

Environmentalism and Electoralism

by Brian Martin

Can the goals of the environmentalists be advanced by active participation in election campaigns? To what extent should environmentalist strategies be based on building and relying on support from the labour movement? These and other similar questions are answered implicitly in the actual course of campaigns by environmental and other social movements, but are much less frequently addressed openly and critically. In addressing these questions Brian Martin looks at the strategies of two important Australian environmental movements: the anti-uranium movement and the movement against the flooding of the Franklin River in southwest Tasmania.

A large fraction of the effort of most environmentalists is spent in *ad hoc* lobbying, publicity, community education and protesting¹. Action may be taken against a proposed freeway, against herbicide spraying, in favour of recycling legislation or in support of a new national park. The methods used depend on the individuals or groups involved and on the issues, and range from writing letters to parliamentarians or newspapers, lobbying politicians, producing and distributing leaflets, holding public meetings, holding demonstrations and using civil disobedience. In spite of the amount of effort involved in many such campaigns, they are often still *ad hoc*; indeed, activities are not coordinated into a coherent programme towards a long-term goal. Such campaigns are based on pressure group tactics, and presume the operation of a pluralist political system in which changes in policies are possible by the mobilisation of public opinion and pressure, especially on the government.

If social action on an environmental issue is sufficiently coherent, organised and sustained, it is appropriate to speak of an environmental movement. In a movement the otherwise *ad hoc* activities are tied together by a general goal and usually a sense of purpose and unity. Environmental movements often develop social goals associated with the environmental goals. The anti-nuclear power movement, for example, has promoted the 'soft energy path' alternative of energy efficiency and use of renewable energy sources.

In the case of environmental movements, it is also appropriate to speak of strategies. A strategy can be characterised as a coherent set of tactics, methods and campaigns for achieving particular specified goals. Strategies usually take into account the social and political context and in particular the role of groups

favourable, unfavourable and indifferent to the movement's goals. In some cases, movement strategies are carefully formulated, continually examined and redirected when necessary. More often strategies develop out of unspoken assumptions about how campaigns should be organised. In these cases the *de facto* strategies must be inferred from the activities of the movement.

Methods

In general, environmentalists use four particular types of methods of action: appeal-to-elites methods, electoral methods, labour-based methods and grassroots methods. These are far from exhaustive and are not mutually exclusive, but they do epitomise some of the key directions and divergences of social activists. Movement strategies can and often do involve more than one type of method. But if the main approach relies on a particular type of method, such as appeal to elites, then it may be appropriate to speak of an 'appeal-to-elites strategy'.

The assumptions of the appeal-to-elites approach underlie most social action on environmental issues. The basic idea is to convince key decision-makers in government and sometimes industry of the logic and justice behind taking action and making policy to solve environmental problems. Typical appeal-to-elites methods are writing letters to politicians, sending petitions to politicians, making submissions to environmental inquiries, lobbying politicians and government bureaucrats, and writing articles aimed at elite policy-makers. The necessity for adopting such methods based on 'speaking truth to power' is seldom spelled out, but is simply assumed.

Electoral methods are based on actively intervening in parliamentary elections to support environmentally preferred policies, usually by supporting a party or running environmental candidates. In countries in which the dominant social democratic or communist party is unresponsive on environmental issues, such as in France and West Germany, parties with strong environmental orientations—'green parties'—have been started and promoted by environmentalists. The dominant social democratic party in Australia, the Australian Labour Party (ALP) has been relatively open to environmental policies. The small party, the Australian Democrats, has been even more sympathetic. For this reason no 'green party' has been considered necessary or viable in Australia. Therefore electoralism by Australian environmental movements has usually meant supporting and actively campaigning for the ALP and sometimes the Australian Democrats.

Labour-based methods look to the labour movement to further environmental goals. The two dominant formal structures most associated with the labour movement in Australia are the ALP and the trade unions. Many Australian trade unions have a tradition of activism on social issues, and in the 1970s this expanded to cover environmental issues. This receptivity, combined with the difficulties of using the Australian legal system to oppose development projects, led in the early 1970s to bans by builders' labourers on construction projects opposed by community groups on environmental grounds—the so-called 'green bans'.² The labour movement is wider than just the official labour party and trade union structures, and includes for example independent workers' initiatives such as wild-cat strikes and labour-oriented research groups such as the TransNational Co-operative in Sydney.

The basic approach of a labour-based strategy to achieve environmental goals is to mobilise the labour movement to take action towards the goals. In Australia this typically means pushing for the adoption and implementation of environmental policies by the ALP and for environmental stands and direct action by trade unionists.

Grassroots methods aim at mobilising 'ordinary people' in all walks of life to promote social change by collectively changing their behaviour. Grassroots methods do not rely on support from elites for achieving their goals. Rather, they strongly encourage participation in a meaningful way by as many people as possible. A typical approach is to organise within a group of some sort—workers, church members, students, parents—at the level of the 'rank and file', by providing information, building networks, fostering development of skills and initiative, and taking action.

As mentioned before, considerable potential and actual overlap exists between those four types of methods. For example, all four are potentially components in a single approach of applying pressure to elites: by force of argument, by mobilising votes, by threat of industrial action, or by demonstrating citizen concern. Similarly, all the types of methods can be developed utilising grassroots methods: writing letters to politicians can be a way of encouraging people to be involved; social movement groups can be mobilised in

election campaigns; and shop floor and party branch organising can be the basis for promoting labour movement concern on an issue.

Superficially, it might seem that convincing or pressuring elites holds the best chance of achieving environmental goals. The difficulty with this approach is that elites in government and industry are often the ones with the most interest in policies and practices which damage the environment. Chemical companies and electricity authorities, for example, depend for profits or bureaucratic expansion on the increasing use of their products. Those who rise to high positions in such organisations therefore have a strong stake in maintaining profit and expansion. Logical argument is notoriously inadequate to convince a person who maintains a vested interest in a contrary view. Political pressure on elites is more likely to achieve results, but the pressure must be maintained or the environmentally damaging practices may be reintroduced. But persistent and enduring political pressure is hard to sustain by social movements.

It is often assumed that any social movement of sufficient size and strength must enter electoral politics at some stage. It is worth spelling out some of the limitations of putting much energy into elections.

□ It does not challenge existing structures such as the bureaucratic organisation of the state and the profit system. Rather, entering election campaigns reaffirms the value of existing structures.

□ Focus on elections and dependence on sympathetic politicians does little to establish the social movement as a viable force outside the parliamentary arena. A basis for continuing struggle may not be established. Often after an exhausting election campaign, the movement virtually collapses.

□ The sense of personal responsibility for environmental problems is given away to elected elites.

□ Elected representatives, even those most responsive to community opinion, are still subject to intense pressures to adopt anti-environmental or 'compromise' policies. Politicians are constantly influenced by industrial lobbyists and top state bureaucrats. A more pervasive influence is the requirement to maintain economic expansion in order to finance government programmes. Politicians cannot afford to jeopardise 'business confidence' by anti-capitalist policies. The key goal of political action becomes survival in office. For these reasons elites, including elected representatives, cannot be relied on to enforce environmentally sound policies.

□ Entering elections tends to polarise opinion on the environmental issue along party lines. Potential supporters in the party not supported become much harder to reach.

□ Election campaigning often depends on key personalities, either as candidates themselves or as charismatic campaigners. This dependence, plus the need to coordinate policies, maintain party unity and not cause doctrinal splits, tends to centralise power in the social movement itself, to reduce meaningful participation and thus weaken the base of the movement.

□ Strategies which do not depend on electioneering tend to be neglected.

Most of these problems also apply to labour-based methods. These and other points are relevant to the following discussion of the Australian anti-uranium movement and the movement against flooding of the Franklin River. These have been two of the most

powerful and overtly successful environmental movements in Australian history.

The anti-uranium movement has not prevented uranium mining, but has greatly slowed its implementation and has totally prevented the introduction of nuclear power and other parts of the nuclear fuel cycle in Australia. Furthermore, the Australian anti-uranium movement has gained strong support from the labour movement and in this regard is the envy of many overseas anti-nuclear power movements. The movement against the flooding of the Franklin generated perhaps the greatest outpouring of community concern of all Australian environmental issues. The Franklin was saved and the Tasmania Hydroelectric Commission, one of the most politically powerful government bureaucracies in Australia, was thwarted.

The campaigns of these two movements have been well run, by and large, and relatively successful in their own terms. In focussing on some of the limitations of the strategies of these two movements, I do not wish to deny their undoubted achievements. My aim is rather to draw attention to the shortcomings of even the most impressive environmental movements when they are based on pressuring elites.

The Anti-uranium Movement³

A grassroots orientation has underpinned much of the activity of the anti-uranium movement. The basic thrust has been to take the issues to 'the people' and encourage them to take a stand according to their own assessment of the issues. This assumes that, given an exposure to a range of views, most people will oppose uranium mining. The anti-uranium activists have seen their role as making sure that their side of the case is heard, given that the pro-uranium arguments are backed by wealthy mining interests and by politicians and state bureaucrats favouring an expansion of this area of state-regulated commercial enterprise.

In producing leaflets, writing letters and organising marches and rallies, the anti-uranium movement set out to reach as many people as possible while at the same time encouraging meaningful participation in the organising itself. For example, in 1977 a major activity was gathering signatures on a national anti-uranium petition. Although there was some interest in gathering as many signatures as possible to impress politicians and obtain media coverage, the main aim was to encourage personal interaction on the uranium issue. The signature drive not only meant that many people were approached and exposed to anti-uranium arguments, but also that an avenue was opened for involvement of people in collecting signatures. If the main purpose of the petition had been to impress politicians, it would have been mainly an appeal-to-elites method. But since the main purpose was stimulating involvement in the movement and contact with many people about the issues, the signature drive was mainly a grassroots method.

To supplement the basic grassroots approach, in 1976 the organised anti-uranium movement made an important strategic decision to concentrate on bringing the labour movement into the anti-uranium camp. The laying of such emphasis was decided upon

within the broader strategy of taking the issues of nuclear power and uranium mining to the Australian public and demanding that any decision on those issues be made only after extensive and informed public debate.

Given the reality of the Australian political system, in which active community participation in policy-making has little formal basis, the focus on the labour movement provided an attractive political lever for the anti-uranium cause. Trade unions could take industrial action to oppose uranium mining, and popular support could both strengthen and be strengthened by such action. More fundamental was the perceived role of the ALP. If (1) the ALP adopted an anti-uranium policy, (2) the ALP were elected to government nationally and (3) the ALP implemented its policy, then uranium mining could be prevented or halted. Essentially the anti-uranium strategy was to build a strong grassroots base in the community and, with this support, for the labour movement to provide the direct political intervention to stop uranium mining.

The focus on the labour movement was not based on wishful thinking, since some labour activists and trade unions had been involved in anti-nuclear power activities from the very beginnings of the Australian movement. In the event, the grassroots plus labour strategy appeared to be spectacularly successful. A large fraction of 'public opinion' moved against uranium mining as the issue was debated in 1976 and 1977, and in mid 1977 both the ALP and the Australian Council of Trade Unions adopted policies opposed to uranium mining. The ALP and ACTU policy changes were quite significant in that they were pushed

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through as a result of concern at the party branch and shop floor level, one of the few cases of bottom-up change in labour policies. Thus the anti-uranium movement mainly used grassroots methods even in pursuing the labour-based part of its strategy.

Prior to the December 1977 national election, many anti-uranium groups reached a peak of activity in presenting the issue, especially in selected marginal electorates. While political parties were not formally endorsed, it was made clear that the Australian Democrats and the ALP were the main parties against uranium mining. Quite a few ALP activists and supporters were active in these efforts. But the ALP lost the election badly, and the anti-uranium canvassing had no perceptible effect on the targeted marginal electorates.

Involvement in the election campaign was not a positive experience for many in the anti-uranium movement. In some areas the election was used as an opportunity, owing to heightened community interest in the issues, to present the anti-uranium arguments to a wider audience without a heavy focus on the party

platforms. But in other areas strong ALP supporters dominated activities: anti-uranium activists were given plenty of work in distributing pro-ALP literature and the like, but had little say in the running of the campaign. The frenetic activity before the election resulted in emotional 'burnout' for many activists, while those used more blatantly by ALP supporters bore some resentment for their being exploited.

After the election, the anti-uranium movement went downhill. Many ALP-oriented people left the movement after the election. In 1978 morale was maintained by the resistance of the Aborigines to mining. But after that resistance was deviously and ruthlessly overcome by the Liberal-National Party government,⁴ and especially after mining began in early 1979, severe demoralisation set in. Of three major participative campaigns planned for 1979—promotion of nuclear-free zones, boycott of the ANZ Bank (which is closely tied to the uranium industry), and a statement of defiance against the repressive uranium laws—only the nuclear-free zones campaign has a measure of success.⁵ The actual halting of uranium mining seemed to depend more and more on the labour movement. Symbolic of that, a number of key anti-uranium activists had by then channelled their energies into the labour movement and lost contact with community groups.

The ALP and ACTU anti-uranium platforms were reaffirmed in 1979, but the ALP lost another national election in 1980. In late 1981 the Seamen's Union and others put up a valiant resistance to the export of uranium from Darwin, but could not sustain the fight in the face of union de-registration threats from the government. The weakness of the labour-based strategy was most glaringly revealed at the 1982 ALP National Conference, where in a dramatic confrontation the ALP's anti-uranium policy was drastically watered down. What was especially significant about the change was not the new policy itself but the method by which it was introduced. Ignoring party branch opinion, the amendment was pushed through by party power brokers. The contrast with the grassroots initiative which had led to the 1977 platform could not have been much greater. One response to that defeat for the anti-uranium forces was to plead for a return to branch-level work to push for the original ALP policy.⁶

The labour-based component of anti-uranium strategy

Many people opposing uranium mining have been concerned mainly about environmental hazards of nuclear power. For them, a focus on the labour movement might be seen as a tactical measure. But in as much as anti-uranium campaigning reflected an organised effort towards transforming society in certain ways and hence was a social movement in a wide sense, the labour focus was of deeper significance.

The halting and then reversal of the extension of the nuclear fuel cycle could have potentially significant social consequences. Such action could restrain the widespread use of a technology inherently linked—by its high cost, dependence on experts, and potential hazard—with centralised political and economic power. The stopping of nuclear technology would also allow more social and political space for introducing small-



The anti-nuclear grass-roots movement takes to the streets.

scale renewable energy technologies, with the associated promotion of local self-reliance and participative decision-making. Thus, if having the labour movement on one's side could stop uranium mining, a worthwhile part of a wider social strategy might be to halt the expansion of centralised political power and increase local self-reliance and participative democracy.

In keeping with that goal, the anti-uranium movement emphasised local actions and initiatives, campaigns that involved many active participants, and organised in-groups rooted in the community such as schools, churches and women's groups. Such an approach was especially appropriate to the nuclear issue since support for and opposition to nuclear power in Australia and other countries did not fall along the usual class, party or occupational lines.⁷

Not in keeping with that grassroots orientation, and the single most important decision made by the anti-uranium movement, was its dependence and later over-dependence on the labour movement. For while the labour movement is occasionally open to change from the bottom, hierarchy, patriarchy and centralisation are dominant features of most labour organisations.

Adoption of the labour-based strategy had two undesirable consequences for the anti-uranium movement. First, once the anti-uranium position had become identified with labour politics, the issue was more easily polarised along party lines, and it became easier for the supporters of uranium mining, such as the leaders of the Liberal and National parties, to suppress any internal dissent. Furthermore, after the elec-

tions of 1977 and 1980 it could be claimed, however inaccurately, that the Liberal-National uranium policy had been endorsed.

Second, once the anti-uranium cause was taken up by the labour movement, the community-based anti-uranium movement gradually lost its power. The reason was partly psychological, inasmuch as it seemed that uranium mining could be stopped only through the actions of labour elites, and the most that community activists could do was play a supporting role. At the same time, part of the loss of power resulted from a lack of any other strategy for stopping uranium mining. Once the ALP and ACTU had been won over, there was apparently nothing else to do.

The labour-based approach thus had two main flaws. First, success within the labour movement took power from the grassroots anti-uranium movement and concealed the need for a more complete grassroots strategy. Second, anti-uranium strength at the grassroots was replaced by anti-uranium weakness at the top echelons of the labour movement. This weakness was exploited by the uranium mining companies and party right-wingers in the ALP's 1982 uranium policy change.

The election of a national Labour government in March 1983 highlighted the problems of the labour-based component of the anti-uranium strategy. The fate of uranium mining seemed more than ever to rest on decisions within the ALP, and for community-based anti-uranium activists the main focus was to apply pressure on the government, especially on the key power brokers at the top.

In August 1983 a major civil disobedience action—a nonviolent 'blockade'—was held at the site of the proposed Roxby Downs uranium mine in South Australia. This action had some success in slowing operations at Roxby, but more importantly helped stimulate a resurgence in anti-uranium activity around the country. But much of the activity once again was focused on the ALP.

Thus the anti-uranium movement initially used primarily a grassroots strategy, then moved into a labour-based strategy and ended up by appealing to elites. Luckily, grassroots organising was never entirely neglected, so a large reservoir of support for stopping uranium mining remained in the community as well as in the labour movement.

What might the anti-uranium movement have done differently in order to depend less on the labour movement? Some possibilities might have been:

□ To have developed positive alternatives to nuclear power in a way that involved people locally and at the same time challenged uranium mining. As it was, the 'soft energy path' was mainly used as a basis for argument, not as an organising focus.

□ As well as building support in the labour movement, to have made a greater attempt to build support and weaken opposition at the grassroots level within government bureaucracies, corporations and the conservative political parties. Such action perhaps would not have overcome the pro-uranium forces in those areas, but it might well have reduced their drive and unity, delayed the beginning of mining and provided breathing space for the anti-uranium movement.

□ To have carried through the national ANZ Bank boycott and the statement of defiance campaigns planned for early 1979.

□ To have built strong links with other social movements, such as feminists, Third World action groups and the peace movement, in terms of common social goals and campaigning.

□ To have developed long-term strategies. In the key years 1976 to 1978, the time frame for the anti-uranium movement was the next year, the next few months or the next few weeks. Few looked ahead five or even two years, unlike the uranium mining companies. There was and still is a need for long-term strategies involving grassroots organising, interaction with the formal political system, transnational links, training for civil disobedience and linking with other social events.

It is always easy to say what might have been. There is no guarantee that the above approaches would have been any more successful in preventing uranium mining than the course of action actually adopted. But such options do show that an alternative existed to the essentially labour-based strategy in which the anti-uranium movement found itself. At the time, the focus was on the opportunities and not on the limitations of concentrating on winning over the labour movement. Perhaps even though other strategies might have been canvassed, the same one would have been chosen. But I think it would have been better to have considered the alternatives more seriously.

Furthermore, even if the above grassroots approaches could not have stopped uranium mining in the short term, they would have had benefits in terms of long-term social goals by strengthening networks and personal involvement and by laying the social basis for an energy system based on decentralisation and local control.

Southwest Tasmania

Protection of the natural environment of southwest Tasmania, especially opposition to the damming of rivers there, has been an important environmental issue in Australia for many years. In the early 1970s the key focus was stopping the building of a dam which would flood Lake Pedder. The campaign to save unflooded Lake Pedder was unsuccessful. In the early 1980s the key focus was on stopping the building of a dam on the Gordon River which would also flood the Franklin River. It is the campaign to save the Franklin River that I will discuss here.

To avoid misunderstanding, let me say at the outset that in many ways the anti-dam campaign was brilliantly run within its own assumptions, and that the campaign was motivated by high ideals. The critical analysis which I make here is of some assumptions about strategies, not about commitment or talent.

The basic approach of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society (TWS) and most other groups which campaigned to save the Franklin was to appeal to elites and to apply pressure to elites. Many types of methods were used in achieving that, including grassroots, labour-based and electoral methods as well as direct appeal-to-elites methods. As the campaign progressed, appeals were directed especially to the Tasmanian Labour government, then to the national Liberal-

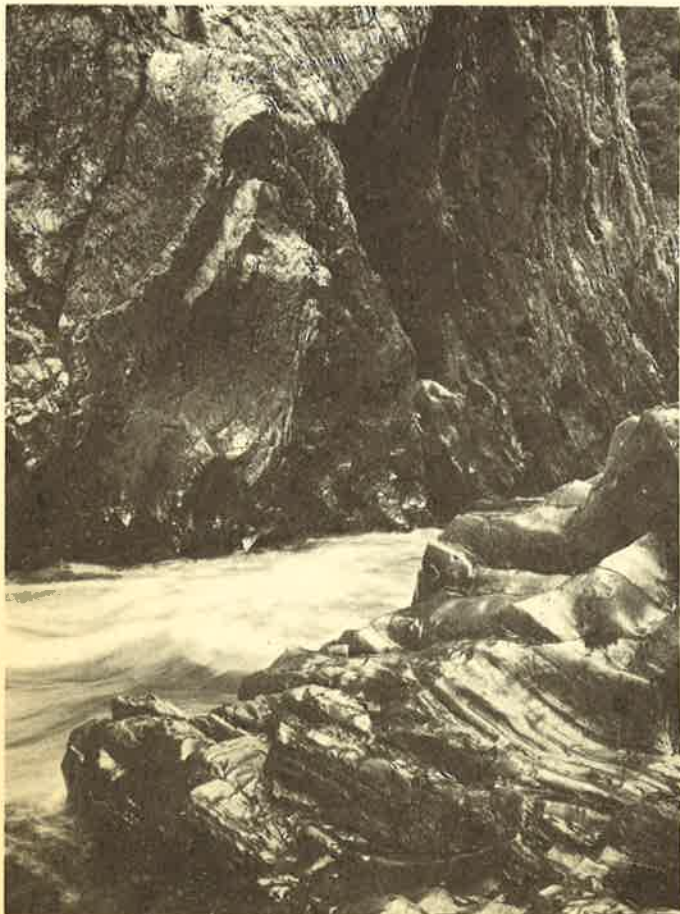
National Party government, and also to the national ALP both before and after the ALP's victory at the national polls in March 1983.

Direct appeals to elites took the form of lobbying, advertisements, letter-writing campaigns, and obtaining authoritative support. The campaign was both active and successful in all those areas. For example, many eminent scientists, artists and other figures lent their personal prestige or their expert opinion to the cause. One notable example was the action of the World Heritage Commission in listing the southwest wilderness in December 1982.

Lobbying, advertisements and obtaining authoritative support do not in themselves require much grass-roots participation. The TWS did not neglect public opinion, and indeed much effort was put into cultivating it through advertisements, mailouts and obtaining favourable news coverage. But the underlying thrust was to mobilise public opinion and activism to apply pressure to elites. One main avenue for participation was through writing letters to politicians; another was contributing money to pay for advertisements, mailouts, lobbying, offices and the like.

The Tasmanian Hydroelectric Commission (HEC), promoter of the Gordon dam, is the single most powerful force in the state of Tasmania.⁸ Both the Labour and Liberal parties in the state supported the dam, and the HEC workers were also solidly pro-dam. Therefore the usefulness of labour-based methods was limited. Nevertheless, the TWS made every effort to bring

The Franklin River: On July 1st 1983 the High Court of Australia declared the dam illegal. This ended years of battle, a spurious Tasmanian referendum and the Franklin blockage with its 1500 arrests.



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politicians on side, concentrating on the Tasmanian Labour politicians. (The Australian Democrats took an anti-dam position early in the debate, but with limited representation they could only raise the issues in Tasmanian parliament without much effect on policy.) Eventually, largely because of the dam issue, a split arose in the Tasmanian ALP, and Premier Doug Lowe and another parliamentarian, Mary Willey, left the party in November 1981.

In March 1982, Australian Democrat Norm Sanders, Doug Lowe and Mary Willey supported a no-confidence motion against the Labour government. At the resulting Tasmanian election the Liberals won a convincing victory. To the extent that this political manoeuvring was done to support the no-dams cause, it seemed to backfire politically. HEC elites still wielded considerable influence, especially in the upper house, and all that was achieved by trying to win over labour politicians was the splitting and weakening of the Tasmanian Labour Party.

After the Liberal victory in the May 1982 Tasmanian election, the Tasmanian ALP still supported the dam; hence the labour-based approach had little to offer within Tasmania. Consequently the TWS looked more and more to the national government to take action. While applying pressure of all sorts to the national Liberal-National government, the dam opponents also worked to get the national ALP to support the anti-dam policy, that being achieved in mid 1982. With the prospect of an early election at a time when media and public interest on southwest Tasmania was at a peak, the national ALP did not require much further prodding to make solid commitments, which it did in January 1983, to implement its anti-dam policy. Thus the labour-based methods which had failed in Tasmania seemed on the way to success nationally.

Even before the March 1983 national election, the TWS possessed considerable experience in electoral methods, and in the 1982 Tasmanian election, many candidates ran on a 'no-dam' ticket. The results of that election, an undoubted victory at the polls for the pro-dam forces, were hardly an advertisement for electioneering by environmentalists.

More encouraging were the efforts to get people to vote for the party they preferred, but also to write in 'No Dams'. That approach was especially appropriate in Tasmania inasmuch as the December 1981 referendum on the dam, did not include a 'no dams' option. The huge 'no dams' informal vote effectively exposed the farcical nature of the referendum choices. 'No dams' write-in campaigns in mainland by-elections were also quite effective. The result shows the effectiveness of allowing people to take a stand that does not have to be expressed via a party political channel. Although encouraging participation to the extent of a view being expressed anonymously, the 'No Dams' write-in campaign was used by the TWS mainly as a means of demonstrating to politicians the strength of the anti-dam position.

For the March 1983 national election the anti-dam movement entered electoral politics unreservedly, and a National South-West Coalition (NSWC) was formed with an anti-dam position. Massive amounts of money

and energy were poured into canvassing, advertising, leafletting, and passing out how-to-vote cards. The NSWC supported the ALP for the House of Representatives and the Democrats for the Senate. That preference was made independently of whether the other candidates had reservations about the dam, or even when they had spoken out against it. The election involvement was on behalf of a party, apparently without reservations.

As mentioned before, several methods adopted by the TWS involved grassroots participation at some level. But the most dramatic method used was the non-violent action, launched in December 1982, to blockade construction work taking place preliminary to building the Gordon River dam. The blockade was a civil disobedience action, involving hundreds of people trained in nonviolent action techniques.

Civil disobedience can be used for several purposes. It can be: a method for involving people in a meaningful experience in challenging unjust laws or actions; a way of demonstrating to others the depth of commitment felt by a group about an issue; a means to obtain publicity and apply pressure on politicians.

The Tasmanian blockade was all of those things. For the people involved it was a moving experience, providing knowledge and understanding of nonviolent action, creating friendships and both demonstrating and forging commitment. If nothing else, the campaign against the flooding of the Franklin provided the most important means in Australia up to that time of spreading knowledge and experience in nonviolent action and training for it.

Yet for the TWS organisers, the blockade was mainly used to obtain publicity and thus to apply pressure on national politicians; it was not seen as part of a long-term strategy involving grassroots involvement in nonviolent action.

One cause and consequence of the anti-dam strategy was centralisation of decision-making power within the anti-dam movement. The centralisation developed naturally from the emphasis on influencing elites; indeed effective lobbying requires experienced lobbyists, while massive fundraising and quick allocation of funds (for example for advertisements) encourages centralised decision-making. At the same time the media likes to focus on key individuals. Many important decisions in the anti-dam campaign—such as full-page colour advertisements in newspapers costing tens of thousands of dollars, and support for the ALP in the March 1983 election—were taken with only limited consultation with the membership of the groups involved. Such action is characteristic of an elite-oriented strategy and strongly at odds with a grassroots strategy.

Another feature linked with the 'apply-pressure-to-elites strategy' was the focus on the environmental effects of the Gordon-below-Franklin dam. TWS leaflets, advertisements and material for the media often emphasised the natural features which would have been destroyed by the flooding of the Franklin: native species, scenic gorges, platypuses and white water. Less attention was given to the wider social, political and economic aspects of the dam dispute, including the

entrenched political power of the HEC, the direction of Tasmanian economy, or methods for decision-making on wilderness. Arguably, the Gordon-below-Franklin dam was not the key problem, but rather a symptom of the hydro-industrialisation route pursued by the HEC in support of its own vested interests, and supported by workers and the major Tasmanian political parties that have been captives of HEC interests.

Those wider issues were well recognised by most active members of the TWS, who therefore came up with alternative energy options for Tasmania. But most media coverage nevertheless focused on the narrow environmental effects thereby helping to depoliticise the issue. Nevertheless, the TWS made little headway in promoting wider awareness of programmes for bureaucratic reform or of alternative methods for decision-making about wilderness. The main emphasis throughout the campaign was on saving the Franklin within the context of present political structures, by a change in policy at the top, rather than a restructuring of political institutions.

How did the TWS strategy fare? Considering its degree of popular support, rather poorly. The campaign suffered from all the limitations of electoralism. In particular, the enormous reservoir of concern and support was recklessly risked in the national election campaign, for a very dubious return. Many environmental organisations, including the Australian Conservation Foundation, staked their futures on an ALP victory which was by no means assured. If the Liberals had won the election, the financial squeeze on government-funded environmental organisations would have become vicious indeed, and support within the Liberal Party for environmental causes would have been squashed.

Did the participation in the election campaign by the NSWC make any difference? Anti-dam campaigners naturally enough have used statistics to show it did.⁹ Opinion polls and informal opinion suggest that a number of voters were influenced by the dam issue. On the mainland the anti-dam stance of the ALP gained some votes, while in Tasmania the Liberals probably gained from their pro-dam stance.

But the question that concerns me here is not so much whether the dam issue influenced voters, but whether the campaigning by the NSWC had any effect. A close look at the figures shows only a limited effect: in the electorates in which the NSWC mounted a major effort, the swing to the ALP was somewhat higher than the national swing, but smaller than the error in the figures. This suggests that NSWC campaigning had relatively little effect on the election results.¹⁰ In other words, anti-dam environmentalists could have taken an independent line, or promoted a 'no dams' write-in, and the election results would probably have been about the same. If such an approach had been adopted, it would have been up to the ALP to promote its anti-dam policy in order to gain votes. The risk of Liberal victory and retaliation against environmentalists would have been reduced greatly, and the possibilities of gaining the support of Liberals maintained.

Many environmentalists will not want to admit that a major election effort had minimal effect. But if envir-

onmental campaigns are to be founded on sound principles, it is necessary to recognise unpleasant truths.

Even the ALP victory was not such a wonderful thing for the anti-dam campaign. As is the usual case with reliance on electoral methods, the commitment and concern and sense of personal responsibility was given away to elected elites. After the election, the

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anti-dam movement went into a quick decline as people looked to the ALP government to take over the job of stopping the dam. Many anti-dam activists were 'burnt out' by the electioneering. The blockade and other forms of mass mobilisation—including demonstrations and public meetings—were downplayed to avoid antagonising public opinion during the election and afterwards.

The election further polarised opinion on the dam, and channelled opinions into party lines. In Tasmania, where the Liberals increased their majorities, the anti-dammers suffered a severe setback.

I have said that elites, including elected representatives, generally cannot be relied upon to enforce environmentally sound policies. In the case of the Gordon-below-Franklin dam, the national Labour government took a strong stand in principle. But in practice the government tossed the issue to the High Court, allowing the government a ready excuse for taking no further action should the court have ruled in favour of the Tasmanian government.

By adopting electoral methods, the anti-dam movement drained its own strength, undercut cross-party support, disempowered its supporters, and put the fate of the dam in the hands of the High Court in which public opinion and activist commitment play little role. Furthermore, the Tasmanian Liberal government was given the issue of 'states rights'—however dubious that issue is by any logical analysis—which it used in a very effective way to mobilise Tasmanian opinion for the dam. In the event, the High Court ruled against the dam, the judges dividing four to three. Thus the entire issue in the end hinged on one person—the swinging High Court judge—thus symbolising the pyramidal structure of the appeal-to-elites approach.

The High Court decision was undoubtedly important in stopping the dam. But the polarisation of opinion in Tasmania and the antagonistic reaction of pro-dam forces there to the court case loss will hamstring environmentalists on issues besides the dam for years to come. More importantly, the TWS campaign had little effect on the entrenched power of the HEC: other dam projects are underway, and the HEC is expanding its domain into other areas of activity.

Given that the national government's court case against the dam succeeded, the illusory path of pressuring elites has been given a credibility greater than it

deserves. Had it failed, it would have been necessary for environmentalists to re-examine the assumptions behind their campaigns. This could have stimulated development of strategies which do not depend so much on action from the top.

What would a grassroots strategy to protect the environment of southwest Tasmania look like? It would include non-hierarchical and decentralised organisation of action groups, a focus on the wider implications of stopping dams with regard to industrialisation, and a range of activities that depend and build on widescale participation and do not depend on charismatic figures, media coverage or influential patrons. It might well include a detailed plan for providing Tasmania's energy needs without further dams or fossil fuel generating plants, which simultaneously provided specific alternative employment opportunities for HEC workers. Such a plan could be developed with some input from the workers themselves, and be used to undermine the enforced unity of the HEC and other pro-dam forces. The grassroots strategy might also include a wide range of participative nonviolent actions, such as boycotts, nonpayment of electricity bills, work bans and union black bans, as well as blockade-type actions.¹¹

It is true that a grassroots strategy, if it succeeds, will usually be accompanied by changes in policy or action at the top. But in a grassroots-based social transformation, elites respond not simply because of public opinion or pressure, but because of a threat to institutions or direct thwarting of goals by strikes, boycotts, or other forms of non-cooperation. So while a grassroots, nonviolent action strategy usually will be supplemented by the familiar methods of disseminating information and pushing for policy changes, that does not mean that the only way nonviolent action can succeed is by swinging public opinion and convincing political party elites to change policies. In a grassroots nonviolent action campaign that succeeds, changes in policy are essentially capitulation and acceptance of a new *de facto* distribution of power in society rather than an opportunistic swing towards public opinion.

It is a long-term project to change the HEC and other similar institutions which carry out anti-environmental practices. It can be reasonably argued, from the perspective of 1982 and 1983, that the flooding of the Franklin was an urgent short-term goal necessitating appeal-to-elites methods. But the TWS was formed in 1975: that was the time to have begun formulating a long-term grassroots strategy. So long as environmentalists remain in the 'urgent threat' syndrome, strategies based on applying pressure to elites will be most attractive and the institutional sources of environmental problems will remain intact.

Conclusion

My main intention has been to point out some of the limitations of appeal-to-elites, labour-based and electoral methods in pursuing environmental goals. The limitations have been glossed over in many campaigns, and strategies have often been taken up without any critical examination. However, in spite of their limi-

tations, appeal-to-elites, labour-based and electoral methods do have advantages. These methods should not be rejected purely out of an ideological commitment to working only at the grassroots. After all, grassroots methods themselves are in many cases just another way to influence elites, and perhaps a better way in many cases, since they do not suffer so many of the disempowering aspects of the other methods.

When are elite-oriented strategies appropriate? Basically when change is sought within the existing social institutions. For example, labour-based methods seem suitable when pursuing improvements in salaries and working conditions. That the TWS used a strategy based on pressuring elites is compatible with its emphasis on stopping a single dam rather than on achieving changes in the HEC. Much of the anti-uranium movement encompassed wider aims, such as an increase in local community self-reliance and decision-making power in tandem with increased local energy self-reliance. Activists in the anti-uranium movement were aware that nuclear power has been promoted by states because it reflects and promotes state power. To the extent that such is the case, appeals to state elites are of limited value and a grassroots strategy is called for.

In the peace movement, the implied challenge to the state is even more fundamental, since the state is founded on a monopoly of the use of violence within a territory, and so professional military forces are central to the continuance of state power. Most peace movements have nevertheless used appeals-to-elites as their basic approach. It is not surprising that those appeals have led to nothing. Nor have labour-based methods succeeded any better. To eliminate war, a grassroots approach seems essential. To the extent that peace movements have used elite-oriented methods, they essentially have sapped their own long-term potential.

If the goal is transforming the social, political and economic institutions underlying environmental and other social problems, then grassroots strategies deserve attention. But because the assumptions underlying elite-oriented strategies are so widespread, grassroots strategies are relatively undeveloped. Perhaps in the future that deficiency can be remedied.¹²

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