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**Radical Environmentalism for the 1990's?**  
**An Editorial**

By Imanuel Arin

The Environmental movement in this country has gone through a dramatic change over the past ten years. The enthusiasm created by a united front of environmentalism in the late 1960's and early 1970's has diminished markedly, due in large part to the fragmentation of the movement into groups with radically different ideologies and approaches. At one end of the spectrum are environmental organizations which have sought to exact policy changes through the existing political framework; at the other end are those groups which have employed militant tactics to accomplish their environmental imperatives. While mainstream groups have been relatively successful in their efforts, the actions of radical environmentalist groups have harmed the movement as a whole.

Radical environmentalism is a movement which advocates violence as a tactic to combat the destruction of the environment. At the root of radical environmentalism is biocentrism, or "deep ecology," a philosophy which holds that all life on this planet has a right to exist and humans have no right to dominate or destroy it. Groups such as Earth First! and Sea Shepard believe that corporate extremism begets environmental extremism, and consequently saving the environment requires nothing less than a cultural revolution.

As the mainstream organizations have grown, claim radical groups, so have they come to resemble the federal and corporate bureaucracies they were designed to monitor. The shift away from activism to lobbying and litigation has left many radicals impatient and frustrated. They worry that the existence of "professional environmentalists" may dissuade lay-people from becoming involved in solving the environmental problems which face everyone. Radical groups' response to this dilemma has been to advocate and employ "monkey-wrenching," that is, direct, illegal and often violent action against perceived threats to the environment. "Monkey-wrenching" efforts to date have included pouring sand into gas tanks of bulldozers, pounding metal spikes into trees to thwart loggers, and even plotting to blow up the Glen Canyon Dam in Arizona.

Are the radical environmental groups correct? Has the movement become too professionalized? And have radical tactics proven effective? Clearly not! It is not a strategic mistake, as these radical groups insist, to pursue legislative and legal avenues to combat the destruction of our environment. In the midst of the industrial and economic explosion which occurred during the Reagan Administration, the more passive groups understood that the general public was not willing to sacrifice economic opportunity for environmental quality. The popularity of the Reagan Administration made it necessary for effective environmental groups to shift their focus from criticism of the government's pro-corporate policies to setting out a positive agenda.

Today the majority of these groups downplay the moral component of the environmental issues they pursue. They motivate people and politicians through expertise, not inflammatory rhetoric. The non-confrontational approach the leaders of the more passive groups have chosen should be commended. It has created a new image for the environmental groups as problem solvers, not screamers. At a time when the business and industrial communities have many friends in the federal government and the courts, these groups give legitimacy to the environmental movement, allowing it to survive in the political climate of, and following the Reagan years.

The new breed of environmental leaders have been effective in separating their ideals from the realistic and attainable goals that will bring us all a better quality of life in the future. The most successful environmental groups have learned to work within the existing framework of political change. Though their tasks are far from complete, the new breed of mainstream environmentalists are poised to make a considerable impact on government policy in the 1990's and beyond. Their consistent non-confrontational approach has given the environmental movement credibility, despite the wanton acts of a few radical environmental groups.