then one is responsible for the provision of security. One cannot simply withdraw, if internal security has not been obtained.

In defence of the leadership of the Greens, it might be argued that the above are isolated cases of inconsistency by aberrant Green Parties. Yet the Green Parties described above, namely, the Australian Greens and the German Greens, arguably represent the most prominent Green Parties in the developed world. Indeed, the Greens emerged as a political force in both these countries. Moreover, even if the above were individual cases of inconsistency, the problem still remains that the Greens vigorously promote themselves as an international political movement or network.²³ One cannot have it both ways. One cannot promote a profile of an international political [24/25] movement or network when it is convenient and then, when problems arise, claim that these problems are from parties which do not reflect the true Green ideology. One cannot claim internationality to avoid accountability.

It might be also argued that the above apparent inconsistencies reflect the moral complexity of dealing with issues of peace and war in a modern society, where compromise is unavoidable. Yet, if this is so, the question remains as to why the leadership of the Greens persists in utilizing the rhetoric of peace and nonviolence within official policy pronouncements. It is all too easy to invoke ideals and indeed the history of international diplomacy is replete with empty declarations on the importance of peace. The strange thing about the Greens is the belief that they are actually ethically different to wider society and to other political parties.²⁴ It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the continued use of the language of nonviolence and peace within Green pronouncements is a means to garnering electoral support. If this is the case, then it makes the leadership of the Greens worse than the most openly pro-war political parties, who at least have the virtue of honesty.

In summary, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion, based upon consideration of the above evidence, that the stance of the leadership of the Greens on issues of war and peace is at best contradictory and at worst opportunistic, manipulative and even fraudulent. There is obviously a huge groundswell of global sentiment in support of peace. The very size of this groundswell, however, means that it is only too easy for astute political parties to exploit this sentiment, especially when the followers of such political parties are unwilling to ask critical questions of

the parties they support. One is reminded of the final despairing notes of Petra Kelly, co-founder of the German Greens, wherein she lamented the extent to which the Greens had become obsessed with power²⁵ and dominated by gurus and opportunists.²⁶ It seems that this critique is more relevant than ever. The problem is that those who are committed to peace are likely to see the Greens as the political party that gives voice to their aspirations, merely through reading the peace rhetoric of the Greens. What is clearly needed is a more critical and discerning approach to the Green Parties and their record. [end 25]

Endnotes [separate page – 40]

¹ B.Brown and P. Singer, Peter, *The Greens*, Melbourne, Text Publishing Company, 1996, p.194.

² J.Pakulski, *Social Movements: The Politics of Moral Protest*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1991, pp.158-194.

³ Global Greens, *Charter of the Global Greens: Defining What It Is To Be Green*, Canberra, Global Greens, 2001, pp. 4-5 and 15-16.

⁴ P.Craven, 'Introduction', in A. Lohrey, *Groundswell: The Rise of the Greens.Quarterly Essay* 8, Melbourne, Black Inc, 2002, pp.iii-vii. Craven sums up the lack of critical analysis when he refers to the 'controlled intellectual excitement' (p.v) in academic writing about the Greens.

⁵ Tasmania, Parliament, House of Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard). House of Assembly*, Hobart, Government Printer, 1991, Debates 4/4/1991, p.79.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 79-83.

⁷ Ibid., p.82.

⁸ Ibid., p.83.

⁹ Independent International Commission on Kosovo, *Kosovo Report*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp.85-97.

¹⁰ P.Latawski, 'NATO's Military Action over Kosovo: The Conceptual Landscape after the Battle', in S.Badsey and P.Latawski (eds), *Britain, NATO and the Lessons of the Balkan Conflicts 1991-1999*. London and New York, Frank Cass, 2003, pp.121-138 and see especially pp.123-126.

¹¹ N.Chomsky, *The New Military Humanitarianism: Lessons from Kosovo*, Monroe, Common Courage Press, 1999.

¹² H.Pinter, 'The Nato Action in Serbia', in: T. Ali (ed), *Nato's Balkan Crusade*, London and New York, Verso. 2000, pp.327-326.

¹³ Chomsky, op.cit..

¹⁴ D.Glenn, 'The Greens' War: A Divided German Left Opt's Into the Afghan War', *The American Prospect, Online Edition*, Web Exclusive, Monday 10 December 2001, <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.wv?section=root&name=ViewWeb&articleId=553>, accessed 28/3/07.

¹⁵ S.Chayes, *The Punishment of Virtue: Afghanistan After the Taliban*, St.Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2006.

¹⁶ B.Brown, *Memo for a Saner World*, Camberwell, Penguin, 2004, pp. 214-233.

¹⁷ Amnesty International. *Letter Writing Guide*, Sydney, Amnesty International (Australia), Undated.

¹⁸ Brown, op.cit.

¹⁹ Australian Greens, *Policies*, Global Governance, Item 3.3, archived 24 October 2005, on-line <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/22488/20051024/greens.org.au/policies/internationalissues/globalgovernance.html>, accessed 28/3/07.

²⁰ B.Brown, 'Greens Call for Immediate Withdrawal from Iraq.', *The World Today*, Australian

Broadcasting Corporation Radio Programme Interview, Wednesday 7 April 2004, Reporter Tanya Nolan, on-line <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2004/s1083090.html>, accessed 28/3/07.

²¹ *The Hague Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land*. 18/10/1907. Article 43. See D.Schindler and J. Toman (eds), *The Laws of Armed Conflicts: A Collection of Conventions, Resolutions and Other Documents*, 2nd revised edition, Leiden, Sijthoff; and Geneva, Henry Dunant Institute, 1981, p.78.

²² *Geneva Convention (IV) Relating to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*. 12/8/1949. Articles 4, 27 and 29 . See Schindler and Toman, op.cit., pp.581 and 589.

²³ Global Greens, op.cit.

²⁴ Brown and Singer, op.cit., pp. 43-49.

²⁵ P.Kelly, 'Morality and Human Dignity', in G.D.Paige and S.Gilliatt (eds), *Nonviolence Speaks to Power*, Honolulu, Center for Global Nonviolence, 2001, pp.121-146 and especially p.126.

²⁶ P.Kelly, 'Open Letter to the German Green Party', in Paige and Gilliatt, op.cit., pp. 149-159 and especially pp. 52 and 54. **[end 40]**