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1

Environmental Protest in France

Since the late 1980s, there has been a significant resurgence in the scale and breadth of environmental protest in France. For those familiar with much of the existing literature on the French Green movement, this observation may seem surprising. This is because some of the most widely known – and often, indeed, best – accounts tend to confine extraparliamentary environmental protest to an initial phase in the construction of national party structures (Les Verts were formed in 1984). Indeed, the conclusion drawn by numerous observers is that the French environmental movement has been demobilised and institutionalised; several studies even argue that extraparliamentary environmental protest has declined to a point of insignificance in France, having been replaced almost entirely by partisan politics (see Prendiville and Chafer, 1990; Faucher and Doherty, 1996). Much discussion of the French Green movement consequently focuses on elections, party construction, and intra- and inter-party conflict (e.g. Shull, 1992; Holliday, 1994). That this shift is mirrored elsewhere in western industrial democracies, and is set against a backdrop of increasing incentives to party formation and possibilities of electoral success afforded by the institutions of the French state, only makes this shift seem all the more powerful and convincing.

This chapter paints a somewhat different picture. Green party formation, although clearly a highly important development, should not be viewed as having entirely displaced extraparliamentary protest; in fact, both forms of action have continued to exist, and even flourish, in recent years. On one level, this chapter – indeed, this book – aims to restore the balance, highlighting the wealth of campaigns, organisations and issues which have been major features of the French local and national political landscape over the past 15 years or so. It asks the

central question: given that structural trends seem to point to the institutionalisation of the Green movement, and that the evidence of the institutional changes that have occurred in France over the past 25 years in particular have increased the incentives for challenger groups to develop partisan, election-fighting structures, how can we account for the renaissance of environmental protest? Does it simply represent a continuation of the protest of the 1970s after a brief lull, or have there been significant developments in the strategies, discourses and actions deployed by environmental movement organisations (EMOs) in France in the 1990s? Perhaps even more pertinently, this chapter asks what this resurgence tells us about the political and institutional framework in which protest groups operate: to what extent has the political context itself changed? Starting with the literature on the development of Green politics in France, this chapter therefore introduces and contextualises the themes which structure the analysis which will be developed throughout this book.

Narratives of environmental politics: from protest to institutionalisation

Narratives seeking to explain the emergence of environmental politics in France have typically focused on the identification of successive developmental phases (e.g. Parkin, 1989; Bennahmias and Roche, 1992; Prendiville, 1993). In such accounts, the organisation of 'biodegradable' structures to fight elections, first seen at local level in Alsace in 1973, and then organised at national level with René Dumont's presidential campaign in 1974, properly belongs to a second phase. In a first, overlapping, phase, isolated protest on diverse issues (including the construction of a winter sports station in the Vanoise national park in 1969, and the Fessenheim and Bugey nuclear reactor projects of 1971) heralds a period of mass extraparliamentary activity centring on the nuclear energy programme announced in the 1974 *Plan Messmer*. For Chaudron and Le Pape (1979, pp. 27–30), this development is primarily ideological; whereas the Vanoise conflict was fought by a first generation of conservationists organised around the Fédération Française des sociétés de protection de la nature (FFSPN), the early 1970s saw the emergence of a second generation of protest within a much more radical *mouvement écologique*.

Where the first generation had focused on wildlife protection, the second developed a critique of France's social, political and economic institutions centring on the perceived technocratic confiscation of power.

Indeed, the sheer extent of the nuclear energy programme was central to the development of environmental opposition, as groups focusing on individual siting and procedural concerns were able to forge links with similar bodies throughout France. At the same time, this geographical spread of opposition brought about a broadening of analyses and demands, as we shall examine more closely in this chapter. High-profile conflicts such as the opposition to proposed nuclear reactors at Plogoff and Le Pellerin in Brittany, and the Superphénix Fast Breeder Reactor at Creys-Malville in Isère (as well as the campaign against the extension of a military camp on the Larzac plateau), both testified to the strength of the movement during the early 1970s and acted as a catalyst for its development within a broad countercultural movement, a phenomenon recognised in Dumont's campaign.

Following the entry of the Socialists into government in 1981, a third phase centres on the construction in 1984 of a national party. Strategic battles over the positioning of Les Verts within the French party system characterise the narratives of the party's initial development, culminating in its breakthrough at the 1989 municipal and European elections. Finally, a fourth phase seeks to explain the challenge of *Génération Écologie* and the repositioning of Les Verts within the party system (for example Cole and Doherty, 1995; Szarka, 1994). Stress has subsequently been placed on the latter party's commitment to social issues, such as the PaCS and the reduction of the working week, its success in the 1997 legislative elections, and the appointment of three Green ministers in the Jospin coalition government, perhaps most notably Dominique Voynet as *Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Aménagement du Territoire* from 1997–2001 (e.g. Szarka, 2000, pp. 28–34).

New social movements and institutionalisation

The identification of these phases is attractive because they are congruent with a body of macrostructural literature on the emergence of Green politics in affluent western polities, including Europe, North America, and Australasia. The development of environmental politics in France can accordingly be seen as part of the emergence of 'new social movements' primarily, although not exclusively, in western Europe. Studies of the membership and electoral profiles of the French Greens have, as elsewhere, identified a relatively young, highly educated, predominantly middle-class constituency (Bennahmias and Roche, 1992). The formation of Les Verts in 1984 can similarly be placed within the cross-national context of the development of what Kitschelt (1993) terms 'left-libertarian' and Müller-Rommel (1990) and Poguntke (1987) 'new

politics' parties. Drawing on the theory of 'intergenerational value change' (Inglehart, 1977), numerous observers have argued that the development of Green parties in France and elsewhere is a consequence of the inability of established parties to aggregate new demands (Müller-Rommel, 1985, pp. 484–91; Kaase, 1990, pp. 94–7).

Principally, this is because the established parties predominantly focus on class interests and material concerns, while the new demands are advanced by a significant constituency of citizens with postmaterial values. Moreover, the differences are not limited to values, but are also present in the set of social action repertoires associated with these new actors and groups (Dalton, Kuechler and Bürklin, 1990, p. 5). Discussing the specificity of what she refers to as 'new political movements', Nedelmann (1984, pp. 1037–8) argues that they deploy a broad spectrum of mobilisation strategies, incorporating both the conventional and the unconventional. Yet their distrust of established political institutions and forms of interest intermediation leads them particularly to seek alternative, non-institutionalised practices and channels of influence. Similarly, new politics parties display new forms of organisation, rejecting hierarchical, disciplined, leadership-driven models in favour of participatory, inclusive, devolved policy-making. This, according to Poguntke (1992), can be seen as the practice of an 'unconventional' political style.

Of course, this analysis is not without its detractors; both Alber (1989) and Bürklin (1987), for instance, argue that the success of the German Greens can be predominantly explained by the conjunctural presence in the economy of alienated, highly educated age cohorts rather than by systemic value change. Yet the new social movement paradigm does enable groups such as the Greens to be seen as more than simply an outlet for demands which traditional parties tend to neglect. Indeed, the NSM analysis underlines the structural challenge posed by such groups, threatening not merely policy decisions but the mode of interest representation in western party systems itself. Correspondingly, EMOs throughout the industrialised West are also commonly held to have undergone a number of historical phases similar to those identified in France. These are, first, an overriding concern with nature protection and conservation; second, political radicalisation in the 1960s and 1970s; and third, their growing acceptance as legitimate actors working within policy-making arenas.

Naturally, we should be wary of simply casting the development of EMOs within a straight 'progression of institutionalisation' narrative. To this effect, Diani and Donati (1999, pp. 22–3) underline the recent emergence of radical, grass-roots environmental groups in a number

of western states, while Rootes (1997a, pp. 326–9) identifies a dynamic of institutionalisation and radicalisation across western environmental movements. As established groups institutionalise, they are outflanked by newer more radical organisations, producing a paradigm where ‘local, informal action gives rise to new formal organizations which are in turn challenged by new local, informal action and so on, ad infinitum’. Yet despite the persistence of radical group formation, narratives of Green party development essentially remain narratives of movement institutionalisation.

Institutionalisation, however, takes more than one form; Van der Heijden (1997), indeed, distinguishes between organisational growth, the evolution of action repertoires, and the development of external relationships, particularly with established power centres. As we have seen in France, the environmental movement is primarily seen as having been institutionalised on the first of these counts, principally through the development of formal party structures. Yet institutionalisation, particularly in other western polities, is frequently also apparent on the third count; the movement’s maintenance as a non-partisan structure is often countered by its increased integration into established non-parliamentary forms and processes of interest representation. Thus according to Rootes (1999b, p. 155), ‘EMOs have been accorded at least some measure of institutionalised access to decision-making arenas’ in all the principal northern and western European states in recent years. And despite the emphasis on unconventional behaviour in much of the early movement analyses, confrontational strategies have increasingly given way to more conventional and consensual forms of activism since the late 1980s, as ‘institution-building appears gradually to be replacing confrontational politics’ (Diani and Donati, 1999, pp. 17–18). According to Tarrow (1995a, p. 241), ‘environmentalism [had] become essentially a “consensus movement” in individual European states’ by the 1990s.

The persistence of environmental protest

Narratives of the development of Green politics in France are clearly useful for explaining the development of environmentalism during Fifth Republic France, particularly given that – after all – they are so frequently employed to analyse the development of specifically partisan formations. Yet these narratives also tend to assume such development to be a teleological process. While they do not necessarily explicitly argue each phase to be discrete, they nonetheless point to a sense of ineluctable historical causality which privileges the final phase. Indeed,

even Les Verts' own website adopts a four-phase structure to describe its own development, underlining the party's own sense of its seemingly inevitable progression to power and influence. But while such phased narratives successfully highlight the emergence of a nationally coordinated, election-fighting, office-holding party organisation, they seem less able to account for the continued importance of extraparliamentary mobilisation on environmental issues in France. The next section of this chapter, then, aims to provide such an explanation, discussing two features of recent protest in particular; these are, first, the connection between protest and party success, and second, the changing pattern of mobilisation.

Party performance and extraparliamentary protest

The link between extraparliamentary action and electoral success is made apparent by the results of the 1997 legislative elections. Of the seven Green *députés* elected, André Aschieri and Marie-Hélène Aubert are closely identified with local opposition to infrastructural projects. Aschieri is thus known for his resistance to the A8bis/A58 motorway project on the Côte d'Azur, while Aubert was elected in the Eure-et-Loir *département* on a platform of opposition to the proposal to construct a third Parisian airport at Beauvilliers, near Chartres. Indeed, she was elected by directly beating the project's primary sponsor, Maurice Dousset, who had been UDF *député* for the constituency since 1973, and at the time was also president of the Centre regional council (see below for further discussion of this project). Of the other Greens elected, Yves Cochet was 'parachuted' into the Val d'Oise *département*, to fight and win in a constituency characterised by strong opposition to the construction of two further runways at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle airport; and Voynet herself is strongly linked with opposition to the Rhine-Rhône canal in Dôle. Further, that Danielle Auroi was able to take Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, former president of France and current president of the regional council, to a second-round run-off was a considerable achievement, founded on local opposition to the council's Centre Européen des Volcans (CEV) project.

This connection is far from novel in the development of the French environmental movement, and has already been often discussed (Sainteny, 1991, p. 105; Shull, 1996, pp. 229–30). Yet in these accounts, local issue movements have primarily been of interest only as a means of explaining spectacular or anomalous electoral performances by Les Verts, Génération Écologie or other Green party formations. In at least one account, local environmental campaigns are actually represented as

a constraining factor on the development of Les Verts, in so far as the high visibility of environmental issues may have impeded the party from effectively presenting elements of its programme less directly related to narrowly defined 'Green' issues. O'Neill, for example, claims that 'even after the movement did acquire a national presence as a party of protest, it remained electorally disadvantaged by its persistent image as a single-issue party – with the status of being little more than a pressure group that fielded local candidates' (1997, p. 180). Perhaps as a consequence, key decisions such as the cancellation of the Serre de la Fare dam or the rerouting of the approach road to the Somport tunnel have at times attracted attention more as a demonstration of the possibilities of institutional action than as the fruit of extraparliamentary protest (e.g. Prendiville, 1993, p. 78).

The importance of protest group organisation also tends to be downplayed. The emphasis on partisan politics in much of the literature on French Green politics has occasionally led to the accordance of a primary role to Les Verts within the organisation of local protest, even though opposition is generally organised by local associations (e.g. Whiteside, 1992, pp. 17–19). The direct role of Les Verts within local conflicts, rather than one of organisation, tends in reality to be limited to symbolic support; indeed, where the party is present in protest groups, it is frequently on the same basis as a host of other political formations. (*Génération Écologie*, for its part, enjoys little confidence from activists within the associative sector.) In many cases, in fact, Les Verts have been slow to respond to potentially environmentally damaging projects, only belatedly following action carried out by local groups. Thus the unanimous approval of the regional budget by an Auvergne regional council including three Verts and two *Génération Écologie* councillors in December 1994 enabled Giscard to claim unanimous cross-partisan support for the CEV, and the initial reluctance of the Greens to oppose the TGV-Méditerranée project was severely criticised by the *Coordination associative régionale de défense de l'environnement* (CARDE), which formed to oppose the scheme in the Bouches du Rhône *département*. It was only after 5000 demonstrators gathered in front of the Hôtel Matignon in September 1990 that Les Verts showed enthusiasm for the issue, by which time relationships between party and protesters had declined to one of mistrust (Perrier, 1993, pp. 35–6).

As has already been observed, narratives of the development of political ecology in France tend to confine extraparliamentary protest to a 1970s pre-partisan phase of organisation. In an analysis which has

achieved wide currency, Prendiville and Chafer (1990, p. 198) identify a transformation from what we consider to have been an embryonic social movement in the 1970s to a fully fledged political party with principally environmentalist concerns. The latter would seem at present to have replaced the former, rather than becoming simply an indispensable political arm of a broader social movement.

By the same token, and despite isolated examples of continued extra-parliamentary protest on the issue, Rucht (1994, p. 136) concluded that there was 'hardly any reason to assume the existence of a vital anti-nuclear movement in France' after the 1970s. Duyvendak, observing the same decline in anti-nuclear protest in France in the 1980s, offers two explanations. First, he argues, activists were affected by 'cognitive dissonance'; in other words, anti-nuclear mobilisation declined because 'the French no longer considered nuclear energy dangerous (or at least, not as dangerous as they had previously thought during the period of mobilisation)' (1995, p. 35). Second, along with Kriesi (1995a, pp. 186–9; 1995b, pp. 76–8), Duyvendak proposes an explanation reliant on an analysis of the political opportunities available to protest groups within the French polity. This subject will be discussed at much greater length in the next chapter, but it is useful here to adopt Brockett's (1991, p. 254) broad definition of the structure of political opportunities as 'the configuration of forces in a (potential or actual) group's political environment that influences that group's assertion of its political claims'.

According to Duyvendak, one factor in the configuration of forces interacting with the French anti-nuclear movement was particularly important: the presence, attitude, and influence of political allies. Indeed, because of the fundamental importance of allies to the potential securing of social movement outcomes in the French political opportunity structure, the victory of Mitterrand and the Parti Socialiste in May and June 1981 was a determinant influence in the demobilisation of the anti-nuclear movement. Faced with the loss of the prospect of change after the refusal of the new government to fulfil its election promises and halt the nuclear energy programme, the movement collapsed. In fact, for the environmental movement as a whole, the change inspired by the victory of the Left in 1981 was 'linear, unambiguous, negative' (Duyvendak, 1995, p. 128). Lacking allies in government, and faced with a strong, centralised, and repressive state, 'opponents of nuclear energy in France [...] have largely given up their struggle and to some extent have even bent their viewpoints to the inevitable', argue Duyvendak and Koopmans (1995, p. 160).

Yet attention to individual cases of extraparliamentary protest on environmental issues, and to the emergence of general trends in association membership, tend to belie such negative analyses. Indeed, far from becoming insignificant in France, environmental protest began to enjoy a renaissance from the end of the 1980s, in terms of geographical spread, issue range, and numerical force. Trom recently noted that

Not a day goes by without our regional and national newspapers reporting a case of local opposition, in the name of 'nature' protection, to an infrastructure project – whether it be a regional development scheme initiated by public authorities, such as a new road or TGV line, the canalisation of a water course, or the erection of high-tension electricity pylons, or a privately-funded project benefitting from the benevolent agreement of the public authorities. (1999, p. 31)

Most conspicuously, 10,000 demonstrators came together in Le Puy in April 1989 to protest against the Serre de la Fare dam, similar numbers gathered in the Aspe valley in 1992 and 1994 to demonstrate against the Somport tunnel, and in Besançon in 1996 to protest against the Rhine–Rhône canal. In spring 1997, between 30,000 and 40,000 gathered outside Nantes for a two-day festival in opposition to a proposed nuclear power station at Le Carnet on the Loire estuary. Indeed, anti-nuclear activism in France has since been highly visible, focusing in particular on the search for a suitable waste disposal site by the ANDRA (Agence nationale de gestion de déchets radioactifs) state agency. Demonstrations in Brittany, the Dordogne, the Orne and the Cantal each attracted up to 10,000 protesters on one weekend alone in April 2000.

Although protests against train movements of nuclear waste have been considerably less strong than in Germany, small groups of activists have maintained guerrilla actions against freight movements: five activists were arrested outside Strasbourg in August 2001, for example, for chaining themselves to the rail tracks in front of the train. Further protests against French nuclear policy, coordinated by the national *Sortir du Nucléaire* network, were held simultaneously in Colmar, Lille, Lyon, Nantes and Toulouse in October 2001, each attracting between 1500 and 4000 demonstrators. These demonstrations took place not in isolation, but rather against a backdrop of widespread protest on environmental issues, including numerous actions against the planned reopening of the Mont Blanc tunnel, and a demonstration in September in Puylaroque, in the French south-west, which mobilised nearly 4000 protesters against a planned industrial pig farm. A march later the same month in Toulouse attracted up to 40,000 protesters, following the

ammonium nitrate explosion in which 29 people were killed, 2500 injured, and 10,000 made homeless. Concerned about possible health risks, local environmental organisations had long demanded the relocation of the AZF chemical plant.

From mass mobilisation to micro-mobilisations

From the outset, any attempt to characterise the extent of extraparliamentary environmental activism in France needs to place the trend firmly in perspective; the proportion of people active within environmental associations is still only about half that for humanitarian groups (Maresca, 1996). Furthermore, while various issues have mobilised five-figure numbers of demonstrators, they have rarely attracted more than 10,000, and the recent numbers have certainly been much lower than the estimated 60,000 recorded at Larzac in 1973, 60,000 at Malville in 1977, or 100,000 at Plogoff in 1980.

Yet these recent mass protests retain their significance because they have developed after a period marked by the decline of associational activity, particularly within the 'new politics' sector. Thus although the proportion of the population claiming to belong to at least one association remained relatively stable throughout the 1980s, this was because a kind of zero-sum game operated: while leisure-oriented, and particularly sporting associations thrived, *les associations militantes* declined in both incidence and membership. Environmental associations were particularly hard hit, with average membership falling from nearly 4 per cent in 1978 to just over 2 per cent in 1984 (Gros, 1985; Haeusler, 1988). Recent studies carried out by Fourel and Volatier (1993), Maresca (1996), and Hatchuel and Loisel (1998), however, have shown that this decline has, at the very least, been arrested. The data show that environmental associations in particular have undergone a partial renaissance since the end of the 1980s, amounting to a second wave of extraparliamentary environmental activism. Maresca charts a recovery from 1988 onwards, with an estimated creation of between 1500 and 2000 new environmental associations per year. The overall figures, giving a total of 5000 to 6000 groups active in France, are, it should be noted, strikingly similar to those given for mobilisation on environmental issues in France in the mid-1970s by Hayward (1978, p. 63) and Wright (1989, pp. 271–2).

In general, these groups have a short life, generally of between three and five years. The majority of members of the group are active, with few 'sleeping' supporters. Groups have tended to organise at municipal level, particularly where urbanisation and industrialisation have bitten into green belt areas; environmental activism has become *une grande cause ... locale*, with groups mobilising against clearly defined, local projects,

often evolving into associations articulating a broader set of local issues (Maresca, 1996). Roch (1996) found that many associations also mobilise at departmental and regional levels; however, whereas the larger organisations tend to be more naturalist in character and favour a more participatory, management-oriented approach, the more localised associations tend to be more 'defensive', or protest-oriented, concentrate on urban infrastructure and quality-of-life issues, and resort consistently to the judicial system. In Lascoumes' terms (1994, pp. 230 ff), these associations tend to mobilise around either a 'single specific' or 'wide range' of localised problem, categories which account for about two thirds of all environmental defence associations in France.

This trend is confirmed by studies carried out by Fillieule on protest activities in three French cities in the 1980s. Analysing the scale, strategies, outcomes, and policing of protest undertaken by a wide range of challenging groups in Paris, Nantes and Marseille, Fillieule found that while the average number of people participating in individual demonstrations had significantly decreased since the 1970s, the number of demonstrations as a whole had undergone a significant increase (1997, p. 75). While mass mobilisations called by unions and parties were on the wane, the 1980s saw the development of 'micro-mobilisations' articulated around a series of *revendications ponctuelles*, or specific single-issue demands (Favre and Fillieule, 1994, p. 131). Thus 60 per cent of events mobilised between 50 and 100 people, and a further 30 per cent mobilised fewer than 50; events gathering between 200 and 500 participants were particularly susceptible to decline. These findings were particularly representative of groups articulating postmaterial demands (Fillieule, 1997, p. 94).

The data produced by influential studies such as that carried out by Kriesi et al. (1995) tend to reveal a very low total number of participants in environmental protest in France. Covering the 1975–89 period, such studies see little evidence for the existence of a 'protest wave' across the new social movement sector as a whole in France, given that the overall numbers for mobilisation are low when compared to other European polities such as Switzerland, West Germany and the Netherlands. Yet it is probable that such studies have consistently underestimated the extent of social protest in France, as they are based on a methodological approach which we should treat with the greatest caution. This is because, as Rootes (1999b, p. 172, n. 21) has pointed out, they attempt to provide a cross-national comparative analysis on the basis of non-comparable sources. To be more precise, such studies are based on data culled from reports published in the Monday editions of one leading

national newspaper per country. The choice of *Le Monde* for France, although ostensibly equivalent (in tone, style, and editorial line) to newspapers such as the German *Frankfurter Rundschau*, the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and the Dutch *NRC/Handelsblad* is in fact highly problematic on at least three counts.

First, this is because the Monday edition of *Le Monde* is actually published on a Sunday, and second, because the paper's news agenda, as Fillieule (1997) underlines, is highly centred on Paris when – as we have seen – environmental protest in particular in France is widespread, but tends to be small-scale and provincial. Third, *Le Monde* is unusually state-centred; the paper's sections are organised to mirror the departments of the state (Fillieule and Ferrier, 2002). Consequently, environmental protest may be underrepresented because it is, as the next chapter argues more fully, intrinsically cross-sectoral, and because the environment ministry is historically the least powerful branch of the administration. If such data is useful, it is primarily because it enables comparisons across time within the same country rather than comparisons between countries; on this basis, we can say that Koopmans' study tends to confirm the trend towards a renaissance in activism at the end of the 1980s. Thus Koopmans records that the total number of participants in environmental protest events was higher in 1989 than at any point over the preceding 15 years (1995, p. 115).

Explaining the resurgence of activism

Such a state of affairs requires an explanation, particularly given the trend to institutionalisation noted above. This section, then, will summarise a number of the developments that have been central to the persistence of extraparliamentary environmental protest in France. Chief among these are the continued existence of localised grievances, but also the effects of institutional decentralisation.

The persistence of grievances

In his analysis of the emergence of Green issues and politics in Britain during the late 1960s and early 1970s, Lowe (1986, p. 71) notes that conflicts over planning and land-use act as a prime catalyst for the development of environmental protest. To be sure, the objective identification of grievances is not in itself a sufficient factor for explaining protest group mobilisation. Indeed, examining anti-nuclear activism across European states, Duyvendak and Koopmans found no direct relationship between the extent of the problem and the level of mobilisation (1995, p. 162).

As Persanyi (1993, p. 139) puts it, 'environmental degradation is not enough. If it were, the strongest environmental movements would be in Third World countries, where environmental decay is now among the worst in the world.' Understanding social movement trajectories requires analysis of numerous factors, therefore, most prominently group resources and the structure of available political opportunities, both of which will be returned to at length in the next chapter. Here, however, it is necessary to emphasise that while the presence of grievances is not a *sufficient* condition for protest, it is a necessary *first* or *pre-condition* for it.

As we have already seen, environmental protest in France in the 1970s was primarily visible when mobilised against two different types of project: state-led development of tourism infrastructure and national energy policy in the form of nuclear power installations. Even in the case of the nuclear programme, despite the construction of protest as a wider critique of the state, activism intensified in the immediate aftermath of governmental policy and siting decisions (Chaudron and Le Pape, 1979, pp. 57–8). It is interesting then to note that, in this second wave of activism, protest has again predominantly formed in opposition to major infrastructural projects, with tourist and transport development schemes at the forefront of environmental action campaigns. Since the decision taken by the Auvergne regional council in 1992 to construct the Centre Européen des Volcans on the edge of the protected regional park, for example, some 25 different environmental associations have grouped together within the Comité de liaison de sauvegarde des volcans d'Auvergne (CLSVA) to oppose the scheme. Whereas environmental protesters consider the project to be environmentally damaging, superfluous, expensive and ill-located, the regional council promises economic regeneration, tourist expansion, and transport infrastructural development. According to Giscard, in an October 1995 speech to the regional council,

This project will create an attractive modern image for the Auvergne, and will be seen as a successful marriage of our region's historical identity and its ability to adapt. It will be a very important element in the image of the Auvergne as both a French and European region, will preserve our natural heritage, and will contribute to the tourist and economic development of the region as a whole.

In particular, environmental campaigns have organised in opposition to TGV railway lines (see Perrier, 1993; Fourniau, 1997; Lolive, 1997), and road construction projects, specifically the vast motorway building

programme launched by the *Plan Mehaignerie* of April 1987, which had the intention of increasing France's motorway capacity from 7000 to 12,000km within the subsequent 15-year period (see Chapter 6). Les Verts set up a 'Comité national contre les excès routiers' in October 1990, and the A1 and A16 motorway construction projects were major tests of the alliance with the Parti Socialiste within the Nord-Pas de Calais regional council in 1992.

However, opposition to motorway construction projects has been particularly prominent at the associative level. In the spring of 1992, France Nature Environnement (FNE) launched a series of roads protests in conjunction with other high-profile regional, national and European organisations under the title 'Autoroutes, overdose!'¹ More recently, the A51 between Grenoble and Sisteron, the proposed A75 viaduct over the Tarn valley at Millau in the Aveyron, the exact route of the A85 along the Loire from Tours to Angers or that of the A83 through classed fenland between Nantes and Niort and, as we shall see in Chapter 7, the Somport tunnel through the Pyrenees, have all attracted popular resistance and the establishment of single issue action movements. Of the 60 'territorial flashpoints' identified by *Le Monde* in June 1997, over half were infrastructural projects, the vast majority transport schemes.²

The third Paris airport and 'nimby' protests

Perhaps the most widespread and sustained recent actions have been mobilised against the plan to construct a new international airport at Chaulnes near Amiens in the Somme, 125 km north-east of Paris. Barring significant revisions to the project, construction work on the airport – essentially designed to relieve passenger congestion at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle and Orly – is scheduled to begin in 2010, with the first flight five years later. By 2020, Chaulnes is scheduled to be a fully operational four-runway airport, as an initial passenger capacity of 30 million/year will have the potential to be increased to 50 million/year in a second phase of development. The initial projected cost of the project, including a vastly expanded motorway and high-speed rail TGV infrastructure linking the site with Charles de Gaulle, ranges from 40 to 60 Mdf.

The decision to build the 'third Paris airport' goes back to 1993, when the Balladur government commissioned a study in response to the hostility of residents in the Roissy area to the extension of Charles de Gaulle. After further studies, the subsequent Juppé government decided in June 1996 to construct a new airport at Beauvilliers, 90 km south-west of Paris. However, following concerted opposition to the choice of Beauvilliers, led by the Collectif contre l'aéroport, an umbrella organisation federating

consumers', environmental, and inhabitants' associations, Lionel Jospin announced his opposition to the project during the 1997 legislative election campaign, and subsequently froze any future plans following the *Gauche plurielle's* victory.

Within three years, however, Jospin was to revoke his decision. Following transport minister Jean-Claude Gayssot's commitment to limit the capacity of Charles de Gaulle airport to 55 million passengers per year (a promise made, despite the airport's nominal capacity of 80 million passengers/year, in response to complaints by inhabitants' associations protesting at the noise and atmospheric pollution levels at Roissy) and the Air France Concorde crash at Gonesse on 25 July 2000, in which 112 people died, in October 2000 Jospin announced the creation of the DUCSAI (*Démarche d'Utilité Concertée pour un Site Aéroportuaire International*) commission to review the choice of a site for the project. Set up within the framework of the *Commission nationale du débat public* (CNDP) introduced in 1995, the DUCSAI held a series of public consultative meetings throughout France in the spring of 2001, before publishing a list of eight potential sites, including both Beauvilliers and Chaulnes, in September 2001. A second series of public meetings, held in the vicinity of each of the retained sites, was then organised before the final report was submitted to the government the following month.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the nominated sites have been the focus for numerous protest actions. Demonstrations have regularly attracted between one and five thousand protesters, petitions have flourished, associations have mobilised. In October 2001, former CFDT railway workers' leader Bruno Dalberto, standing on the single-issue platform of opposition to a third airport in the Paris region, was only narrowly defeated by the sitting right-wing candidate at a departmental council by-election in the solid conservative constituency of Neufchâtel-sur-Aisne. In such villages as Amifontaine and Prouvais, close to the mooted site of Juvincourt, Dalberto even gained over 50 per cent of the first-round vote. The meetings organised by the DUCSAI commission have been far from conducive to rational debate, typically providing only an arena for displays of hostility between opposing camps, and for mutual incomprehension between local inhabitants and administrative officials. Eggs were thrown at the commissioners at one meeting in Laon in September.

It is tempting to label such protests as archetypal *nimby* responses, particularly in the light of the emergence of a second campaign, led this time by a collective of over fifty environmental and residents' associations

in favour of the third airport project. Thus one demonstration was held in Paris in November 2001 to protest against the noise and atmospheric pollution suffered by those living near Orly, Roissy, and the smaller Paris airport at Le Bourget; the protest called for relief to be given to residents by diverting future traffic to an urgently required new international airport (preferably – though not necessarily – at Vatry, an already existing freight terminal near Reims with a low surrounding population density). Moreover, Jospin's decision to authorise the controversial project in November 2001, only six months away from presidential and legislative elections – and when doubts about the validity of passenger growth forecasts following the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States would have seemed to provide a plausible, even compelling reason to delay the decision until after the elections – can perhaps best be explained by the desire to forestall continued protest by residents near the other mooted sites. At first sight, it would seem therefore that individual concerns outweighed environmental consciousness in the anti-airport protest. Yet even given these factors, there are numerous sound reasons, both conceptual and empirical, which should lead us to avoid the nimby description.

The term nimby implies that protesters are acting in only the narrowest of self-interest, and that they would support a similar construction project if it were sited in a different locality. In fact, though widely used in British accounts of localised land-use conflicts, the term is rarely used in France (with the exception of a number of academic analyses which borrow the term with specific reference to the Anglo-Saxon literature) either by activists or observers; as should be apparent from the preceding discussion, the more descriptive terms *collectifs de riverains* (local residents' collectives) and *comités de défense de quartier* (neighbourhood defence committees) are preferred. But aside from linguistic differences, the principal argument against the adoption of the nimby label is that it replicates the paradigm placed on protest by project developers; from the outset, it imposes one partisan-determined frame over the many possible competing analytical frames, and obscures investigation of the motivations and composition of protest groups. Starting from this assumption, it is perhaps not surprising that accounts of so-called nimby protests have frequently identified a process of radicalisation of local inhabitants by outside activists introducing a wider ideological critique. As Cathles (2000, p. 175) points out in her study of environmental protests in Britain, this assumption presumes a one-way flow of ideas and undervalues the contribution of local campaigners to protest

actions, creating

artificial and unjustifiable divisions. It gives the moral high-ground to eco-radicals and patronisingly presents local campaigners as having to be educated by camp protesters before they can be regarded as members of the global environmental movement. In reality there are differing levels of understanding of local issues and awareness of wider global issues among both groups, and there are members of both whose motivations are personal as well as political. Local campaigners are often very well informed and do not necessarily start from the classic NIMBY position.

Moreover, local campaigns need to be seen in the context of competing claims to legitimacy, particularly where protest involves physical direct action against projects which have been authorised through democratic policy-making structures enjoying wide acceptance. The commitment of actors to local campaigns does not necessarily imply their acceptance of similar projects in other areas, but rather their awareness that action needs to be seen as representative in order to challenge the outcomes of consensual decision-making. In contrast, as the campaigns analysed in detail in Chapters 5 and 7 demonstrate, a key feature of the discourses of project-sponsoring élites is to identify protesters as outsiders who have no legitimacy to speak for the community.

Like the protest groups formed in Picardie and Champagne-Ardenne, the Beauvilliers 'Collectif contre l'aéroport' certainly underscores the localised environmental, economic and social problems associated with the development, but places them within such broader concerns as the accentuation of regional developmental imbalances, the unreliability of current passenger forecasts, the contribution of air traffic to CO₂ emissions and the obligations of the Kyoto agreement, the promotion of rail-air travel complementarity, and concerns over the saturation of European airspace. Far from wanting it to be located elsewhere, the organisation has consistently argued that the third airport should not be built at all. It is significant that 20 associations from the three regions concerned came together to organise joint protests and form the SUCSAI collective (Synergie Unitaire pour une Contestation d'un Système Aéroportuaire Inadapté, which translates directly as Unitary synergy to challenge an unadapted airport system). Adopting the slogan 'Ni ici, ni ailleurs, mais autrement!', the collective is thus opposed to the principle of the third airport, demanding the suspension of the consultation process pending further studies on air transport growth, a relief package for Roissy, and investment instead in TGV links and regional airport hubs.

Decentralisation and environmental protest

One aspect that is immediately apparent from these protests is that whereas dissent on environmental issues in the 1970s typically brought protesters into opposition with the state, since the late 1980s single-issue protest has been predominantly targeted at projects which have been jointly or wholly sponsored by subnational political and economic actors. In fact, many of the projects that have been vigorously opposed by environmental groups during this second wave have been primarily sponsored not by central authorities but by regional and departmental councils in particular. Indeed, the association of local *notables* (or political grandees) with infrastructural projects contested by environmental associations over the last decade is striking. The role of regional economic and political élites in lobbying central government to proceed with the seemingly mythical Rhine–Rhône canal project is now well documented (Hayward, 1982; Loridan, 1997), and – as we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5 – finds a parallel in western France with the Loire dam scheme. Also in the French west, the construction of the Pont du Ré was heavily sponsored by local political élites, primarily within the Charente Maritime departmental council, which had taken in principal the decision to link the Île de Ré with La Rochelle in 1974. Local political consensus behind the project was absolute and cross-partisan, even including Michel Crépeau, former environment minister and mayor of La Rochelle. Yet the scheme was not given the green light until the 1982 *lois Defferre* on decentralisation, which enhanced the powers and budgets of subnational authorities and devolved planning and construction decisions, had provided the necessary financial and psychological impetus.

Local and regional élites, anxious to attract economic investment and employment, have frequently been key supporters or proposers of infrastructure projects; René Monory, president of the Vienne departmental council, was the driving force behind the construction of the Poitiers *Futuroscope*, while Giscard is of course one of the greatest *notables* of them all (although the Centre Européen des Volcans has officially been rebaptised *Vulcania* after a schools competition, personally adjudicated by the former President of the Republic, the development is commonly known as the *Giscardoscope*). Even where a major infrastructure development has been drawn up at national level, it has frequently been with the close involvement of regional élites, as Alphandéry (1993, pp. 74–5) and Blatrix (1997) argue in their respective studies of the EuroDisney and TGV Méditerranée projects; similarly, local politicians from the Hautes-Alpes *département* long demanded the (since cancelled) construction of

the A51 motorway to Gap, in the belief that it would increase the area's economic and social wealth.

The third Paris airport provides an intriguing example of a similar dynamic. On the one hand, subnational authorities and politicians have been at the forefront of a number of campaigns against the project. In the immediate aftermath of the Chaulnes decision, 25 of the 26 mayors in the Chaulnes communauté des communes resigned, while Gilles de Robien, the UDF mayor of Amiens, has been a leading critic of the proposal. The Picardy regional council, and the departmental councils of the Aisne, the Marne, the Oise, and the Somme, all voted against the project, at least during the final consultation stage. Moreover, an initial proposal to build the airport at Rouvilliers near Compiègne was not even retained by the DUCSAI commission after a petition signed by 30,000 people was submitted to the transport ministry by Philippe Marini, Gaullist senator and mayor of Compiègne.

Yet such opposition does not tell the whole story for, on the other hand, only two of the eight sites finally retained were proposed by the state (in fact by the DGAC, Direction générale de l'aviation civile, the French civil aviation authority, a branch of the transport and infrastructure ministry); the others were all promoted by subnational authorities, politicians, or recognised socio-economic organisations such as chambers of commerce and industry (CCIs), which are empowered to manage airports in France (Table 1.1).

The choice of a site north of Paris responds to neither of the government's objectives in increasing air corridor safety or promoting the development of economically and demographically disadvantaged regions. The choice of Chaulnes thus apparently responds primarily to the agenda of the air transport lobby, in particular Air France, which is ensured straightforward logistical coordination with its main operation at Roissy. Yet the bidding process has enabled the state to mobilise public and private subnational actors in support of sectoral objectives, legitimising the nomination procedure and underlining the airport's role as a lead project in local economic development.

Thus the primary sponsor of the Chaulnes bid was not the state but Maxime Gremetz, Communist *député* for the Somme, backed by the departmental federation of the PCF and Vincent Peillon, the national spokesman for the Parti Socialiste. Charles Baur, Conservative president of the Picardie regional council, was the original prime lobbying force behind Chaulnes before 1997, while influential professional and small business associations, such as the Union des Industries des Métiers de la Métallurgie and the Confédération Générale des Petites et Moyennes

Table 1.1 The eight potential sites for the third Paris airport, and their principal promoters

Site	Département	Région	Principal sponsors
Beauvilliers	Eure-et-Loir	Centre	Eure-et-Loir departmental council; Centre regional council; Chartres CCI
Bertaucry	Marne	Champagne-Ardennes	Épernay CCI
Chaulnes	Somme	Picardie	Maxime Gremetz; Picardy regional council 1995–7 (later backtracked)
Les Grandes Loges	Marne	Champagne-Ardennes	Reims CCI
Hangest-en-Santerre	Somme	Picardie	DGAC
Juvincourt-Amifontaine	Aisne	Picardie	Initially, Aisne departmental council (later backtracked and opposed); DGAC
Montdidier-Sud	Somme	Picardie	Amiens CCI
Vatry	Marne	Champagne-Ardennes	Marne departmental council, Champagne-Ardennes regional council, Châlons-en-Champagne CCI

Entreprises, have backed the recent campaign. The Amiens CCI, though it itself proposed Montdidier-Sud, quickly rallied to Chaulnes once the government decision was taken. The list of backers for the Beauvilliers bid was arguably even more impressive: since 1996, regional political and economic élites have lobbied intensively for the airport by setting up an organisation baptised AIRCAP (Association pour l'Implantation en Région Centre du Nouvel Aéroport de Paris). All six of the region's departmental councils supported the proposal, as did the Chartres and Orléans municipal councils, the Chartres and Alençon CCIs, and such political grandes as Jack Lang (minister and former mayor of Blois) and Jean-Pierre Sueur (mayor of Orléans and former minister).

The reason why subnational political and economic actors have continued to champion the siting of the airport in their locality in the face of protest is perhaps not very hard to understand. According to the presidents of the departmental councils which make up the Centre region, the choice of Beauvilliers would be the 'development opportunity of the century', with the presidents of the Eure-et-Loir's CCI and MEDEF

(Mouvement des Entreprises de France, the peak employers' association) arguing that the effect on the region's economy would have been greater than that achieved by the decentralisation initiatives of the 1960s, creating over 100,000 jobs.³ And though the Aisne departmental council all but unanimously voted in July 2001 against hosting the airport at Juvincourt, it also reaffirmed its wish that business taxes be shared equally among Picardy's three *départements* should one of its neighbours be selected. It is estimated that local authorities benefit from Charles de Gaulle airport by between 400 and 500 MF (million francs) in local taxes and charges every year. Not surprisingly, just before Chaulnes was chosen, the Picardy regional council recognised that the project 'constitutes an exceptional and unique development opportunity', while reiterating its opposition ... 'for the time being'.⁴

The state in environmental discourse, action, and ideology

We can therefore tentatively draw a number of contrasts between the form and organisation of environmental dissent in the 1970s and 1990s, especially given the conceptualisation of the state in the first wave of environmental protest. The state is particularly important in environmental discourses in France; as Parodi (1979, p. 41) points out, the legacy of the events of May 1968 gave Green politics a distinctive anarchist flavour in France, and environmental action consequently developed strong anti-statist positions. More generally, Rootes (1997a, p. 329) underlines the importance of state-centred analyses in the formation of Green parties in western polities: significantly, many have evolved from anti-nuclear campaigns aggregating coalitions around a critique of the state. As this section will argue, this is particularly true of the French case. Given the new sets of grievances and policy-making centres that Green protest was addressing in the 1990s, it is important to examine whether the second wave of extraparliamentary environmental activism has seen a fundamental shift in the construction of the state in discursive and strategic terms.

The state, anti-nuclear activism, and Les Amis de la Terre

Decentralised decision-making, and particularly the promotion of the region as a cultural and political unit, are historically central to environmental discourse, ideology, and practice in France. The statutes and organisation of Les Verts, for example, are emblematic of the party's internal culture of *la politique autrement* and its desire to avoid top-down, impositional, 'professionalised' policy-making structures.

The party thus aims to resist the emergence of a leadership class by enforcing strict limitations on the number of elected offices any member can simultaneously hold, and elects four national spokespersons rather than a single party leader. An internal referendum must be held if 10 per cent of the party's members call for one; potentially covering any aspect of policy, the result is binding. The importance of the party's regional branches is underlined by the large degree of organisational autonomy they enjoy, and by their role in the party's two-phase conference procedure; decentralised regional assemblies (held at the same time, on the same day, with the same agenda) elect delegates to a subsequent single federal assembly. Held every two years, the federal assembly elects 30 members of Les Verts' policy-making council, the CNIR (Conseil national interrégional); the other 90 are directly elected by the regional branches.

This culture of participation and decentralisation is also prominent within the party's policy choices. Direct democratic mechanisms are expressed outside the party by such innovative policy initiatives as the consultative citizens' meetings instigated in September 2001 by the Green group on the Montreuil municipal council; designed to foster public participation in local decision-making, these open meetings discuss the agenda of the forthcoming council meeting. The recognition and promotion of minority languages within the media and state education system have been a constant distinctive feature of Les Verts' programme, as have alliances with groups articulating demands for regional autonomy. Thus the party has long placed autonomy within the Republic (though not independence) at the centre of its policy on Corsica, and in 1990 the CNIR recognised the existence of the Corsican people and advocated self-determination for the island. The previous year, Max Simeoni, general secretary of the nationalist grouping Union du Peuple Corse, was elected to the European Parliament on the Green list, while I Verdi Corsi, founded in 1988 with a membership drawn from non-violent Corsican nationalist as well as environmental groups, has subsequently fought numerous campaigns and shared a variety of platforms with legitimist nationalist organisations, and participated in coalitions such as Corsica Nazione and Unità. Such *girondisme* is equally evident in the party's electoral profiles; voting patterns for Les Verts and associated lists have tended to be strong in peripheral areas with separatist traditions such as Alsace and Brittany (Bennahmias and Roche, 1992, pp. 71–99), while surveys of Green voters and activists have revealed close identification with regionalist movements (Prendiville and Chafer, 1990, p. 187).

It is hardly surprising, then, that a critique of the function and organisation of the central state has long been a central tenet of French political ecology. As Journès underlines, the relationship between the state and civil society was primarily conceived in the environmentalist discourses of the 1970s to be fundamentally antagonistic, emphasising the social domination of the latter by the former (1979, p. 241). The manifesto produced by Brice Lalonde and René Dumont for a November 1976 parliamentary by-election in Paris advocated such anti-centralisation measures as the resiting of government and parliament in a 'medium-sized town', and the administrative services 'in several others', as well as the suppression of the prefectural corps and the replacement of 'the forces of repression based in Paris' – in other words, the police, and the CRS riot police in particular – with locally elected 'peace-keepers'.⁵ For Les Amis de la Terre, French society was 'authoritarian, hierarchic, and highly centralised', a mode of organisation which found its primary expression in the nuclear industry but which was also visible in a system of centralised planning which denied local autonomy.⁶

Lalonde's speech to the Dijon *entretiens écologiques* of spring 1977, in which he advocated 'breaking down the centralised machine' is further characteristic of such discourse, linking concerns over excessive political and administrative centralisation with those over the societal choice implied by a nuclear state. Breaking down the state, argued Lalonde, must necessarily start with 'dismantling the nuclear programme'.⁷ The critique of state authoritarianism developed by the French anti-nuclear movement during the 1970s, particularly given the absence of proper parliamentary debate on the instigation of the electro-nuclear programme under the *Plan Messmer*, tends therefore to corroborate the analyses proposed by academic observers outlined earlier in this chapter.

Accordingly, the defining protests which helped to bring together the fledgling Green movement were frequently organised around demands for the functional and/or territorial devolution of power. The *autogestionnaire* demands of the Lip factory workers were taken up by René Dumont's 1974 presidential campaign, while regionalist demands and peripheral opposition to central authority were at the forefront of numerous siting controversies, including the campaign against the creation of a steel works and industrial pole at Fos-sur-Mer, and the anti-militarist Larzac protest. Similarly, the campaign for a national referendum on nuclear power launched by Les Amis de la Terre in 1979 was designed to meet the democratic deficit at the heart of a project which it considered to be the imposition of technocratic decisions on local communities, and where public inquiries were only 'simulacra of

democracy'.⁸ Lenoir (1977, p. 63) even goes as far as to compare the technocratic practices of state electricity producer and supplier *Électricité de France* (EDF) with Nazi and Stalinist totalitarianism.

During the 1970s, opposition to centralised state control and the absence of democratic accountability and citizen participation in planning decisions were major, even defining, traits of environmentalist opposition to nuclear reactor siting schemes throughout France. Examination of nuclear power sitings has found that protest was strongest when policy decisions were revealed late, regionalist traditions were strong and cities were relatively close. Indeed, opposition to nuclear power was strongest where opposition to the central exercise of state authority was also strongest. In fact, within the French anti-nuclear protests of the 1970s, the alliance between the local population and environmental activists from outside the region was often strained, particularly in such conflicts as Nogent, Braud et Saint Louis, and Cruas-Meysses (Touraine et al., 1983, p. 24, pp. 61–8). Yet the perception of such projects as centralised policy initiatives imposed on frequently economically disadvantaged peripheries without prior democratic consultation was crucial. Studies carried out by Garraud (1979) and Nelkin and Pollak (1981) identified the main focus of anti-nuclear campaigns to be the lack of meaningful parliamentary debate on the programme and the presentation of each new site as a *fait accompli*. Shared concerns over technological development, local autonomy, and decisional centralisation frequently provided the basis for the construction of broad territorial social movements tying cultural defence to economic bargaining (Surrey and Huggett, 1976, pp. 288–9; Falk, 1982, pp. 173–5).

Peripheral resistance and environmental protest: Larzac and regional autonomy

The construction of such alliances was also critical to the success of the Larzac campaign, which remains a key reference point for environmental action in France and a potent symbol of victory in the face of state policy initiatives. Yet, although Larzac quickly became a symbolic laboratory for post-1968 alternative lifestyles and ideas (see Michaud, 1989, pp. 97–102), it should not be forgotten that the campaign originated as a highly localised corporatist conflict. The extension of the military camp directly threatened a number of modernised and unionised dairy concerns working within the lucrative Roquefort cheese production business. Indeed, as Pichol points out, the description of the Larzac activists as *paysans* incorrectly substitutes a definition based on class for one based on professional categorisation: the plateau's 103 landholdings

ranged from traditional, artisanal smallholdings in the south to large, modernised holdings in the north (1978, pp. 95–6). The first to mobilise against the scheme was the Confédération des éleveurs de brébis et des industriels de Rochefort, supported by the established agricultural union leaders. It was thus the ‘peasant aristocracy’ and ‘a petty bourgeoisie preoccupied by its own destiny’ which originally mobilised against the scheme, in particular the grandees of the sector, forming the Association de sauvegarde in January 1971 (Holohan, 1976, p. 286).

In other words, before it developed into a broader regionalist, environmentalist, and anti-militarist movement towards the end of 1971, opposition to the scheme was led by local sectoral élites who perceived the project to be a threat to the development of the local economy, at that time in the midst of industrial reconversion. In particular – and very ironically given the shape of environmental conflict in the 1990s – one of the main objections to the camp’s extension was that it would have exacerbated the region’s *enclavement*, or enclosure, by blocking the RN9 route south from Millau, depriving the southern Aveyron towns of their principal outlet towards the coast.

Nonetheless, as the Larzac campaign developed, its watchwords became the rejection of the economic and cultural oppression imposed by a centralising, colonial state. Regional and linguistic grievances played a vital role in the spread and depth of the conflict, as Occitan activists constructed the fight to stop the extension of the camp as a fight for cultural decolonisation, and the promotion of an oppositional cultural identity in which language was the central element (Holohan, 1976, pp. 291–3). The Occitan slogan of the Larzac conflict – *volem viure al pays* – consequently became a signifier of peripheral defence and environmentalist action. Likewise, the environmental opposition to the construction of the Naussac and Villerest dams in the upper Loire basin in the mid-1970s was characterised by regionalist opposition to a ‘colonial state’. Naussac in particular was, in the words of *Le Monde*, ‘a symbolic place for all those who want to “live on the land”, who refuse to watch the hillsides die so that the valleys might live, and who denounce the centralised and technocratic state.’¹⁹

A typical example of the identification of peripheral resistance, regional mobilisation, and environmental activism is provided by René Conan’s statement to the State Security Council at the trial of seven Breton autonomists in 1977. Conan argues that environmental protection and regional autonomy are inextricably linked, as pollution is caused by multinational capitalism, which in turn is promoted by the practices and institutions of the French state. The French justice system

marginalises ecologists firstly because it does not recognise environmental protection, and secondly because it operates in favour of class interests. The only recourse for activists is to engage in extra-legal activities to combat a repressive state apparatus:

We accuse the state bureaucracy, with the complicity of the political elites, of violence...

Violence is in a prefectoral order, in the authoritarian decisions of EDF, the DDA and the DDE. It is found on the side of a state which doesn't hesitate to resort to brutal repression when the people are peacefully protesting against a decision taken with no prior consultation of those affected by it.

This is physical violence. But there is also bureaucratic violence, which is perhaps less visible.

The government and EDF want to construct nuclear power stations in Brittany? A decree is signed and the choice imposed on a local population which doesn't want it.

This is the way it works in every field.¹⁰

Protest, confrontation, and the state

As Conan's statement testifies, the opposition between the state and environmental protest is prevalent not only in terms of the discourses deployed by activists, but also in their strategical choices. The suspension in spring 1978 of construction work on the Flamanville nuclear power station, ordered by the Caen administrative court on the grounds that EDF had breached planning procedures, is an isolated example of successes gained through the judicial system in the 1970s. Indeed, even though all nuclear sitings were challenged in the courts by protesters, Flamanville is the only example of a victory, and even that was partial and temporary.

For a number of commentators, it is the inability of the protesters to influence nuclear siting decisions through the courts which provides the most significant feature of the form and outcomes of anti-nuclear activism in France. The absence of a statute clearly establishing safety procedures for nuclear installations, the limited role of judicial review, the identification of the judiciary with the state and the restricted availability of action through the civil (as opposed to administrative) courts all meant that legal action was primarily seen as a publicity tool by campaigners, who consequently adopted less institutionalised, more disruptive forms of behaviour to achieve their goals (Chafer, 1985, pp. 8–12; Nelkin and Pollak, 1981). Lucas (1979, p. 208), underlining the fruitlessness of

protest through legal and parliamentary channels, conceives the optimum anti-nuclear strategy as one which 'preserve[s] a large peaceful participation whose support will provide a political perspective for particular and limited acts of violence which do not endanger human life'.

In contrast to campaigns against nuclear power in Britain during the same period where there were no cases of violent conflict between police and protest groups (Rüdig, 1994, p. 82), and despite the explicit emphasis on non-violent protest which typified the vast majority of campaigns in France, state-group interactions became increasingly confrontational during the 1970s. The perceived coercion and repression carried out by the CRS (the French riot police) were met on numerous occasions by violent responses from protesters, who employed a variety of direct action tactics, including physical resistance, civil disobedience, and sabotage, including the bombing of offices, plants, workshops, and even of the home of EDF president Marcel Boiteux. The violence was to culminate in running battles between the CRS and opponents of the Plogoff nuclear project during a six-week period in February and March 1980.

For anti-nuclear activists, the violence of the police justified and reinforced their critique of an authoritarian, anti-democratic state apparatus. Campaigners at Plogoff emphasised the hostility of the CRS, which they criticised for inciting violence, attacking onlookers with tear-gas grenades, and even taking hostages among local demonstrators (Conan and Laurent, 1981, pp. 46 ff). The death of one protester at the 1977 Superphénix demonstration provided the most visible sign of 'a supposedly democratic state [which] reacts like a terrorist when faced with a traditional demonstration' (Collectif d'Enquête, 1978, p. 8). Neither was confrontation the exclusive preserve of anti-nuclear campaigns; resistance to the Naussac dam in 1977 was characterised by battles between protesters and police, site occupations, the blocking of the Paris-Nîmes express, the burning of construction vehicles, the bombing of the headquarters of the project managing organisation, the theft of project documents, and the sabotage of EDF equipment.

This chapter has argued that the first wave of French environmental protest was heavily marked by the anti-statist discourses, the construction of defensive regional alliances, the criticism of state planning procedures, and confrontational strategies which on numerous occasions spilt over into violent clashes with police. The grievances which provided the stimulus for the organisation of protest were frequently infra-structural projects, widely perceived as emanating from technocratic, centralised policy-making centres which allowed for little consultation and negotiation with outside interests. As we have seen, the renaissance

in environmental activism in France in the 1980s and 1990s has similarly been catalysed by infrastructural projects perceived as being environmentally damaging. Yet, in contrast to the first wave of activism, this second wave has been characterised by the close involvement with infrastructural projects of local élites stressing regional prosperity.

It will be noticed, however, that whereas many of the explanations offered for the downturn in environmental mobilisation in the early 1980s focus both on grievances and on the state's prevalent configuration of power, the explanations for the resurgence of extraparliamentary protest that have been offered here focus mainly on grievances. To be sure, discussion of institutional centres is a vital component of the configuration of power; yet this overview has only been able to establish areas of further discussion. It is the task of the succeeding chapters, therefore, to investigate the relationships between the state and environmental protest in order to increase our understanding both of protest outcomes and of the power structure of the French state at the turn of the century. The first part of this task will be to review the literature on political opportunity structures, policy networks, and policy styles.

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