

# Ideological Cleavages and Schism in the Czech Environmental Movement

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## Abstract

*Following the 1989 Velvet Revolution, Czechoslovakia experienced a period of heightened environmental awareness characterized by strong public support and a proliferation of non-governmental environmental organizations. The political and economic climate shifted dramatically in 1992 with the election of the conservative Civic Democratic Party. Environmentalists soon found themselves out of favor with the political establishment and they experienced government harassment, dwindling public support, and a loss of funding for their campaigns. Drawing from in-depth interview data, archival research and fieldwork we find that these external pressures contributed to ideological cleavages and ultimately organizational schism within Rainbow Movement (Hnutí Duha), one of the largest and most influential environmental movement organizations in the country. Our research has important implications for environmental movements in diverse political and economic settings.*

**Keywords:** environmentalism, social movements, factionalism, democratization

## Introduction

The 1989 Velvet Revolution initiated the democratization process in Czechoslovakia, ending four decades of communist rule. But it also exposed to the world the severity of environmental problems facing the country. Environmental activism had largely been illegal during the communist era, aside from a handful of state-sponsored organizations (Carmin and Hicks 2002; Carmin and Jehlička 2005). Between 1989 and 1992, however, political opportunities expanded and the nation experienced a period of heightened environmental awareness. The country's first Ministry of Envi-

ronment was established and environmentalists were appointed to official government posts. Former political dissident environmental activists suddenly found themselves in key institutional positions within government. Civil society flourished and within this context a full-blown environmental movement was launched. Several national organizations were formed, including Rainbow Movement (*Hnutí Duha*), Children of the Earth (*Děti Země*), and Czech Greenpeace. In addition, numerous branch chapters of these organizations were established around the country.

This period of environmental euphoria was short-lived, however, as the 1992 elections ushered in a period of political conservatism. Led by free-market enthusiast and newly elected Prime Minister, Václav Klaus and his Civic Democratic Party, the nation embraced a program of economic shock therapy. Klaus and his supporters purged environmentalists from government offices and derailed the efforts of the environmental ministry. Environmentalists were publicly vilified as radicals and impediments to democracy (Pavlínek and Pickles 2000) and in 1995 they were included on a list of government subversive groups being monitored by the Czech Government (Jehlička 1999). In addition to public relations problems, environmental organizations found it increasingly difficult to garner government grants and resources for their campaigns. International resources were drying up and foundations were shifting their support for civil society further into eastern parts of Europe.

In summary, political opportunities shifted drastically for the Czech environmental movement between the Velvet Revolution and the mid-1990s. Faced with increasing governmental scrutiny of their activities, dwindling resources and a diminishing lack of public support for their campaigns, the Czech environmental movement was confronted with contracting political opportunities during the second half of the 1990s. We examine how these external pressures con-

tributed to internal dissension and schism within Rainbow Movement, one of the nation's largest and most influential environmental organizations.

## Theoretical Framework

Research on political opportunity theory has become a growth industry in recent years (Almeida 2003, 2008; Ganson and Meyer 1996; Goldstone and Tilly 2001; Meyer 1993, 2004; Roscigno and Danaher 2001), with analysts attempting to tease out the extent to which social movement activity is influenced by external political variables. Early work on political opportunities focused on the relative openness of government structures (Eisinger 1973), the importance of elite government allies (Jenkins and Perrow 1977), and the state's use of strategies and tactics to limit movement activism (Tilly 1978). Significant research findings indicated that closed opportunity structures contributed to movement failure (Eisinger 1973; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1994).

A growing body of research in authoritarian and democratizing societies, however, indicates that the relationship between political opportunity structures and movement outcomes is far more complex (see Osa 2001). There have been several documented cases where activism flourished in seemingly closed opportunity structures (Isbester 2001; Khawaja 1993; Kowalchuk 2005; Kurzman 1996; Schock 1999). For example, in his research on the Philippines and Burma, Schock (1999) found that the repressive state regimes in both countries lost public credibility after using extreme force against its citizenry. As a result, the state's actions actually spurred social movement activism. Kurzman (1996) found that perceived opportunities and a strong sense of efficacy triggered the 1979 Iranian revolution despite the objective indications of a closed political environment. These studies suggested that closed political opportunity structures can either facilitate or inhibit movement activism.

Our research addresses shifting political opportunities and movement outcomes in a democratizing country. While political process theory has become a dominant framework in the study of social movements, it has been heavily criticized for failing to properly conceptualize its key variables (Goodwin and Jasper 1999). Following Almeida (2003, 2008) and Goldstone and Tilly (2001) we offer definitional clarity by identifying key dimensions of opportunity and threat. According to Almeida (2008, 14), "Viewing opportunity and threat as ideal types, groups may either be driven by environmental cues and institutional incentives to push forward demands and extended benefits (i.e., political opportunity) or be pressed into action in fear of losing current goods, rights, and safety (i.e., threat)."

In his research on popular struggle in El Salvador,

Almeida (2003, 2008) identifies two key components of opportunity relevant to developing countries: competitive elections and institutional access. Competitive elections provide previously disenfranchised groups a chance to influence public policy and popular opinion. Institutional access facilitates the state passage of favorable new laws, the expansion of non-governmental organizations, and state support for civil society (Almeida 2003, 348-350). In addition to the two formal components of opportunities, organizational resources such as networks, non-governmental organizations, and sympathetic institutions play a critical role in fostering collective action, especially in non-democratic or transitional societies (Almeida 2003; see also McCarthy and Zald 1977).

While political opportunities constitute a critical set of variables shaping movement outcomes, equally important are key dimensions of external threat (Almeida 2003, 2008; Goldstone and Tilly 2001). Almeida identifies three salient components of threat relevant to non-democratic and liberalizing nations: state economic problems, erosion of rights, and state repression. State-attributed economic problems represent economic threats to social movement organizations and parallel broader concerns with resources (i.e., McCarthy and Zald 1977), whereas the erosion of rights and outright state repression correspond directly to repressive threats (Almeida 2003, 2008). In most scenarios, threats deter collective action and popular protest. However, focusing on popular protest in El Salvador, Almeida notes that some resourceful groups can overcome threats in certain political and economic contexts.

Almeida's (2003, 2008) findings in El Salvador parallel recent work on social movement coalitions, which indicates that external political threats can actually foster collective action among aggrieved populations (McCammon and Campbell 2002; Meyer and Corrigan-Brown 2005; Van Dyke 2003). These findings challenge earlier work on political process theory by linking seemingly negative indicators of opportunity/threat with positive movement outcomes. But how common are these results? How do shifting political opportunities and threats impact social movements in democratizing nations?

Our research addresses these questions by examining the complex relationship between political opportunities/threats and internal movement dynamics within the Czech environmental movement. Following research by Balser (1997) on the U.S. Green movement, we argue that the external political environment can have a profound impact on the internal workings of a social movement. This perspective differs from most existing research, which has treated movement dissension solely as an internal problem. Balser (1997, 199) explains, ". . . factionalism within SMOs has been approached largely from a closed perspective; it is viewed as an

internal response to an internal problem. Factionalism is considered a result of poor internal conflict management and a source of organizational decline.” The political opportunity perspective broadens our analytical lens by including a wider range of salient variables for examining seemingly internal movement dynamics.

Researchers have long been interested in movement dissension and factionalism (see Gerlach and Hines 1970; Zald and Ash 1966). Gamson’s ([1975] 1990) seminal analysis of social movement organizations identified factionalism as a major cause of movement failure. And numerous analysts have documented the negative effects of factionalism in the contemporary women’s movement (Buechler 1990; Echols 1989; Ryan 1989). In addition, Rochford (1989) examined how organizational change and ideology contributed to factionalism and group defection in the Hare Krishna movement. More recently, Gamson (1997) examined internal wrangling and disputes within two sex and gender movements over issues of collective identity and inclusion/exclusion processes.

Research studies indicate that there are multiple factors that contribute to movement factionalism and dissension, but one of the most salient issues centers on ideological cleavages. For example, the contemporary women’s movement was stymied by ideological disputes during many of its early years. According to Buechler (1990, 107), “Ideology has played a critical role in generating and sustaining—as well as dividing and fragmenting—the contemporary women’s movement.” Similarly, Ryan (1989) documented movement animosity around the promotion of “ideological purity” by some women activists. In his seminal research on the civil rights movement, Haines (1984) highlighted the ideological gaps between moderate and radical factions of the movement which, paradoxically, served to bolster the allocation of resources to some moderate organizations.

Ideological divides have also been documented within environmental movements. Slaton (1992) found critical ideological divides between activists in the U.S. Green movement. Specifically, she documented cleavages between “deep ecologists,” who stressed spirituality and green thought and more radical “Left Green” factions of the movement, who promoted socialist and anarchist-libertarian agendas. Importantly, these ideological differences translated into incompatible priorities and platforms, as well as different approaches to activism.

The Czech environmental movement is an excellent case for examining how external factors influence and shape internal organizational dynamics. Recent research indicates that external threats can, in fact, spur social movement mobilization by increasing activists’ sense of urgency and the willingness to cooperate (McCammon and Campbell 2002;

Meyer and Corrigan-Brown 2005; Van Dyke 2003). We examine the converse relationship, analyzing how dimensions of opportunity and threat negatively impact internal movement dynamics. Specifically, we analyze how increasing threats and the contraction of opportunities combined to foster dissension, factionalism, and ultimately schism within Rainbow Movement, one of the country’s largest environmental organizations. While our analysis focuses primarily on Rainbow Movement, our findings have implications for the broader Czech environmental movement, as well as for other social movements in democratizing nations.

## Methods

Data sources for this paper come from a large multi-year research project on the Czech environmental movement and include in-depth interviews, archival research and observation. Fieldwork was conducted by the first author over a six year period, between 2000 and 2006. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 120 different respondents in the Czech Republic, including representatives from dozens of different environmental organizations. While the full dataset is important in providing contextual elements of the Czech environmental movement, including relevant data on other Czech environmental organizations, this paper focuses primarily on in-depth interviews with 25 members of Rainbow Movement and their splinter organization, Nesehnutí.

Initial interview contacts were established through site visits at organizational offices. Using purposive sampling the first author began by interviewing organizational leaders from Rainbow Movement and Nesehnutí. He then employed a snowball sampling technique to identify additional activists in these two organizations who were involved in the conflict and schism. An interview schedule was used to prompt respondents. The open-ended questions used in the interviews were designed to give respondents space to describe their background, experiences, beliefs, and assumptions about environmental activism in the Czech Republic and the splintering of Rainbow Movement. Respondents were asked to talk extensively about the history of the conflict and about their ongoing activism.

The in-depth interviews ranged from 2-3 hours and were audio-taped. Follow-up interviews were conducted with several of the 25 activists to get updates on current activities, organizational changes, and movement obstacles. To ensure inter-coder reliability, two researchers independently coded the data. Each researcher began with a line-by-line coding of key words and phrases (e.g., “organizational leadership,” “conflict over strategies and tactics,” “governmental harassment,” “organizational resources”). This process resulted in a list of dozens of key concepts from across the interviews.

Both researchers then grouped the codes into major thematic categories that reflected the central issues raised by the respondents.

Archival research provided another critical source of data for this project. The first author reviewed hundreds of relevant social movement organization documents, including newsletters, correspondence and various publications associated with Rainbow Movement and Nesehnutí. These documents provided important background information on various environmental campaigns, as well controversial issues within these two movement organizations. The first author also examined local and national newspaper coverage of environmental activities throughout the data collection period. The first author also spent over 12 months in the field observing various environmental activities, ranging from mundane administrative tasks to public demonstrations and protests. Detailed field notes were taken immediately following periods of observation and were later typed and coded along with the archival data and in-depth interviews.

### **Shifting Opportunities and Threats for Czech Environmentalists**

The Czech environmental movement has experienced changing fortunes over the past two decades. During the immediate post-1989 period the movement went through tremendous growth and development, but by the mid to late 1990s they were being characterized as “subversives” by the Czech government and they were confronted with severe resource problems. We examine how these shifts in political opportunities and external threats fostered internal dissension and factionalism with Rainbow Movement, one of the country’s oldest and most prominent environmental organizations.

#### **Expanding Opportunities for Czech Environmentalists**

Following Almeida (2003, 2008) and Goldstone and Tilly (2001) we separate political opportunities from threats as two distinct sets of salient external factors. We emphasize three key dimensions of political opportunity shaping the Czech environmental movement following the 1989 democratic transition period: free elections, institutional access, and organizational resources (Almeida 2003, 2008).

Immediately following the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the country began making plans for free elections, which were held in June 1990. While a number of newly formed political parties participated in the process, the coalition party Civic Forum easily dominated the election results. The free elections in Czechoslovakia, along with the renewed interest in environmental issues, allowed activists unprecedented access to institutional channels of government. The new government included a large contingency of former anti-

regime and environmental dissidents (Michta 1994). Consequently, the political opportunity structure during the democratic transition phase was highly conducive to protest.

Not only anti-regime but also environmental dissidents moved into key government positions that afforded them access to political decision-making processes. Prominent environmentalists such as Josef Vavroušek, Ivan Dejmál, and Bedřich Moldan assumed government positions from which they advocated a strong pro-environment agenda. They chartered new ground for the country by establishing a Ministry of the Environment and by engineering the passage of basic environmental statutes.

In the first flush of the democratic transition, environmentalists worked both inside the government and in consultation with government officials. The Ministry of the Environment formed what was called a “green parliament,” an informal group of representatives of prominent environmental organizations that met regularly in the Ministry building to advise Ministry officials (Jehlička 1999). Such structural changes in the democratic phase not only opened the door to environmental activism, but also underwrote it through the emergence of new organizational funding sources.

Besides the benefits of environmental insiders, the democratic transition phase in Czechoslovakia generated new funding sources for the formation and maintenance of environmental organizations. In addition to direct government support, the openness of the political system permitted international foundations to cooperate with environmental organizations. In particular, foundations such as the Sores Fund, C.S. Mott, and the General Marshall Fund aided in the development of civil society in all of Central and Eastern Europe.

Domestic funds also increased in availability. Environmental organizations received funding for specific projects from the Czech government through application to the State Environmental Fund administered by the Ministry of the Environment. In addition, the Czech-based foundation, Environmental Partnership, provided funding for several national environmental organizations and frequently supported smaller, local environmental campaigns. As a result of both domestic and international funding, several hundred environmental groups emerged by 1990 (Fagin 1999, 2000).

#### **Increased Threats and Movement Obstacles**

We adopt Almeida’s (2008) multi-dimensional conception of threat, emphasizing two of the salient dimensions in our case: state harassment and state-attributed economic problems. There was a relatively short period of environmental euphoria for the Czech environmental movement following the Velvet Revolution. In the 1992 national election the conservative Civic Democratic Party gained political power in the country. Under the political leadership of Vá-

clav Klaus, the country embarked on an enthusiastic program of economic shock therapy.

Prime Minister Klaus successfully removed environmentalists (Carmin and Hicks 2002) from government positions and he effectively dismantled the Environmental Ministry. He described the prominent Environmental Minister, Ivan Dejmál as an “eco-fascist” (Horák 2001, 318) and he considered sustainable development to be a “bizarre, leftist invention” (Horák 2001, 238). He compared environmentalism to fascism and communism and saw all three as serious threats to democracy and freedom (Pavlínek and Pickles 2000; Slocock 1996). Importantly, his public vilification of environmentalists garnered tremendous media attention.

The negative tone being established in national government, combined with escalating inflation led many Czechs to join Klaus in denouncing environmental protest as an obstacle to economic growth. Declining support appears to have been directly related to growing economic concerns, and many Czechs felt they had to choose between economic growth and the environment. This dichotomy was promoted by various sectors of the new business elite and the state and was propagated by the media. Government animosity toward environmentalists peaked in January 1995, when several prominent environmental groups were placed on a list of subversive groups being monitored by the National Government Security Service (Fagin and Jehlička 1998; Jehlička 1999). As Jehlička (1999, 39) explained,

*As at the end of the 1980s, Czech environmentalists appeared in the middle of the 1990s on a list of subversive elements which was drawn up by the state intelligence services. In addition to the accusation of being a threat to the well-being of society, this time they were also deemed to pose a threat to democracy. Thus, while maintaining their views and goals, environmentalists in the eyes of the government and a certain section of the media went through a paradoxical transformation from being one of the major proponents of democracy to one of its major threats.*

Their placement on the government watch list became a symbolic marker for the changing fortunes of the environmental movement in the Czech Republic. During the initial post-communist euphoria from 1989-1992 environmentalists had enjoyed public recognition and government inclusion in official posts, but by the mid-1990s they were being harassed by the government as terrorist organizations.

By the second half of the 1990s the Czech environmental movement was also facing severe resource problems. Without access to Czech governmental funding, environmental organizations became more dependent on international

foundations for support. Throughout the 1990s, however, there was a gradual reduction in funding from foundations as support moved further to eastern regions of Europe. The lack of governmental support, along with the loss of resources, placed extraordinary strains on the Czech environmental movement. We argue that these contracting political and economic opportunities negatively impacted the broader movement and ultimately led to organizational dissension and schism within Rainbow Movement.

## The Emergence of Rainbow Movement

Rainbow Movement was legally sanctioned by the Czech government in 1989 and it is headquartered in the Moravian region's capital city of Brno. During the communist period state-sponsored environmental organizations served as important safe houses for environmentalists pursuing more controversial environmental campaigns, but in some cases radical members were forced out of these mainstream environmental groups. Such was the case for the founding members of Rainbow Movement, who were expelled from CSOP for being “too radical.” A founding member explained,

*In 1989, I met with one of my childhood friends and discovered that he was already involved in the Czech Union of Nature Conservation, CSOP, which at that time was one of the only two official environmental groups. I was quite interested in doing environmental work, so I accompanied him and joined the local group of CSOP. We started some information activities, but in a very few months we were expelled from the organization because the other people thought that we were just too radical. So we were kicked out. And we started to informally organize our own group, which we called, ‘Hnutí Duha,’ or Rainbow Movement.*

The veteran activist elaborated on the issue that led to their expulsion from CSOP, “At that time all we did was spread information. By chance, one of the issues we covered was nuclear energy. Of course, at that time it was felt that it was very *risky* to criticize nuclear power because it was a strategic issue of the communist regime.”

Rainbow Movement's agenda was largely centered on nuclear energy for more than a decade. The organization initially campaigned against the Dukovany nuclear plant, located in South Moravia, but they soon shifted their attention to the controversial Temelín nuclear facility in South Bohemia, which had remained “under construction” from the communist era. Czechoslovakia's nuclear industry had been heavily supported by the Soviet Union and Communist Party leaders

in Czechoslovakia had fully supported the development and expansion of nuclear energy. But the communist government ran out of resources for the Temelín plant during the 1980s. In addition, the 1986 disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear facility in the Soviet Union (currently Ukraine) took additional momentum out of plans to complete the nuclear facility. In light of depleted financial resources and greater concern over nuclear energy, the Temelín nuclear plant was placed on indefinite hold.

Following the 1989 revolution the future of the Temelín nuclear plant resurfaced. Environmental groups and concerned politicians argued that the completion of Temelín was too dangerous, especially since the facility was based on the same Soviet-style technology that had been used for the Chernobyl plant. During the early 1990s, the public remained divided over the completion of Temelín, but the proponents of nuclear power gained political momentum when the American Westinghouse company was awarded a contract to oversee the project. In addition to Westinghouse, there were other powerful lobbying groups that campaigned for the completion of the facility. In 1992, the newly elected conservative Prime Minister Václav Klaus gave his official approval to finish the Temelín facility.

A founding member of Rainbow Movement explained their reaction to Klaus' declaration and to the waning support among other environmental organizations, "We said, 'Oh no, this is not a problem that we can accept.' It is really a big problem and it will continue to be a big problem, and we will continue working on it!" Thus, while many environmental groups dropped out of the campaign after the official decision was made to complete Temelín, Klaus' declaration merely solidified Rainbow Movement's opposition to the nuclear facility. A veteran activist summarized their strategy,

*In summer 1992 we really decided to go ahead and we started to organize civil disobedience activities. The first action was held on the anniversary of Chernobyl, in April 1992. This was our first blockade of Temelín. Then every summer we organized "action camps" around the plant and non-violent blockades of the construction sites.*

The summer camps and blockades attracted international attention and environmentalists came from the United States and dozens of other countries to support the anti-nuclear effort. The summer activities also drew a great deal of national media attention. In addition to serving the primary function of opposing the completion of the Temelín nuclear facility, these events provided a venue for organizing other environmental campaigns. Rainbow Movement continued to lead the blockades of Temelín through 1999 and the last action camp was held there in 2000. In 2002, after the Temelín nuclear fa-

cility was fully operational, the organization decided to shift its resources to other projects. Rainbow Movement has remained active on several energy campaigns and continues to publicly oppose nuclear power in the Czech Republic.

While energy has been the cornerstone of Rainbow's activities, the organization has been active in several other important areas. It has a strong program of work in forest campaigns, where activists have worked on numerous projects, including several anti-logging initiatives in nationally protected areas. One of the largest campaigns against logging has been centered on protected land in the Sumava National Park, where charges of corruption and profiteering have been raised against the National Park staff. In addition, Rainbow Movement has organized campaigns for the protection of various animal species. In 1994, Rainbow Movement joined Friends of the Earth International (FoEI).

## External Pressures and Internal Dissension

The contraction of political opportunities and increasing external threats negatively impacted Rainbow Movement, along with the broader Czech environmental movement. By the mid-1990s politically active environmental organizations throughout the country were facing tremendous external pressures. Specifically, in terms of the contraction of opportunities, the Czech government refused to sponsor "controversial" campaigns, which accounted for nearly all of Rainbow Movement's activities. Moreover, Rainbow Movement was particularly vulnerable since it had been engaged in a longstanding conflict with the Czech government over the Temelín nuclear facility.

In addition to state-induced economic problems, government harassment and the public vilification of environmentalists negatively impacted public support for environmental campaigns. As a result, Rainbow Movement and other national environmental organizations such as Children of the Earth were having greater difficulty garnering support for their activities. At the same time, much of the international and domestic foundation support that was once plentiful in the Czech Republic was now shifting out of the country and to other parts of the region. International funding organizations such as the Skoll Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Ford Foundation, and the Soros Foundation greatly reduced their funding of Czech environmental organizations (Fagin 2004). As a result, large national organizations such as Rainbow Movement became desperate for financial resources.

During the second half of the 1990s dissension emerged within Rainbow Movement over conflicting responses to the changing political and economic climate. We analyze key points of contention and discuss how ideological cleavages emerged within Rainbow Movement that ultimately led to or-

organizational schism. Specifically, we examine conflict over strategies and the proposed expansion into broader issues of social justice and human rights.

### Controversy over Strategies and the Radical Fringe

As growing pressure mounted to secure funding and public support for the organization and its activities, dissension over strategies and tactics increased. Moreover, heated debates centered on the inclusion of radical factions within the organization. The use of direct action tactics had always been a sensitive issue within the organization, dating back to the earliest days of the protests at the Temelín nuclear construction site. A longtime activist explained how these actions made some members uncomfortable, "For example, there were some people in the organization that even thought the blockages were at the *edge* of what they were willing to tolerate and see as acceptable methods."

Much of the debate centered on the use of violence and leaders within the organization worried that even the "appearance" of violence within the organization would provide fodder for the Czech government and further alienate the public. Despite these concerns, controversy over radical tactics continued to surface. Controversy erupted within the organization when a group of anarchists affiliated with Rainbow Movement refused to sign on to the organization's "Principles of Non-Violence" statement, arguing that self-defense could be necessary against their opponents. It surfaced again when several activists linked to the Brno branch of Rainbow Movement covered their faces at a demonstration against human rights violations. An activist described the controversy,

*So the conflict was basically about violence. And it was also about members covering their faces during demonstrations. As an ecological organization our activities were always public. So we were never ashamed of what we did. Many members of the organization viewed these actions [covering one's face] as nonsense and detrimental to Rainbow Movement. And they worried that it would be used against us.*

Leaders from Rainbow Movement's national office believed that engaging in these kinds of activities gave the false appearance that the entire organization was involved in violence and extremism. A prominent leader argued, "The government and the public were already turning against us. Imagine how it looked to have some members in the newspapers with their faces covered!" Another long-time activist noted, "And they went there with masks and they looked to be more violent than they were. So it was really bad for our publicity." Similarly, an activist explained, "Some people thought they *were* too radical. And others just thought they

only *looked* too radical. And some people just didn't want these types of people in Rainbow."

While these radical approaches to activism stirred up considerable controversy within Rainbow Movement, a more contentious debate centered on the inclusion of anarchists within the organization. Again, the primary concerns of key leaders and other prominent members centered on the perceived image problems, and the associated government harassment and lack of public support. Eventually, factions emerged over the inclusion of radical elements within the organization. The Brno branch of Rainbow Movement was comfortable working with anarchists, but prominent leaders within the organization had serious concerns regarding governmental repercussions. It is important to note that several environmental organizations had already been included on a list of government subversive groups being monitored by the Czech government (see Jehlička 1999). The leadership of Rainbow Movement worried that any affiliation with anarchist groups would stigmatize the organization and invite additional government scrutiny and harassment.

### Expansion into Human Rights

As political opportunities contracted for environmental organizations in the Czech Republic following the loss of funding, government harassment, and diminishing public support, Rainbow Movement became embroiled in a protracted debate over the organization's campaign agenda. A group of more radical activists argued for the expansion of traditional environmental campaigns to include human rights. They argued that the inclusion of human rights campaigns would allow the organization to develop a wider base of support, especially among younger activists. A veteran activist involved in the controversy explained,

*There were differences between the Brno local group and the national office of Rainbow. The Brno local group put a greater emphasis on human rights and it became more involved in these campaigns over time. On the other hand, Rainbow movement as an [national] organization was presenting itself only as an ecological organization and was not really interested in working on human rights.*

Despite resistance from national leaders within the organization, the Brno-based group of more radically-oriented activists within the organization began to engage in a series of protest activities linking environmental campaigns to human rights violations. For example, they began organizing demonstrations against international oil companies over joint environmental and human rights violations. The national leadership of Rainbow Movement became increasingly alarmed and frustrated with the expansion of traditional environmental

campaigns, as well as the inclusion of the radical fringe of the movement and the use of non-violent direct action tactics.

### **Movement Splintering and the Formation of Nesehnutí**

Dissension and animosity within Rainbow Movement continued to escalate and factions became crystallized by 1996 over conflicting programs for responding to the changing political climate. The radical faction felt that they were being squelched by the national office, which they accused of being undemocratic. In response, the national leaders argued that the proposed plans by the more “active” wing of the organization were “too radical” and would thus hinder the group’s ability to garner support for future campaigns. In 1997, under increasing pressure from the central office, a core group of approximately 30 veteran activists from Rainbow Movement left the organization to form Nesehnutí. A veteran leader noted, “We were all feeling the pressure, from the public, from the government. We were constantly arguing about funding for our campaigns and some of us just wanted more freedom. And we had different ideas about how to run the organization.”

The activists that formed Nesehnutí linked these broader external pressures to the general functioning of the organization. National organization leaders continued to pursue government and foundation support and wanted to dictate the campaigns of all branch chapters, while local chapter leaders wanted more autonomy and freedom. Consequently, many of the activists that formed Nesehnutí linked the schism to debates over democracy and autonomy for branch chapters. An activist explained, “In the end it was clear that the conflict was much deeper. We didn’t agree on how the organization was functioning and we wanted it to be more democratic.”

Nesehnutí established an open and democratic organizational structure and they have continued to focus on broader human rights issues, as well as on more direct environmental campaigns. The organization functions on very limited resources and is largely dependent on volunteers. There are approximately 40-50 core activists in Nesehnutí, but the group has a much broader base of “sympathizers.” Their national headquarters is located in the Moravian capital city of Brno and they have formed several regional branches around the country. Nesehnutí is still touted as the most radical environmental organization within the Czech Republic and it is highly respected within the broader activist community.

### **Shifting Opportunities, Threats, and Movement Outcomes**

We argue that the splintering of Rainbow Movement can be linked to shifting political opportunities and growing threats from external forces, including state-induced econom-

ic problems and state harassment and public vilification. These factors inhibited Rainbow Movement and other environmental organizations from securing necessary resources. Moreover, government harassment and media vilification created a public backlash against environmentalists, which made it increasingly difficult to recruit new members. We chart the broader movement and organizational outcomes associated with these growing external pressures.

### **Professionalism and Institutional Tactics**

During the early post-communist period the environmental movement relied heavily on non-institutional tactics. Many of the tools and networks for this type of activism were already in place from dissident activities in the 1980s. The activities drew a great deal of media attention, and thus gained considerable exposure for the movement. However, throughout the second half of the 1990s there was a tactical shift toward more institutional approaches, which were consistent with a growing trend toward professionalism within the movement. Importantly, proponents of this organizational model argued that professionalism would increase opportunities for domestic and international funding support.

The splintering of Rainbow Movement reflected competing strategies for responding to the changing political context. Nesehnutí responded to increasing threats and contracting opportunities by mobilizing grassroots support and operating very cheaply. In contrast, Rainbow Movement pursued a program of professionalization aimed at garnering broader public and institutional support for their campaigns. At the time of the organizational conflict, Rainbow Movement’s national office argued that the inclusion of the radical fringe and the use of militant tactics threatened to “tarnish” the image of the organization, which has been a member of Friends of the Earth International since 1994.

National leaders of Rainbow Movement were concerned about how such activities would impact their ability to garner public and government support, as well as financial resources from domestic and international foundations. A veteran leader of Rainbow Movement reflected on the split, “At the time we were being characterized by the government as radicals and terrorists and we couldn’t afford to continue with this plan. We needed the public for our activities and they didn’t want to support a group of ‘radicals.’ ” Leaders of Rainbow Movement also argued that non-institutional tactics had lost their effectiveness in the changing political environment. While direct action tactics garnered tremendous public support during the early post-revolution period, they preferred more professional strategies for solving environmental problems. While public demonstrations and events continue to be used by some organizations to draw attention to issues, many environmental groups have found it increasingly diffi-



cult to attract media and public attention. A veteran activist and former political dissident, who had been harassed and imprisoned during the communist era, described the changing nature of public environmental demonstrations,

*Before 1989, public gatherings were successful in capturing the public's attention. The gatherings were, of course, attacked by the police, but the newspapers were writing about it and this was very good. Now, all of the sudden, when a gathering is organized the media doesn't come. It doesn't matter whether there are 10,000 people, or two people, because it is basically like it never happened.*

Prominent environmental organizations such as Rainbow Movement have responded to the changing political climate by adopting institutional tactics such as lobbying, legislative work, and media campaigns to garner broader national and international support for their campaigns. These projects are less controversial and are therefore less likely to invite government harassment.

### Non-Institutional Approaches

An alternative approach to movement activism within the changing political climate, adopted by Nesehnutí, reflects a return to the more radical, direct-action strategies and tactics used during the early post-1989 transition period. They rely heavily on public protests and other non-violent direct action tactics. Importantly, this approach to activism requires far fewer organizational resources. A veteran activist emphasized how Nesehnutí is more "active" within the Czech environmental community,

*For Nesehnutí, they only have a small number of employees and their output is action. They really like action and they want people to organize direct action campaigns. They also help people connect and meet others with ideas of alternative society.*

The activist compared Nesehnutí's method to Rainbow Movement's emphasis on lobbying efforts, "I think that both are very important, but it is not possible for one organization to do both."

In response to the changing political climate in the Czech Republic, Nesehnutí has expanded the traditional focus of the Czech environmental movement by incorporating broader issues of human rights and social justice into their agenda. When asked about the goals of the organization, a founding member of Nesehnutí explained, "We felt a need to point out the association and interconnection between ecological and social topics . . ." Another activist explained a recent international project to illustrate the connection between social and environmental issues,

*We worked on issues related to the Shell oil company's operations in Nigeria. It was clear that the devastation and destruction of the environment and nature in those areas where the company is getting the oil goes hand in hand with massive violations of human rights of the native people.*

Another example of their work linking the environment to human rights is the campaign to free Tibet. The veteran activist explained,

*Our campaign for the freedom of Tibet was based on informing the public that human rights are being violated and that there is persecution of political prisoners. But we also wanted to explain how the Chinese Army has made a nuclear testing ground out of Tibet. There is radioactive waste being placed there. Again, this is a violation of human rights hand in hand with the destruction of the environment.*

Despite the international dimensions of many of their human rights campaigns, activists in Nesehnutí are careful to point out the importance of linking these issues to the Czech Republic.

Rainbow Movement and Nesehnutí represent two different organizational responses to the changing political and economic climate in the Czech Republic. Nesehnutí has continued to focus on grassroots activism and they have partnered with the radical fringe of the activist community. They have sustained their organization by expanding their campaigns and by appealing to a broader base of support, as noted by a founding member, "I think by widening the topics we can attract people that would not normally be interested strictly in the ecological aspects of these problems." In contrast, Rainbow Movement has become more professionalized and continues to seek governmental and foundation support for their campaigns.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The environmental movement flourished in Czechoslovakia following the 1989 Velvet Revolution and the nation experienced a proliferation of non-governmental environmental organizations. Between 1989 and 1992 the country established its first Ministry of Environment and a series of environmental initiatives were launched by the transitional government. Our findings indicate that the initial success of the post-communist environmental movement was based on the expansion of political opportunities, including free elections, institutional access to the government bureaucracy, and an abundance of organizational and financial resources. Within this supportive political and economic context, the

Czech environmental movement took shape and several national organizations launched successful campaigns on energy, traffic and transportation, nature protection and public education. In addition, there was strong public support for environmental campaigns throughout the country.

Following the 1992 election of Prime Minister Klaus and his conservative Civic Democratic Party, environmental organizations experienced a distinct contraction of political opportunities. Moreover, a series of state-based threats emerged, creating economic and political problems for several prominent environmental organizations, including Children of the Earth and Rainbow Movement. Klaus and his supporters launched a public relations campaign vilifying environmentalists and these negative sentiments, along with economic uncertainty, lowered public support for environmental initiatives. In addition, the Czech environmental movement lost much needed financial resources from governmental grants, as well as from domestic and international foundations.

As political opportunities contracted, Czech environmentalists struggled to solidify a coherent vision for the environmental movement. Our findings indicate that these external pressures were particularly damaging to Rainbow Movement, one of the country's largest and most influential organizations. Cleavages emerged within Rainbow Movement as activists developed competing strategies for responding to the contraction of political opportunities. Some activists aligned themselves with militant anarchist factions and pursued more radical direct action tactics. Cognizant of the need to appeal to funding agencies and the mainstream public for support, the national headquarters of Rainbow Movement pushed for greater professionalism and became increasingly uncomfortable with the radical activities of some members.

Organizational cleavages were further exacerbated when radical activists within the organization called for the expansion of traditional environmental campaigns to include human rights violations. Tensions continued to escalate within Rainbow Movement and eventually the organization splintered into two separate groups. The original Rainbow Movement has continued to work on traditional environmental activities and some of its members have become involved in traditional party politics. In contrast, Nesehnutí has moved further away from mainstream environmentalism. The group is composed primarily of younger environmentalists and human rights activists and they have garnered a reputation for being the most radical environmental organization in the country.

Environmental movements are often characterized by internal dissension and conflict. We employed the case of the Czech environmental movement to illustrate how these seemingly internal cleavages are shaped by broader political and economic forces, and by increasing external threats. While recent research indicates that external threats can foster co-

operation and a collective sense of urgency (Almeida 2008; McCammon and Campbell 2002; Meyer and Corrigal-Brown 2005; Van Dyke 2003), our findings suggest that external forces can negatively impact not only broad social movement processes (e.g., coalition-building), but also the internal dynamics of individual social movement organizations. Specifically, increased threats and contracted political opportunities can foster animosity and schism within social movement organizations. In the case of Rainbow Movement, these cleavages ultimately splintered the organization.

Following Brockett (1995), we argue that the challenge for social movement scholars is to determine the conditions under which varying external opportunities impact broad movement outcomes, as well as organizational dynamics. Under which conditions do these external pressures spur collective mobilization and successful coalitions versus internal dissension and conflict? Moreover, movement scholars need to examine these relationships in a variety of political contexts. While our research focuses on post-communist Czech Republic, future analyses should examine these dynamic relationships in other transitional societies, as well as in more stable democratic countries.

## Endnotes

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