The conservation movement has begun to grow political roots. The newly politicized perspective has been marked by the development of ecology — also known as ‘green’ — political parties who have sought constituent support and run candidates for elective positions.

Statistics have shown that many of the people who join a non-political ecology group have no specific political affiliations and come under the category of “idealists”. Their reason, in the first instance, for becoming active in such a group is to try to bring their influence to bear on a specific environmental issue. Later, these same people become increasingly politically conscious as a result of the frustrations experienced in trying to reach their goals, eventually assuming that their aims can only be achieved within the framework of an environmental political party. With the decision to form such a party come the political problems which affect not only the ecology party but the established parties themselves.

The new political party soon becomes a collecting ground for all those discontented with the environmental policies of the established parties, thus robbing those parties of their much-needed critical voices. On the other hand, an ecology party, if it wishes to gain and retain political power, must concern itself with issues other than that of conservation alone. It must develop a broad ideological base, a platform made of non-ecological elements, to remain viable. Experience with single-issue parties has shown that their existence is limited, their appeal too narrow to garner any political influence. An ecology party must not merely take decisions — it must also achieve a majority for implementing them, and this can only be done on the basis of political compromise, sometimes to the detriment of conservation.

For this reason, we have seen in recent months that although ecology parties have gained many supporters and have had success at the polls, most of these supporters, when faced with a long-term political choice, have given their support to one of the other established political parties. Consequently, ecologists’ demands have been perhaps compromised. On the other hand, established parties have no longer been able to take ill-considered, unsound positions without accommodating the ecologists’ demands. We view this development as a victory for democracy, and no small success for conservation.

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The date of the next issue, which is planned for early Summer, will depend on how quickly we can prepare for publication the huge amount of literature arising out of the Sixth Governing Council of UNEP, to be held in Nairobi, from 9 to 27 May, 1978.