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THE RELATION BETWEEN POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

Abstract

The aim of this paper is examination of general relationship between political ideology and radical environmental activism, with a special focus on considering the extent of influence and the exact position of the politics in the domain of mentioned eco-activism. Within the first four parts, the general characteristics of radical environmentalism, as well as its relationship with the political left-wing, political right-wing and apolitical/anti-political beliefs are analyzed, while the final part is devoted to discussion and general conclusions. Among other things, it was concluded that the basic ideological dimension of radical eco-activism is based on the idea of biocentrism, as the original environmental and nonpolitical category, while political ideological elements represent secondary and facultative components that can influence the specification of the ideology of a part of eco-activists. At the same time, it was pointed out that the proper perception of such (i.e. secondary) position of political beliefs within the radical eco-activism creates a precondition for understanding heterogeneity and frequent contradictions in the political beliefs of radical eco-activists.

Keywords: political ideology, ecology, radical environmentalism, left-wing, right-wing, eco-terrorism, direct action.

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RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

Radical environmentalism represents a subcategory of general environmental ideology, which, as its name suggests, is characterized by advocating the use of more drastic (in some cases even criminal) actions with the goal of environment protection. It originated in the 1970s as the expression of dissatisfaction of one part of the members of mainstream ecological movements, which considered that battle for preserving the eco-system should also be extended to use of some more invasive methods (Long 2004: 19-20; Liddick 2006: 19). Within the radical environmental movement, the use of direct action method is of great importance ((Long 2004: 5). Some of the characteristic types of such direct action are some forms of civil disobedience¹, tree spiking², arson, use of explosive devices³, monkeywrenching⁴, blocking or destruction of roads that go through natural habitat and others (Manes 1990; Long 2004; Liddick 2006). Different acts of protection of animal world in natural environment, i.e. liberation of animals that are kept or raised in artificial conditions (farms, science laboratories etc.) represent a special and very significant aspect of radical action of one part of the eco-activists, especially radical advocates of animal rights (Liddick 2006: 39 and further). Among the radical environmentalists, there is a widespread rule of restraint from every type of endangering life and health of people. However, even though a large number of extreme environmental organizations accepted this principle, cases of attacks on life and body of people are registered in practice (up: Liddick 2006: 2-3).

The characteristic of action of most well-known radical environmental groups is the leaderless resistance tactics, i.e. independent and self-initiative work of independent individuals or smaller groups that are organized in cells which are not related with each

- 1) For example, tree sitting: staying in the canopy of trees to prevent their cutting.
- 2) This technique involves the nailing of nails or other sharp and solid objects into the trees that are intended for cutting.
- 3) The placement of fire and explosive devices in order to damage or destroy residential, business, infrastructure and other objects built in natural habitat, as well as other immovable and movable property that, in some way, endanger the ecosystem.
- 4) The term is used to denote the destruction of earth-damaging machinery - vehicles, machinery, etc.

other – covert cells (compare: Manes, 1990). Such approach, which is characterized by lack of hierarchical and other organization, an absence of unique plan and program of specific actions, member anonymity, lack of interaction between members of different covert cells, makes the described strategy of work very vital and greatly complicates the possibility of suppressing the movement by authorities. Some of the globally best-known organizations of this type are: Greenpeace, EarthFirst!, Earth Liberation Front (abbr. ELF), Animal Liberation Front (ALF), Earth Liberation Army (ELA), Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS) and others (Liddick 2006: 4-6; Long 2004: 4 and further).

In relation to the described, criminal aspect of radical environmentalism, use of term “eco-terrorism” is commonly seen in practice. According to R. Smith, this controversial name was first used in 1998. (Smith 2008: 545), and it is officially used in the USA since certain eco-activist organizations are proclaimed as terroristic and classified in the domain of national terrorism.⁵ Relying on the results of previous research (Matković 2013; Matković 2017), we can say that, in order to denote totality of ecologically motivated criminal actions, use of the term “pro-environmental crime“ is the most precise, while every potential (and still equally contentious) use of the term terrorism needs to be limited only to narrow circle of the most extreme types of environmental violence. It would also be expedient to simultaneously carry out the terminological modification and to form a new construction: ”pro-environmental terrorism”, in order to distinguish that behavior from the actions of the same name, but drastically different by content, for which the term ”eco-terrorism” is already being used, and which refer to planned and strategic destruction of ecosystem (Matković 2017: 113).

Defined like this, radical environmentalism as ideology and as a movement brings together organizations and individuals that are very heterogenic when it comes to their characteristics and beliefs. Focusing on the subject of our research, in the following sections we will closely consider the connection between radical

5) According to the definition of FBI, eco-terrorism is „the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally oriented, subnational group for environmental-political reasons, or aimed at an audience beyond the target, often of a symbolic nature“ (Long 2004: 3-4).

environmental activism with political ideologies.⁶

Left-wing politics and radical environmentalism

Environmental ideas have a very fertile ground within ideologies of political left-wing. In the original ideas of Marxism, an interest in environmental issues can be seen (Burkett 1999; Foster 2000). K Marx said that even society as a whole, that is, all existing societies, are actually not owners of the earth, but only its possessors, its beneficiaries, so that they have to leave it in improved condition to the future generations (Foster, 2000). Also, in some established socialist societies, environmental ideas can be noticed. After October revolution in Russia, during the first decade in which the Soviets ruled, there were tendencies within the Russian scientific intelligence to include environmentalism in Bolshevik political thought and to harmonize the production with the laws and limits of nature. On the contrary, Joseph Stalin carried out the repression of ecological awareness promoters and of science of ecology, creating a drastic ideological turn in the mentioned domain (Gare 1996; Gare 2002). A similar anti-environmental approach can be seen in China, where Mao Zedong rejected environmentalism, believing that, regarding the patterns of historical materialism, complete nature has to be put in service of the revolution (Shapiro, 2001).

In the modern world, various types of left-wing ideologies and political orientations are connected with ecology. Among the most well-known are: green politics, eco-socialism and green anarchism. Besides them, the following orientations and sub orientations should be mentioned (otherwise very diverse, both by its nature and by its ideological content): anarcho-primitivism, eco-feminism, green syndicalism, veganarchism, social ecology, total liberationism etc. (compare: Dobson 2007; Wall 2010, Martell 1994). As far as pro-ecological extremism is concerned, it seems that, out of all these options, the most radical environmental activists of left-wing orientation find themselves in the domain of green anarchism and its subcategories. Green anarchism or eco-anarchism is a movement within anarchism, which is specifically focused

6) About a relation of classical environmentalism and political theory, see: Eckersley 1992.

on environmental protection issues, with the goal of establishing non-hierarchical connections with the non-human world of living beings. According to this, the theory of green anarchism extends beyond the standard social-anarchist frames of critique of interpersonal relations, as it also includes a critique of the interaction between people and other living beings. This theoretical approach provides the basis for the application of radical environmental practice that aims both at the same time at human liberation and non-human liberation, in order to create an ecological anarchist social community made up of people and other living beings and based on heterarchical relationships (up: Hall 2011: 374).

Speaking of practice of radical environmentalism, it can be noticed that a significant number of registered extremist and other radical pro-ecological acts is carried out in connection with a certain left-wing ideological preference of their perpetrator.⁷ Such examples are numerous at the global level. Many radical acts, carried out by the members of leading radical environmental organizations (EarthFirst!, ELF etc.), as well as by globally well-known individuals (for example Michael „Arrow“ Scarpitti, Theodore „Unabomber“ Kaczynski etc.⁸), were followed by indicators that suggested their political preference, but also the political dimension of their ecological work.⁹ Due to this factual situation, sometimes the whole work of mentioned radical eco-organizations can be placed in the domain of left-wing ecological work. However, one should be careful when making these generalizing conclusions (which will be discussed more in the next sections of this paper).

Right-wing ideologies and ecological radicalism

As with the political left-wing, there are also some elements of ecological postulates among some right-wing political ideolo-

- 7) About left-wing extremism in general see: Đorić 2016; Kushner 2003; Brockhoff et al. 2012.
- 8) More about Theodore Kaczynski, PhD of mathematics, ex-university professor and convicted domestic terrorist, as well as about his alleged relation with anarcho-primitivist ideology in Chase 2003; Kaczynski 2016.
- 9) For example: self-declaring of perpetrators as anarchists, pointing to the “anti-capitalist”, “anti-bourgeois” and related dimensions of their struggle, calling for a “revolution” and for a “fight” against the existing society (class, capitalist, exploitative, materialist, etc.).

gies. In the historical context, certainly the most extreme form of political ideology (but also the ruling order) that has incorporated certain elements of environmentalism is the German national socialism, especially in connection with its famous “Blood and Soil” motto (Zimmerman 2008: 531-532). In the modern social environment, there is also a noticeable connection between environmental ideas with right-wing politics. Along with the development of pro-ecological left-wing political philosophy, the opposite movements in the field of the political right-wing were formed, which also adopted certain elements of ecological principles within their ideology. Examples of such ideas and movements are green conservatism, eco nationalism, eco-capitalism etc. Apart from this, as a part of right-wing ideologies connected to environmental preferences, can also be considered the following ones as well: agrarianism, bio-conservatism, ecofascism etc. An important aspect is the domain of so-called religious environmentalism, i.e. environmental activism related to different religions, religious movements and religious communities.¹⁰ Apart to all aforementioned historical and modern ideologies and movements, we consider it very important to highlight an example of current extreme right-wing ideologies, movements and associations that incorporate a Neopagan system of principles and beliefs, based on the pre-Christian tradition of the European people. Bearing in mind that the Pagan heritage is inextricably linked with the world of nature, and taking into account the fact that the worshipers of extreme right-wing Neopagan beliefs, as a rule, advocate the need to return to the old way of life that implies life in accordance with nature and natural laws, it seems reasonable to state that one of the most straightforward connections between right-wing ideology and environmentalism is precisely in this fraction of the extreme right.¹¹

Unlike general environmental questions that evidently find space in the ideology of some right-wing movements, it can be noticed that extremism in the name of environmental protection is much less performed in the name or under the wing of a right-wing organization or ideology. Radical activism of members of

10) About religious environmentalism compare: Berry 2013.

11) About a relation between Neopaganism and radical right ideology see François, Godwin 2008; Aspren 2008.

(extreme) right-wing groups is most often connected to social¹² rather than environmental issues. Therefore, it can be concluded that the most radical forms of environmental action are not typical for extreme right-wing activists.¹³ This also corresponds with the general (conservative or reactionary) nature of right-wing ideologies, since violent revolutionary changes (in which can, basically, a part of extremist ecological activism be included) correspond more to the extreme left-wing ideologies by their nature. When it comes to religious environmentalism, some groups actively participate in certain environmental projects and campaigns which have different ecological goals (preservation of ecosystem, preventing global warming, anti-nuclear campaigns etc). This practice is connected with the movements and initiatives such as evangelical environmentalism, dharmic ecology etc. (compare: Gottlieb 2017; Nanda 2004). However, actions of those movements mostly stay in the domain of classical environmentalism, without going into its more radical form. However, there are statements in literature that among radical environmentalists can be seen the whole spectrum of those who could not be described as admirers of political left-wing-among others: Neopagans, Wiccans, anti-globalization protesters, Third Positionists, bioregionalists etc. (Manes 1990). Based on this, it is possible to indirectly notice that the admirers of various right-wing orientations participate in the radical environmentalism - either alone or as part of some of the renowned environmental organizations that include heterogeneous membership. However, according to available data, in the context of concrete examples from practice, indicators of explicit right-wing political declaration of perpetrators of such pro-ecological actions, who acted in the name of some of the leading radical environmental organizations, were not noticed. Regarding the registered individual actions, it can be noticed that most often it is not about radical environmentalism that would directly base its work on some ideology associated with right-wing values, but rather individual decision about executing extremist acts in order to solve the concrete ecological problem, with desire to preserve the existing order in nature (conservation action) or to establish the previous, damaged state (reactionary

12) Different types of endangering people and property by various criteria (racial, national, religious, gender etc.) are characteristic for such groups.

13) For general characteristics of right-wing extremism see: Đorić 2014; Marks 1996; Atkins 2004.

action).¹⁴ Because of this, sometimes it is not easy to demarcate these actions from some types of apolitical environmental activism.

APOLITICAL AND ANTI-POLITICAL POSITIONS WITHIN THE RADICAL ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

Bearing in mind the heterogeneity of philosophical and ideological starting points within the general radical environmental movement, political pluralism and diversity of attitudes in relation to politics and political issues comes up as a logical result. Because of this, besides the activists that combine environmental and certain political ideology, there is noticeable the presence of those individuals or groups that carry out their pro-ecological actions independently from the political ideological dimension. In that manner, it is possible to notice different ideological approaches – both apolitical, and even more radical, anti-political approach. In relation to this, a division can be formed: a) apolitical and b) anti-political environmental activism. Within the first one, it is possible to form an additional division: a) activism in which radical pro-ecological activities are executed by apolitically oriented individuals; b) those pro-ecological activities that are not related to political ideological beliefs of their perpetrators. As examples of apolitical environmental orientation, those organizations in which there is no visible direct presence of relation with the political ideology of any type can be mentioned.¹⁵ Also, it is partly justified to place in this category those organizations which, even though they eventually developed a certain connection with the domain of political ideology, originally represented exclusively interest in the ecosystem, regardless of political and other social issues.¹⁶

When it comes to the second category (i.e. anti-political environmental activism), it is about those types of activities in which actors categorically deny the importance of political issues and their

14) As an example can be mentioned Wiebo Arienes Ludwig, leader of the Christian community named Trickle Creek from Canada, who is known for eco-sabotage actions aimed towards local oil and gas industry.

15) For example Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and other organizations that focus exclusively on environmental issues in their program and concrete actions.

16) For example EarthFirst! organization during the 1980s (Bari 1998: 6)

interest in them. As a rule, it is about individuals and groups who represent biocentric ideas in combination with: a) general lack of interest in issues that concern global social community; b) even more radical starting point: with an openly hostile attitude towards human community and/or humankind in general. In this other case, clear elements of anti-human, misanthropic, nihilistic and other similar attitudes are noticeable (compare: White et al. 2006: 131-132).¹⁷ In some examples, a certain intertwining of radical activism of described anti-social oriented environmentalists with actions of socially interested environmentalists (such as green anarchists for example) can be noticed, which causes some ideological dilemmas within the environmental movement.¹⁸

DISCUSSION

The ideology of radical eco-activism started to form during the 1970s. Most of the radical pro-ecological actions, concluding with the first half of the 1970s, were individual, isolated acts, partly inspired by counter-culture from the 1960s (Long, 2004: 19). They did not represent a part of the coherent radical environmental movement and ideology on which it would be based. This leads to the conclusion that the beginnings of extreme forms of struggle to preserve ecosystem did not have a clearly formulated general ideological program, which consequently means that they did not have a narrowly specified, political doctrinal background as well. However, in the marked period (i.e. during the 1970s) starts to develop a specific philosophical and ideological base on which the future radical eco-activism will be based. Such aspirations were inspired by a wide spectrum of influence - from Marxism and socialism, through feminist ideas, postmodernist ideas, to Eastern religion (Long 2004: 19; Liddick 2006: 19). These environmental ideas were in direct confrontation with capitalism, patriarchal society and Judeo-Christian tradition, as the factors that were considered responsible for endangering nature. According to Liddick, radical environmentalists saw a parallel and a similar pattern between the planet Earth exploitation and victimization of minorities, women

17) To consider the general link between radical environmentalism and anti-human and misanthropic ideology, see Keeling 2013; Watson 1992; Taylor 1991.

18) For such examples in Eastern Europe, compare Маткович 2017; Черный блог.

and marginalized subjects of society in general (Liddick, 2006: 19), which can explain the abovementioned point of view. All this shows that there is a significant connection between certain left-wing ideas and the beginnings of a radical environmental movement. However, this circumstance should not lead to one-sided conclusions about the alleged unified political nature of radical environmentalism. Very diverse beliefs can be seen within the radical environmentalism (including the diversity when it comes to political position). As it is graphically stated, among radical environmentalists are, among others, present: deep ecologists, earth liberationists, animal liberationists, anarcho-primitivists, green anarchists, bioregionalists, ecopsychologists, ecofeminists, neo-Pagans, Wiccans, Third Positionists, anti-globalization activists, anti-capitalist protesters etc. (Manes, 1990). This truly impressive diversity clearly points to a conclusion about the impossibility of theoretical unification of the political ideology of radical environmentalism. At the same time, bearing in mind the breadth of its philosophical and ideological base and the necessary interweaving of various influences, it is appropriate to conclude that the ideology of radical environmentalism is syncretic in any case, whereby there are different modalities and forms of that syncretism, depending on the concrete doctrinal starting points of some ecological groups and individuals.

Even though there are many ideas and ideologies that surround radical environmental movement, some of them represent its backbone. Long thinks that the most important among them are: deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology and bioregionalism (Long 2004: 20). However, it seems right to bow to Liddick's narrower definition, by which deep ecology is actually the central base, i.e. the core idea of radical environmentalism (Liddick 2006: 19). In any case, deep ecology, with its fundamental idea of biocentrism, represents the basic and broadest accepted starting point of the whole radical environmental movement.

Considering everything previously mentioned, it can be concluded that philosophical postulates of radical environmentalism represent a very heterogeneous base that allows the connection with different (political and other) ideologies.

It is necessary to consider doctrinal elements of biocentrism, as a key element of beliefs of radical ecoactivists (Liddick

2006: 19; Hays et al. 1996: 167). Biocentrism is the opposite of anthropocentric beliefs, according to which the humankind is the most important and central kind among all entities in universe. Unlike anthropocentrism which is human-based, i.e. assumes access from the position of humankind, or exclusively in relation to human values and principles, biocentrism extends the category of relevance to all living beings - in other words, it represents a nature-based system of thought (up: Yu, Lei 2009; Liddick 2006: 3). Biocentrism can also be defined as an ethical and ideological starting point which, among others, relies on the following principles: all beings are members of the community of planet Earth; there is a "system of interdependence" among all living beings; all living organisms realize their well-being in their own way; all organisms have equal inherent value – people are not superior (in moral terms) in relation to other beings (Taylor 2011). Based on the abovementioned, it can be confirmed that biocentrism is a pivotal ideological starting point of radical environmentalism. At the same time, it is justified to notice that biocentric ideology is apolitical in its basic shape (or precisely, without necessary connections with the domain of political theory and practice). This represents a very important insight which gives us the answer to the essence of the political dimension of radical environmentalism. Biocentrism, as the base of radical environmentalism, is not political by its nature, which means that the entire radical ecology movement can function completely independently from the political dimension. However, the biocentric ideological concept allows the connection with the domain of political ideology. The connection between politics and radical eco-activism is created precisely in this area. Because of this, we consider it reasonable to conclude that the connection between political ideology and eco-activism is of secondary nature.

Analogously to general ideology of radical environmentalism, the ideology of leading radical environmental organizations and movements is primarily based on the idea of biocentrism. Because of that, and because of the described nature of those organizations (leaderless resistance tactics, the organization in the form of independent covert cells etc.), there is their principal openness towards members who adopt different ideological views, including very diverse political positions. Hence the conclusion about the hypothetical possibility of participating in their radical envi-

ronmental acts practically by every individual, regardless of his political orientation. However, the doctrine of some environmental organizations (for example the ones that, apart from environmental, focus on social issues as well; that call for the need of revolutionary changes in the existing socio-political system etc.) shows a significantly lower degree of political openness, often remaining exclusively in the domain of left-wing politics and attracting activists mostly from the ranks of green anarchists. Also, practice shows that when executing pro-ecological acts in the name of some of the leading environmental organizations, such extremist acts, by rule, are not followed by symbols that would directly point out to right-wing political orientation of their perpetrators. Such acts usually are either not followed by political messages at all, or some symbols, messages or slogans, that directly or indirectly point out to the left-wing orientation of their perpetrators, can be noticed in relation to them. For example, in rhetoric of some organizations (ELF, ALF, EarthFirst! etc.) expressions characteristic for (extreme) left-wing activists can often be seen: highlighting class issues; calling for fight against “bourgeoisie,” “capitalists”, “capitalist society”, “Western society”; calling for a “revolution” etc. (compare: Long 2004: 16; Smith 2014: 154; Parson 2008: 62-63). All of this points out to the assumption that the representation of all ideological starting points is not equal in practice of organized, group environmentalism, and that apolitical/anti-political and left-wing ideologies are mostly present within the leading (most popular and most well-known) radical environmental groups, unlike the right-wing, which is the least present.

It is noticeable that there are numerous contradictions (and even paradoxes) regarding the adopted political ideology within the environmental movement. Most obvious proof for that is a parallel presence of supporters of fundamentally opposite and conflicting political options (such as extreme left and right-wing) within individual environmental actions¹⁹, and often within the same environmental organizations. However, even among environmentalists of the similar political orientation can sometimes be noticed significant ideological discrepancies – it is enough just to recall the heterogeneity of previously mentioned left-wing orien-

19) For example, including the evangelical and other religious organizations to pro-ecological actions organized by left-wing environmentalists.

tations, which are related to environmental issues in general.²⁰ All this provides additional confirmation of the conclusion about the secondary role of political ideas inside the ideology of protectors of the environment. Starting from the insight that the general ideology of environmentalism (with particular emphasis on the idea of biocentrism) is key to the doctrine of radical ecological activists, it is justified to notice how political beliefs issue comes as additional, facultative factor which can, but it does not have to, influence to additional specification of ideology of some eco-activists, without interfering with the essence of the very radical environmentalism itself. In this way, the presence of very heterogeneous and often contradictory individual political orientations within the environmental community can be understood and logically explained.

One of the elements that can be useful in clarification of political issue of radical environmentalism is the way in which this problem is approached in the USA, as a country that is confronted with the intense work of ecological extremists, and which, in turn, took very energetic measures- among other things, by defining that behavior as “eco-terrorism” and by classifying it as domestic terrorism. Starting from such stances, FBI characterizes eco-terrorism as “special interest terrorism”, separating it from traditional categories: right-wing terrorism and left-wing terrorism (Lewis 2004; Long 2004: 4; Smith 2014: 45-46). According to the FBI’s point of view, special interest terrorism is different from mentioned traditional, political categories of terrorism because extremist special interest groups seek to resolve specific issues, rather than effect widespread political change (Lewis 2004). This attitude clearly emphasizes the difference between radical environmentalism and extremism of both left-wing and right-wing orientation, which additionally confirms the need to relativize the influence of elements of left-wing and right-wing political ideologies within the radical environmental approach. However, the same attitude also suggests the essential uniqueness of radical environmentalism in relation to political extremism in general, since, under the “special interest” category, eco-terrorism is separated from political terrorist forms.

20) For some contradiction compare: Smith 2014: 147-148; Long 2004; Bari 1998: 2-4.

FINAL CONCLUSION

Radical environmentalism is a phenomenon that theoretically allows, and confirms in practice, the possibility of connection with different political ideologies, including apolitical/antipolitical as well. Unlike the general environmental philosophy, which is incorporated by different a(nti)political, as well as left-wing and right-wing political ideological aspirations, in radical environmentalism more often we encounter a connection with the left-wing or with apolitical/anti-political ideas. However, sometimes it is not easy to notice such political differences in practice, since most famous radical environmental organizations often lack explicitly defined political profile of their program, leaving a wide space for individual ideological interpretation to their members and sympathizers. In any case, basic ideas of radical environmentalism (led by biocentric ideas) are of non-political nature, which is why political ideology, where it is present, shows as a secondary, facultative ideological element.

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