

Social policy – Green debates



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Roots and evolution

The green parties were established after the global student revolt of 1968, and with their first actions, they dedicated a part of their political message to the pursuit of social justice. In one of the first electoral manifestos in 1972 in the New Zealand Values Party – a predecessor of the present-day Green Party – proposed a guaranteed minimum wage, the right to education and health care, as well as an increase in worker and employee roles in managing jobs were also found alongside calls to develop alternative sources of energy.¹ 1972 was also the year in which the first Green Party was established in Australia – the United Tasmania Group came to existence. The primary charter of this party was 'The New Ethic', in which the party called for the establishment of a new society founded on justice, democratic participation, equality of men and women, the free flow of scientific knowledge, equal opportunities and the elimination of the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and the

accumulation of wealth.² Between the end of 1972 and the beginning of 1973, the PEOPLE party, which was the predecessor to the Green Party of England and Wales, was established. It also emphasised the need to integrate social and environmental policy.

These examples demonstrate that the first Green Parties, which were created in the 1970s, were a movement against the industrial, militaristic and consumerist vision of state and society in which socially embedded models of capitalism masked the damage that had been caused by them – the degradation of the natural environment resulting from, among other things, expanding consumerism, economic exploitation of liberated colonies, environmental and social injustice, and cultural and financial discrimination of women.³ To a large extent, this was due to the biographical context of the people establishing these parties (many of them had had experience within left-wing political parties or informal civic initiatives). Additionally, a large part of them came from social movements – trade unions, non-governmental organisations and projects focusing on the fight against economic, social and environmental inequalities both nationally and world-wide.⁴

This meant that there was a critical distance to the economic model, which led to the depletion of natural resources and between state institutions which actively participated in this process – regardless of whether it was directed by capitalist rules or existed under the communist arrangement. Many Greens were near to the conviction expressed during the events of 1968, that the alternative should be social self-organisation. To this day, this distance is visible within the social programmes of these parties, both to the corporate multinational power and financial institutions as well as to the omnipotent state and through the simultaneous support of widening the field of social participation within the public sphere and becoming united through the active organisation of civic society.⁵

In the 1980s, the Greens were forced to confront their own convictions with the expansion of neoliberal

² <http://gregg-jocoy.blogspot.com/2007/11/new-ethic.html>

³ B. Kozek, *-laczego róże nie lubią słoneczników?* (Why don't roses like sunflowers?), portal lewica.pl, 6/2/2010, <http://lewica.pl/index.php?id=20892>

⁴ *Green Identity in a Changing World*, The Heinrich Boell Foundation, office in Brussels, 2008. Publication accessible from: http://boell.eu/downloads/GREEN_IDENTITY_UK_web.pdf

⁵ A. Dobson, *Sustainability Citizenship*, Green House, London 2011 http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/private/Sustainability_Citizenship_inside.pdf

¹ http://www.globalgreens.org/green-party-platforms-programs-and-manifestos/nz_values_1975
[all pages visited on 3/2/2012 r.).

ideology, specifically Thatcherism and Reaganomics. This monetaristic ideology gained advantage over Keynesianism and preached for the minimising of the role of the state within the economy and praised rather unrestricted business.⁶ Apart from the limitations which were intended to correct the activities of the invisible hand of the market, with time, more and more environmental regulations were introduced. This forced the role of the state within the environmental transformation of the economy and society to be reconsidered, and also a greater concern for preserving and developing the post-war welfare state model.

This process continued throughout the 1990s, when the Greens were included in coalition governments for the first time – starting with Finland in 1995. This was a period in which European social democracy, most often its bigger coalition partners, chose a 'third-way' course, largely accepting economic neoliberalism. In areas where the left-wing influence of this concept was smaller, the Greens took part in progressive solutions such as the reform which shortened working hours in France. In areas where the influence was greater, the Greens were often forced into painful compromises with their existing programme principles. In Germany, this not only manifested itself as internal disputes surrounding German participation in the military operation in Afghanistan, but also in the Hartz IV reform which limited financial support for the unemployed.⁷ This unpopular reform enabled part of the Green electorate to move to the left-wing Die Linke and, for a time, impaired the image of the German Greens as a party which fought for social justice.

The social dimensions of Green political activity strengthened with the advent of the concept of the Green New Deal. This concept was a response to the financial and economic crisis which swept through global financial markets in 2008, and which consisted of taking advantage of the necessity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to invest private and public funds to establish green jobs through the development of renewable

energy, public transport, energy-efficient construction and public services.⁸ The most important think-tanks decided to address the guidelines of this Green New Deal, such as the British New Economics Foundation⁹, United Nations agencies including UNEP¹⁰, as well as Green parties from around the world – from Ireland¹¹ to New Zealand¹². The proposed regulations, which approached the countercyclical proposals of Keynesianism in economic policy (including stimulating demand as a way to counter economic downturn) and the global necessity to resolve the ongoing crises (including economic, climatic, social, food as well as the loss of biodiversity associated with it), demonstrated the evolution of mainstream green politics and the rediscovery of its meaning for the environmental transformation of the public sphere and the embedded social actors associated with it, such as trade unions.¹³

Rules and details

The turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries brought about the formalisation of international cooperation of Greens from around the world. The first informal assembly of 'Green International' occurred in 1992 during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. In 1999, 150 Green Parties from 24 countries participated in a session in the Mexican city of Oaxaca. In 2001, the Global

8 The key source of information on the Green New Deal – its core ideas, best practices and publications on this subject – is <http://greennewdeal.eu/pl>

9 A Green New Deal: Joined-up policies to solve the triple crunch of the credit crisis, climate change and high oil prices, New Economics Foundation, London 2008, http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/A_Green_New_Deal_1.pdf

10 Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World, United Nations Environment Programme, Washington 2008, http://www.unep.org/labour_environment/PDFs/Greenjobs/UNE-P-Green-Jobs-Report.pdf

11 A Green New Deal. Getting Ireland Back on Track, Irish Green Party, Dublin 2009.

12 <http://www.greens.org.nz/greennewdeal>

13 It is worth noting that the head of one of the German central trade unions, ver.di - Frank Bsirske – is a member of the Greens. In recent years, German trade unions have, because of the red-green government coalition from 1998 – 2005, went from defending the German nuclear industry to the acceptance and support for green energy modernisation based on energy efficiency and renewable sources, creating new, green jobs.

6 Among many books on neoliberalism, it is good to note those issued in Poland by the Warsaw Book and Press Publishing Institute in the series 'Biblioteka Le Monde Diplomatique', including: D. Harvey, Neoliberalizm. Historia katastrofy [Neoliberalism. A History] (2008), A. Bihr, Nowomowa neoliberalna [Newspeak Neoliberalism] (2008), D. Johnston, A. Saad-Filho, Neoliberalizm. Historia katastrofy [Neoliberalism. A History] (2009), M. Husson, Kapitalizm bez znieczulenia [Capitalism without Anesthesia] (2011), S. George, Czyj kryzys, czyja odpowiedź [Whose crisis, whose answer?] (2011).

7 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hartz_IV

Greens¹⁴ network was established; the Global Greens Charter was adopted at the founding congress.¹⁵ This charter became the foundation of the organisation; every party that wishes to belong there must agree to the objectives established within.

Due to the large discrepancy in the development of countries within what is commonly referred to as the 'Global North' and 'Global South', the principles of creating social policy set out in the Charter are quite general. It contains social justice as one of the key principles for the global ecopolitical movement. It is defined as decreasing inequality in development (among certain states and internally), repaying debts of developing countries, eliminating poverty and illiteracy, and equality 'regardless of gender, race, age, religion, class, ethnic or national background, sexual orientation, level of ability and health'. The fight against poverty is intended to improve the quality of democratic functioning and strengthen social participation within this mechanism; it is also meant to act as a peaceful method of resolving global problems. According to the Global Greens, economic inequalities make sustainable development impossible; to ensure an appropriate quality of life, universal access to education and health care, water and food must be provided. The Global Greens Charter pays attention to the rights of men and women to control their own fertility, and also recognises the key role that young people play in promoting the values of sustainable development within the ecological limits of the planet.

The European Green Party (EGP) – a continental ecopolitical federation – was established as the first pan-European political party at a congress in Rome in 2004.¹⁶ The most complete charter on social policy by far, 'A green vision for a social Europe'¹⁷, was adopted in 2008. The Charter diagnoses the deteriorating situation in Europe which, according to the EGP, is the effect of a fixation of certain governments on reducing budget deficits to zero and on lowering taxes. This led to a limitation on the ability to finance the European social model and also to the ongoing limiting of access to social welfare and public services. From the moment the charter was accepted, problems were apparent and became topics of serious discussion at the European level amongst them increasing signs of youth

unemployment or the feminisation of low-paid or part-time work. It is true that the introduction to the charter claims that, as a result of the variation in the European model of the welfare state, it is difficult to consider universal solutions appropriate for all countries; it is, however, more detailed than the declaration of the Global Greens.

The charter indicates that every woman and man should be guaranteed a minimum income, which includes services and material benefits. It also proposes to begin analyses into the reasonability and economic feasibility of introducing a citizens' income.

The 'Green vision for a social Europe' considers the negative effects of privatisation and deregulation of public services such as water management, postal services and health and education, and proposes that individual states have the right to independently decide on the form of ownership of public services provision. In light of this, the European Union should adopt a directive on public services which would exclude market logic as a measure of their benefits. Education – from nursery school to higher education – should be free and focused on supporting individual contact between the student and teacher to a greater extent than it has been in the past (hence the support for smaller classes). Preventative care should become the foundation of European health care policies. This means that a healthy lifestyle and regular medical checks should be encouraged, as well as an improvement in work safety and hygiene. The charter also does not forget to mention the proposal which pertains to providing access to the elderly for a wider range of free care.

According to the charter, the labour market should be tied to elements of flexibility (for example, in organising weekly work schedules and their length) and ensure a social security network (such as access to training and the ability to become qualified). Equilibrium among these elements, described as *flexicurity* (flexibility + security) should be developed in a social dialogue between the state, trade unions and employer organisations. Restrictions – through legal regulation or financial instigation – should be imposed to the practice of working over-time, hence the opposition of the Greens at the European level to ideas of extending weekly working hours to over 48 hours, distorting, in their opinion, the balance between work and personal life. The Greens support the fight against pay inequality between women and men as well as establishing minimum wages and allowing their differentiation due to a particular economic sector or area. Maternity leave should be extended to 12 months, and this should be accompanied by taking action

¹⁴ <http://www.globalgreens.org/about-us>

¹⁵ <http://www.globalgreens.org/globalcharter-english>

¹⁶ <http://europeangreens.eu/menu/learn-about-egp/>

¹⁷ http://europeangreens.eu/fileadmin/logos/pdf/policy_documents/sociale_europe/EGP_WG_Social_Policy_-_Policy_Paper_as_voted_by_the_EGPCouncil.pdf

to increase male participation in raising children which – along with adjusting the accessibility of nursery and preschool care – would improve the situation of women in the labour market.

Discussions and controversies

The diversity of social systems of certain European states, which may be followed in the works of Esping-Andersen¹⁸, have contributed to complications of the European Green Party in adopting a new social programme which is, more than before, fit into the concept of the Green New Deal. The complexity of issues related to the establishment of a self-sustaining pension systems meant that it was decided that this issue be moved to a separate document. The policy paper 'The Green New Deal. The Social Dimension'¹⁹, was finally adopted by the EGP in the spring of 2012 after being worked on for more than one and a half years.

Controversy did not surround the need to prepare a new programme charter in view of the prolonged economic crisis; it described the appearance of the disturbing new phenomena such as the increase in unemployment amongst young people, the expansion of precarious forms of employment, or problems related to migrants on the European labour market. It also set out a vision for green jobs as high-quality forms of employment in which the right to labour representation, participation in training and the ability to increase qualifications would be implemented. Increasing the number of people employed (an important topic in view of an aging population) is intended to ensure increased availability of childcare for at least 33% of children under the age of three and pre-schoolers for at least 90% of children under the age of six, allowing for an increase in the employment rate of women and improving the legal conditions which would enable the unrestricted stay, travel and employment of migrant workers.

Another important aspect of the document is the fight against social inequalities. According to the European Greens, this should be pursued using diverse tools – progressive taxation of income, investing in improving the energy efficiency of buildings, reducing energy consumption and limiting energy poverty due to high

heating costs in households, to providing high quality public services and financial transfers. Social policy is perceived in the EGP charter as a right of citizens of which practical implementation by public authorities is necessary to ensure a better quality of life and sustainable development.

It is good to focus on the main points of disagreement and proposals which were raised by specific member parties while working on the common platform. For example, the Austrian Greens proposed to enclose in quotation marks the concept of the labour market that was used in the charter. Their intention was not intended to bring about a correction of punctuation, but to draw attention to the fact that the actors involved in it – contrary to the theory – are not equal and that those employed and those looking for employment must be subject to special protection. They also critically approached the concept of 'flexicurity', claiming that it was embedded in a neo-liberal paradigm of thinking about the economy and that improving the situation may be realised only by job security, such as an increase in employment and a better balance between work and personal life. They also did not want the vision of a green social policy in Europe to be limited to ensuring 'equal opportunity'. Instead of this concept, they proposed 'equal rights', because, according to them, certain social rights are attributable to people regardless of their individual efforts.

The Dutch Green Left (GroenLinks) presented a different point of view during the debate about the document. It opposed the vision of a top-down, comprehensive reduction of working hours. Supporters of this idea recognised that a growth in productivity of European economies was a beneficial result, contributing to a reduction of the need for labour. An improved redistribution of working hours might – according to them – increase the level of employment. According to the Dutch from GroenLinks disputing these theories (supported in part of the argument by the Green Party in Germany and the Belgian Ecolo party from Walonia), the top-down shortening of working hours at the European level would not take into account the particularities of each state and sector. Instead, they proposed a declaration to increase the possibility of a more flexible choice of the length of working hours by employees. They also did not agree to the proposal to introduce higher labour costs for employers who hired employees on a weekly basis working less than 15 hours, arguing that work income has a significant meaning for many employees working under these circumstances. The German Greens were also concerned with the flexibility of working hours and of determining a minimum wage.

18 G. Esping-Andersen, *Trzy światy kapitalistycznego państwa dobrobytu* (The Three Worlds of Welfare State Capitalism), Difin, Warszawa 2010.

19 http://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/new_s/files/GND%20social%20dimension%20adopted.pdf

They did not want to accept a law that fixed the level of a minimum wage at 60% of the average national wage on the assumption that individual states should have the right to make such decisions in, for example, different sectors or collective agreements.

In the attitude of the GroenLinks, it is possible to see the legacy of the Dutch model for a flexible labour market, the effect of which – according to the results of research – are: low unemployment, a high rate of employment (including women) and laws to ensure social security to people working part-time, and – on the other hand – also the feminisation of part-time work, not providing sufficient funds for support, and the lack of jobs for people wishing to work full-time. The debate on the new redistribution of working hours in the Green community continues²⁰, and it encouraged the Green European Foundation – GEF – to conduct a study on this matter²¹ which was commissioned by the Greens/European Free Alliance in the European Parliament.

Amendments of the Federation of Young European Greens – FYEG – focused on strengthening the economic position of the young, the elderly (through the use of European funds to implement intergenerational projects, such as multigenerational homes) and immigrants, and their access to social and public services. FYEG proposed, among other things, a clear indication of the adverse effects that privatising medical services has on their quality as well as on guaranteeing free health care and other public services implemented by the state or local governments or non-profit community organisations, rather than through private commercial enterprises. In order to improve the situation of women in the labour market, FYEG also proposed to introduce mandatory paternity leave.

Central Europe

The relationship between ecology and the construction of an egalitarian society was not always equally strong in other cultural spheres, such as in post-communist

Central Europe. During the democratic breakthrough the problem of dealing with social themes was with a historically unfavourable heritage of the region. Active state policies were associated with the previous regime of 'real socialism' and a majority of political parties, including the democratic opposition and the post-communist left-wing ones, accepted the neo-liberal 'Washington Consensus' – a policy of reduced taxes, commercialisation and privatisation of public services and the surrender of redistribution of resources and the fight against economic injustice.

Green parties that referred to ecology and which were not eager to raise social justice issues, sooner or later paid the price with a loss of political significance, forcing upon them the task of building a new, holistic socio-economic programme. An example which illustrates this theory is that of the Czech Republic, in which the Greens came into parliament by taking on board the technocratic former Environment Minister, Martin Bursik, from one of the centre-right governments. They lost representation in the following election after becoming engaged in a centre-right coalition government. Today, the party is led by Ondrej Liska and openly declares a critical attitude in view of ideas for another right-wing coalition, such as proposed tuition fees, further restricting free medical care, or introducing a uniform VAT rate. They also take part in demonstrations organised by trade unions.²²

The Hungarian party, Politics Can Be Different (LMP)²³, had an extensive social programme which led them to achieve the best electoral results of any Green Party in Central Europe. During the election campaign in 2009, the party decided to present a comprehensive programme for the social integration of the Roma Community²⁴; in parliament, it voted against ideas by the right-wing government of Viktor Orban, such as those introducing a flat income tax, reducing the length of time for the payment of unemployment benefits to 90 days, or penalising homelessness. In cooperation with trade unions, it attempted to push for a referendum on amendments to the Labour Code, objecting to its flexibility at the cost of employee security. The initiative failed due to an insufficient number of signatures.²⁵

20 At the last programme congress, the Polish Greens decided to strike down the mention in the economic resolution draft about the gradual shortening of working time, expressing the need for further discussion on this topic.

21 *Work More? Work Less? What should be done so that we all can work and perform better?*, Green European Foundation, Brussels 2011, http://www.gef.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/GEF-11-49_En.pdf

22 <http://zeleni.cz>

23 <http://english.lehetmas.hu/>

24 The Green European Foundation issued a special publication on this topic, *Roma and Traveller Inclusion in Europe. Green Questions and Answers*, accessible from: http://www.gef.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/GEF_11_10_Roma_and_Traveler_Inclusion_web_final.pdf

25 *LMP failed to collect sufficient signatures for referendum*, Politics.hu, 3.4.2012 r.,

The social programme of the Polish Greens

The first mention of social issues could be seen in the founding charter, the 'Green Manifesto'²⁶ of the Polish Greens 2004 – adopted at the founding convention in 2003. The party, which was established by people involved in social movements such as ecological, feminist, pacifist and LGBT at a time when the governments of the Democratic Left Alliance were rejecting their own, left-wing agenda, initially focused, to a great extent, on taking post-materialistic themes known to its members from current, largely NGO activities. The 'Manifesto' raised the idea of social justice which, in social policy, was meant to be implemented through an NGO-based struggle with social problems (poverty, unemployment, homelessness). The electoral programme of 2005²⁷ was more specific. Proposals included creating jobs in the environmental protection sector, the development of housing, maintaining free higher education, restoring the maintenance fund for lonely mothers, returning to the health care fund for health care, and for the state to focus on preventative care.

Discussions on the role of the state in social policy found a voice in 2010 – three of the four programme resolutions adopted by the Party Congress at the time related to this area. The 'social policy priorities'²⁸ indicated a development of the foundations of the political philosophy of the Polish Greens to social issues: to balance flexibility and security in the labour market, focus on the creation of new jobs in the green economic sector instead of pushing people to find non-existing jobs on the labour market, introduction of a mandatory paternal leave for at least one month, increased spending for social benefits to at least the European Union average, and increased premiums paid to people on parental leave. Apart from repeated proposals for a greater role in prevention, there was also a demand to maintain the public health care system in its programme resolution, 'Health for All'²⁹. This included hospitals, improvements in the accessibility of high-quality pre-natal care benefits and cooperation with the staff and local communities in the management of health institutions. The resolution 'Education is a right, not a

commodity'³⁰, supported the proposals to include preschool care under education subsidies, to improve the availability of medical care and psychological services in schools, and also to include minorities and the poor in high-quality education at every level.

The elections of 2011 were a period of very intensive work on the programme proposals for the Polish Greens. The party congress adopted resolutions (or authorised the National Council to continue work and adoption) concerning: a green economic vision³¹, the labour market³², the pension system³³, and higher education³⁴. Proposals to increase marketization and to restrict the scope of free higher education through the introduction of a second area of study for all apart from 10% of students with the best academic results were critically assessed. The party were in favour of limiting the maximum level of contributions to the private pension schemes at 3% of the salary and equalising the age of retirement for men and women at 65 (with the possibility of early retirement for people working in jobs which may be harmful to their health). Proposals were also supported for uniform contributions to the social security systems regardless of employment type, which aimed at reducing bogus self-employment and the existence of so-called 'junk jobs', mandatory wages for students in company internships, as well as supporting the growth of unionisation and increasing representativeness of employer organisations and the social economic sector (i.e. Cooperatives). These resolutions were the basis of the electoral programme entitled, 'A green tomorrow without fear'.³⁵

Looking to the future

30 <http://zieloni2004.pl/art-3674.htm>

31 *Zielona Gospodarka (The Green Economy)*, <http://zieloni2004.pl/art-4290.htm>

32 *W stronę godnej pracy – propozycje Zielonych dla polskiego rynku pracy (Towards dignified work – Green propositions for the Polish labour market)*, <http://zieloni2004.pl/art-4289.htm>

33 *Godne życie w złotym wieku – zielone założenia systemu emerytalnego (Worthy of living in the golden age – the Green establishment of the pension system)*, <http://zieloni2004.pl/art-4291.htm>

34 *Uniwersytet dla demokratycznego społeczeństwa. Priorytety programowe Zielonych w dziedzinie nauki i szkolnictwa wyższego (University for a democratic society. Green programme priorities in the field of science and higher education)*, <http://zieloni2004.pl/art-4306.htm>

35 http://zieloni2004.pl/program_wyborczy.pdf

<http://www.politics.hu/20120403/lmp-fail-to-collected-sufficient-signatures-for-referendum/>

26 <http://zieloni2004.pl/art-29.htm>

27 <http://zieloni2004.pl/download/program2005.pdf>

28 <http://zieloni2004.pl/art-3672.htm>

29 <http://zieloni2004.pl/art-3671.htm>

There is still a lot of debate about the future of social policies and the green policies on these issues. The Greens are still inclined towards a more universal, rather than selective system of benefits and public services; however, they must deal with the challenge of finding sources of financing at a time of budget cuts. Simultaneously, they must convince society to believe in their ideas in a situation in which, as in Central Europe, ecology is less associated with modernisation, green jobs in new sectors of the economy and the quality of life, and more with sacrifices and a threat to employment in industry.

By promoting the concept of a Green New Deal, ecopolitical parties have begun to experience political success. These include maintaining the position of the fourth largest power in the European Parliament after elections in 2009ⁱ, the first seats gained in the first-past the post systems in UKⁱⁱ, Canadianⁱⁱⁱ and Australian^{iv} parliaments, as well as the first post of prime minister in history in one of the most industrialised German states – Baden-Württemberg.^v

The growing importance of Green political power still primarily applies, however, to the most developed countries of Western and Northern Europe. In most of the countries of Southern and Central Europe, Asia, and Africa, there is an absence of strong Green political parties. A lot of work – be it in policy or in the internal organisation – is still before them.

i <http://greens-efa.eu>

ii <http://www.carolinelucas.com>

iii <http://elizabethmaymp.ca/>

iv <http://adam-bandt.greensmps.org.au/>

v <http://www.winfried-kretschmann.de/>

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With support of the European Parliament.

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