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The Green Alternative in West Germany

ERIC CHESTER

The 1960s and '70s were a time of turmoil in West Germany. Tens of thousands of young people engaged in militant demonstrations against nuclear power and nuclear weapons, many of them becoming radicalized in the process. From this wave of insurgency emerged the Greens, a party which has made environmental concerns, in the broadest sense, its major priority.

The Greens reject the growth orientation of the entire German establishment. They insist that the quality of life can not be measured by the rising tide of material goods. West German society is threatened by a deterioration of the environment, as well as by the militarized status of a country still occupied by U.S. forces employing nuclear weapons. Beyond these crucial issues, the Greens advocate a 35-hour work week to cut unemployment and they press for affirmative action programs to overcome discrimination directed against women in the workforce.

When the Greens passed the 5% threshold in the 1983 federal elections, thereby gaining representation in parliament, the party became an integral part of West German political discourse, and a topic of discussion internationally. Since then, the party's basic philosophy has remained intact, and it has continued to grow in support. Currently, membership has reached 25,000, of whom 3000-5000 actively participate in local base groups. The party also increased its share of the vote to 8.3% in the last federal election held in January of this year. Its operating rules still require that at least 50% of those at every level of leadership must be women. Last year the party finally adopted a strong pro-choice position on abortion, over the opposition of many of its religious supporters. The Greens have always prided themselves on their ties with social movements, and these ties continue to be important.

Greens & Autonomous Women's Groups

An important example of these ties is in evidence in Frankfurt, one of West Germany's largest cities, where two of those elected to the city council on the Green ticket are women from an autonomous grouping of local feminist activists. Two years ago, women from the Greens met with local feminists to choose the women who would appear on the Green slate for the upcoming municipal elections. The meeting ended in disarray, when those within the Greens were unable to agree upon a

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common ticket. Instead, two spaces on the slate were reserved for representatives of the autonomous women’s group.

The two women are not formally members of the Green caucus in the Frankfurt city council, although close cooperation is the general rule. Although loosely aligned with the Realos, one of the two major tendencies within the Greens, generally the autonomous women operate on their own agenda, with a focus on the presentation of a feminist slant to the issues posed in local politics. In this role, the two women have represented the concerns of the Frankfurt gay community to the city council, issues which the Green delegates have too often avoided.

The two women from the local group of feminists were also in the forefront of a recent battle with the city’s establishment on the issue of prostitution. Frankfurt has a quasi-legal red light district near the train station, on the edge of downtown. As the city has grown, and as land has soared in value, those with power have increased their pressure on the district. To deal with the problem, the city’s conservative mayor proposed an official red light zone at some distance from the downtown area.

After considerable discussion within the feminist community, and after meeting with a group of prostitutes, the autonomous women's group, and its two representatives, decided to oppose all legal restrictions aimed at limiting prostitution to specific areas within the city. They pointed out that landlords, almost all of them men, would be able to extract far higher rents from prostitutes forced to relocate within the newly created ghetto.

Despite its many achievements, the Greens appear to have lost their momentum and to be indecisive in their direction. The party’s ties with grass-roots activists in social movements have weakened, the party structure has become more bureaucratized, and internal divisions have widened and deepened. To some extent, these problems inevitably accompany success. Guaranteeing a democratic internal process is far more difficult in a large organization than in a smaller, more personal one. Yet the problems also reflect a downturn in the level of activism within the broader social movements.

### The Realo Tendency

Crucial to understanding the evolution of the Greens is an analysis of the Hesse experiment. Hesse is one of the eleven provincial states of West Germany, with a population of over five million, many of them residing in Frankfurt. It has long been a stronghold of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the traditional left-wing party of Germany which has close ties to the trade unions. In Hesse, the majority tendency of the Greens is allied with the Realos, the realists, who believe that an alliance with the Social Democrats is of paramount importance.

From the Realo viewpoint, social change can only be instituted through legislation, and the prerequisite for such legislation is a sympathetic government, all the way to the federal level. . . Fundis insist that radical social change depends on a vital grass-roots movement engaged in militant direct action.

In October 1985 the Greens became a part of the ruling coalition in Hesse through an agreement with the Social Democrats, and one of the leading Realos, Joschka Fischer, served as the Environment Minister of the state. This red-green coalition, the first in Green history, ruled Hesse for sixteen months. Its formation precipitated an intense debate within the entire Green movement. The lines which formed during the Hesse coalition controversy continue to mark the most acute divisions within the Greens. Underlying the ongoing debate are two very different perspectives on how to achieve fundamental social change.

The Realos believe that electoral politics, garnering more votes, should be the central focus of the party’s activities. To further this goal, the Realos convinced the party to drop its initial principle of rotation for those elected to public office. Under rotation, no one could hold public office for more than two years. This procedural rule sought to ensure a leadership which would be more accessible to the activist rank and file, and which would not be the sole preserve of a few individuals. The Realos argued that voters sought public symbols of continuity, and that elected officials could only become effective in parliament after several years of learning the ropes. In this trade-off between efficiency and grass-roots democracy, the Realos prevailed and the rotation rule was dropped.

From the Realo viewpoint, social change can only be instituted through legislation, and the prerequisite for such legislation is a sympathetic government, all the way to the federal level. The Realos are convinced that only a close and continuing alliance with the Social Democrats can create the basis for a winning electoral coalition. Together the two parties currently receive about 45% of the vote in federal elections, not enough to win but well within striking distance. Realos present a long-range perspective, in which the first victory at the federal level could well be a decade in the making. Once elected, a red-green coalition would move slowly in implementing its joint agenda to humanize West German society.
Grassroots Report

Greens Gathering in Massachusetts

JOHN WILLOUGHBY


The five day meeting of activists was not particularly large by mainstream political standards. About fifteen hundred people from around the country gathered at Hampshire College in Western Massachusetts. Nor did this meeting lead to the founding of a new organization: the group that organized the Green Gathering explicitly noted that it would be premature to create a more tightly-knit national institution. Finally, some of the most important progressive movements were missing at the conference. Only a few of the attendees were involved in either rank and file labor struggles or anti-racist battles. A lesbian and gay caucus formed during the conference, but the Gathering itself did not systematically discuss heterosexism, the AIDS crisis or even the coming October March on Washington.

Most of those who came to Hampshire College were associated with feminist, ecological and peace movement politics. Nevertheless, there was a sense among the participants (and the reporters) that an all-inclusive radical political movement in the United States could emerge from Green politics. International representatives from Germany, Poland, Costa Rica, Haiti, Brazil, Canada and Japan attended—as did spokespeople from several Native American nations. The number of people of color at the conference was small, but there were quite forceful expressions of solidarity from Gwen Patton of the National Rainbow Coalition and from the National Committee for Independent Political Action. One of the most intriguing developments of the conference was the participation of a few 'post' Marxist-Leninist groupings that have somehow managed to survive the disintegration of the 1970s. James Boggs of the Detroit-based National Organization for an American Revolution, for example, spoke at two major plenaries.

The Political Activities and Structure of the American Green Movement

The formation and growth of the German Green Party undoubtedly has been a major inspiration behind the development of a national Green movement in the United States. The conference at Amherst, however, represented much more than an effort by radicals to recreate the unique German experience.

The first halting attempts to construct a national network of Green activists began in 1984 in St. Paul, Minnesota with a regionally diverse group of independent ecological, peace and disarmament activists. The founders have, from the beginning, been suspicious of centralizing organizational tendencies, but Kansas City Greens now operate a reasonably efficient informal national clearinghouse for all local groups which apply to become members of the 'Committees of Correspondence.' There are approximately seventy such organizations grouped in-

to various Regional Confederations. Each region, in turn, sends two delegates—at least one must be a woman—to quarterly interregional meetings.

Many organizers I talked to expressed dissatisfaction with the national organizational structure. Some of the regions do represent an active rank and file. Twenty-six of the seventy local bodies, for example, come from New England. Regional representatives from other areas have a much smaller membership base, yet the consensus decision-making process at the national level allows them to block decisions within the Inter-Regional Committee.

This structural issue will be a minor problem if the active membership grows and expresses the need for more effective regional and national coordination. And Greens have undertaken an impressive array of projects. The East Bay Green Alliance, Central Coast Greens and the Mendocino Greens in Northern California have fought genetic engineering experiments, the attempts by timber companies to regain the 'right' to spray herbicides on coastal forests and the anti-union efforts by these companies to destroy collective bargaining agreements. In Burlington, Vermont, the Green grouping has established itself as a left critic of Socialist Mayor Bernie Sanders by organizing opposition to a tourist, condominium development project on the lakefront.

Several groups (including the Burlington Greens) have organized successful electoral campaigns. Greens coalesced with members of the Wisconsin Labor-Farm Party to run a very energetic, multi-racial rainbow campaign at the state level. Enough people voted for the radical candidates (headed by labor activist Kathy Christensen) to guarantee future ballot status.

Perhaps the most successful experiment in Green electoral politics has taken place in New Haven, Connecticut. (Note: I was deeply involved in the New Haven Green Party during the last year, so this is not an unbiased account.)

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closer to principles of mutual interdependence that can be observed in nature and are celebrated in pantheistic earth-mother cults. In other words, an ecofeminist perspective attempts to hold together radical social analysis with spiritualist, matriarchal practice, and one paradoxical result is the simultaneous celebration of women's autonomy and traditional women's roles. King seemed to support the feminist dimension of this analysis while critiquing its failure to address class and racial oppression.

One of the plenary sessions began with a prolonged meditation session, and, in reaction, Jutta Ditfurth complained that some American activists wanted to found a religion.

This synthesis of spirituality and feminism is a potentially uneasy one, but the most divisive issue at the conference proved to be defining the meaning of ecological politics. King and the 'grand old man' of Green politics, Murray Bookchin, both vigorously upheld a secular, anti-capitalist and social ecological perspective. Bookchin especially argued against so-called 'deep ecological' tenets which simultaneously justify the undemocratic exclusion of most humans from the natural world and celebrate a new spiritual involvement with nature.

Few explicitly challenged the Bookchin/King view, but Charlene Sprednak—author and co-author of several books and articles on Green politics—consistently stressed that the Greens should be founded on shared spiritual values that recognize our 'oneness.' One of the plenary sessions began with a prolonged meditation session, and, in reaction, Jutta Ditfurth, a national spokesperson of the German Greens, complained that some American activists wanted to found a religion.

An encouraging tendency was the widespread understanding that our opposition to American imperialism need not imply a blind support for non-capitalist, bureaucratic regimes.

Despite these uncertainties, there is a small but vital Green movement in the United States. The decline of the sectarian Marxist Left during the 1970s has opened up space for a healthier, more pluralistic revolutionary politics. The Greens will probably not provide the final political framework for the establishment of a new, multi-racial, feminist Left in this country. A primary problem was that although
Greens warn that genetic engineering experiments could have severe ecological consequences. Photo: Ellen Shub.

conference participants were well-aware of the limitations on green politics as a result of inadequate organizing within communities of color, no plans were articulated that could begin to overcome this substantial weakness. Nevertheless, the conference demonstrated to me that this movement will definitely contribute to the reconstruction of the United States Left.

One final note: the Green conference put on the best cultural night of entertainment I have ever experienced at a meeting of the Left. Any organization that can attract writers Grace Paley and Bob Nichols, poet Gary Lawless, comedian Charlie Varon, singer/poet Rachel Bagby, and folk singer Jim Scott has much to offer the American people.

John Willoughby is on the steering committee of the Union for Radical Political Economics and is a member of the New Haven Green Party.

Greens Still Lack Color

As noted in this article, the U.S. Green movement contains a sprinkling of Native Americans and a handful of Blacks and Hispanics, and there are developing ties with the Rainbow Coalition. However, the movement has been and is dominated by whites. In a recent article in The Green Letter ("Where Are All the Colored Folks," The Green Letter, Summer, 1987) Jenny Yamato points out the risk in assuming that the reasons people of color are not more active have to do with either disinterest or the need to put economic survival first.

This guilt-inspired attitude, Yamato suggests, belies a failure of whites to respect the struggles people of color have fought and won, and the movements they continue to realise. "You would do well to think about and acknowledge the ways in which we are already in the movement. Take us as we are. Respect us," she writes. She goes on to argue that "target communities" are more often than not asked to "push a cart already filled with someone else's agenda," rather than sharing in the discussion that defines that agenda.

The article also exposes the class issues and biases which make the Greens and other white-dominated political groups unable to address class differences among themselves, much less take up the battles faced by poor and working-class people of color. Yamato's article is inspiring for its clear-headed anger and frustration, coupled with a commitment to continuing the search for ways to correct the imbalance in our movements. It's clear that the Greens will not be a voice for many of us until its members join in projects initiated by people of color.

-John Willoughby

The Resist Pledge System

The most important source of Resist's income is monthly pledges. Pledges help us plan ahead by guaranteeing us a minimum monthly income. In turn, pledges receive a monthly reminder letter (in addition to the newsletter) which contains news of recent grants and other Resist activities. So take the plunge and become a Resist pledge!

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The Green Letter is an educational forum devoted to reporting on the activities of the Green movement. Their address is Green Letter, P.O. Box 9242, Berkeley, CA 94709.
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This perspective, gradual change through the electoral arena, fits neatly into the spectrum of social democratic politics. Why then do the Realos continue to emphasize the need for an independent Green party? All tendencies within the Greens view the entire spectrum within the Social Democratic party, from right to left, as insensitive to ecological concerns. In their view, this insensitivity stems from the close ties between the social democrats and the trade union leadership, since the trade unions have consistently placed the protection of jobs before the protection of the environment.

Yet there is a more basic motivation for the Realo perspective of retaining an independent role for the Greens. In West Germany, as in most advanced capitalist countries, the traditional blue collar working class is dwindling in size with the advent of the post-industrial service economy. This, in turn, has led to a significant, and ongoing, decline in the Social Democratic share of the vote. The Realos are well aware of this shift, and they argue that the Greens can attract younger and more progressive sectors of the new middle class into a broad left coalition. Thus rather than being competitors, the Greens and the Social Democrats could act as complementary components of a successful electoral coalition.

Recent events in Hesse have forced the Realos to further refine their perspective. In February of this year the red-green state coalition dissolved when the Social Democratic premier refused to call for the closing of a plant producing plutonium fuel for nuclear power plants. Once out of power, and facing reelection, the SPD reversed its position, arguing that since the party at the federal level had decided to oppose the construction of any new nuclear power plants, the plant in Hesse was no longer necessary. Another red-green coalition was then patched together for the April state-wide elections. The results were a major blow to the Realo perspective. Although the Greens did very well, increasing their share of the total vote to 9.4%, representing a considerable increase in support, the Social Democratic share fell dramatically. While some social democratic voters switched to the Greens, many moved over to the conservative Christian Democrats, allowing a conservative government to come to power in Hesse.

Building a winning electoral coalition is at the center of the Realo perspective. The defeat of the red-green coalition in the recent Hesse elections has led the Realos to conclude that all wings of the Social Democratic party, specifically including the pro-American right-wing, must become integral components of the progressive alliance. Any green-red coalition program has to be tailored to meet the objections of the SPD moderates, since without their support a sizable number of voters will switch their support to the conservative parties, leaving the progressive coalition as a permanent minority.

Leading Social Democratic moderates have spent years vigorously denouncing the "irresponsibility" of the Greens. The Realos are well aware of these charges, and they are determined to revise Green policy so it can be tolerated, if not accepted, by the entire range of opinion within the SPD. Their first effort will focus on convincing the Greens to drop their call for a unilateral withdrawal from NATO. The Realos also hope to persuade the Greens to modify their opposition to nuclear power plants to allow for a phased decommissioning of existing plants, the position already taken by the Social Democrats. Other revisions would surely follow.

The logic of the Realo position is clear. To win the acceptance of the SPD moderates will require major shifts in Green policy. In addition, the Greens would have to distance themselves from the militant wing of the social movements. Realos are prepared to make these changes, but other forces in the party are determined to block them.

The Fundis

The other major tendency in the Green party is the Fundis, or fundamentalists. During the last few years, the party has been fairly evenly split between its two tendencies, with those in the middle casting the deciding votes. The last three years of controversy have not led to a significant shift in the relative balance of support between Realos and Fundis, but the gap between them continues to widen.

Fundis reject the emphasis on electoral politics which characterizes the Realos. Fundis insist that radical social change depends on an active grassroots movement engaged in militant direct action. They see the role of the Greens as providing the electoral expression for these social movements. Elected officials who are Fundis work closely with activists to develop alternative programs, but they also state

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Green Alternative

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that these programs can only be im-
pemented when people are mobilized
to fight for them.

While the Fundis have considerable
support among Green activists, they re-
main on the defensive within the party.
Differences among the Fundis have
prevented the creation of a unified
tendency on the federal level, making it
easier for the Realos to set the agenda
for internal debate.

Even more importantly, the Fundi
perspective relies on the existence of a
vital movement of direct action. The
last few years have seen a decline in ac-
tivism in West Germany, as elsewhere,
leaving the Fundis weaker. At a time of
relative quiescence, there is always a
tendency to look toward the electoral
arena as a "practical" alternative to
direct action. This view is frequently
linked to pressure to moderate
demands for fundamental change, on
the basis that these demands are "uto-
pian." The Fundis confront this syn-
drome, as does the Left in this country,
but they do so in a society which is far
more politicized than the United
States.

So far the Fundis have been able to
hold their own within the Green party
structure. The essential points of the
party's platform were reaffirmed at the
last party conference held this May,
and a majority of those elected to the
national leadership were Fundis. The
Fundis are confident that they can hold
the Greens on a radical course, as long
as the party remains in opposition, that
is as long as a green-red ruling coalition
does not constitute a potential ruling
coalition at the federal level. Yet the
Realos will continue to exert leverage,
particularly when red-green coalitions
on a state level, in Hesse or elsewhere,
are once again elected to power.

The Fundis are firmly committed to
organizing for their position within the
Greens as active members of the party.
Nevertheless the split between the Fun-
dis and the Realos runs deep. In Frank-
furt, delegates from the two groups on
the city council occupy separate, but
adjoining, rooms. In the absence of a
revival in the social movements, the
Realos are likely to continue their
move into the mainstream of West
German politics, carrying the Greens
with them, if only hesitantly. On the
other hand, U.S. pressure to further
militarize West Germany could well
spark a new round of militant protests,
reviving the Greens as a party of grass-
roots activism, and strengthening the
Fundi position.

With all their problems, the Greens
are still an exciting development, one
which challenges leftists of every per-
suasion to rethink some of their tradi-
tional tenets. As the Greens have
grown, internal divisions have become
more acute, and a certain dynamism
has become diffused. Still, the Greens
have demonstrated the potential for a
radical political party to gain a mass
base of support in an advanced
capitalist country. For leftists in the
U.S., the Greens continue to present a
viable alternative to the tepid liberal
politics which currently engulf us.

Eric Chester is an activist in anti-
intervention movements, living in
Somerville, MA.

Grants

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activism focusing on stopping the
proliferation of defense industries in
NM, fighting plans to build a new
high level toxic waste dump in
Carlsbad, NM, and exposing the
transport of nuclear warheads
through the state. RESIST's $400
grant will go to general expenses for
the October Rio Grande Corridor Ac-
tion.

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While longtime residents of Boston's neighborhoods watch, powerful developers are making the decisions that will have serious and longterm implications for their communities. Many residents can no longer afford to rent or buy homes in their old neighborhoods, while others find they have no say over the environmental impact, increased traffic or lack of parking that accompany development projects.

In response, the Coalition for Community Control of Development (CCCD) was established in the summer of 1986, to draft a plan that would create democratically selected neighborhood councils that will have significant power (including veto power) over planning and development decisions. In this plan, the CCCD is taking steps to ensure participation by tenants, people of color, women and poor people. So far, meetings have been attended by representatives from eleven Boston neighborhoods as ethnically and racially diverse as the city itself.

The CCCD has been conducting extensive research into the use of neighborhood councils in other cities, as well as surveying Boston residents about their ideas on citizen participation. The Coalition intends to hold a series of public meetings in the city's neighborhoods on the topic of community control and the CCCD plan. The overall goal is to design a development plan for Boston from the perspective of the city's residents, advocating community control but with a commitment to open access so that traditionally disenfranchised groups cannot be excluded from decision-making processes.

RESIST's $400 grant was used for outreach to ensure continued participation in the CCCD by representatives of all city neighborhoods and other interested persons or groups.

Correction: In our June/July special issue on the Middle East, we printed out-of-date addresses for two Middle East resources. Israel & Palestine Political Report can be contacted in the U.S. c/o Larry Harris, IJPU, PO Box 5672, Berkeley, CA 94705. The Campaign for Peace with Justice in the Middle East can be contacted c/o AFSC, 2161 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140.

InsideOUT, P.O. Box 38327, Los Angeles, CA 90038

"I am 15 going on 16 and of course gay... I listen to your radio programs on my headphones so nobody will hear me listening..."

Letters like this one from a listener to a local gay radio show begin to reveal a large but largely ignored public radio audience. Gay people of all ages are creative when it comes to seeking out and using the few resources available that can provide information about gay and lesbian culture, politics and preoccupations across the U.S. and around the world. Local gay radio has an avid, if often invisible, listenership. Now veteran producers of these programs have joined in an effort to create and distribute a national gay public radio program that will both communicate to large numbers of closeted gays who lack access to gay media and contribute to the sense of power and pride growing in gay and lesbian communities nationally and internationally.

At least 20 local gay radio programs are now produced in the U.S. and Canada, usually by unpaid volunteers who rarely have the time or resources to link up with each other or seek out new, well-produced programs and feature reports. Gay radio journalists also lack an outlet for their work when it focuses on gay issues. The producers of InsideOUT hope to provide a weekly half-hour program of short reports that will be a forum for the gay/lesbian community. Some of the issues to be addressed include the interconnections between feminist movements and gay/lesbian liberation; disability issues; news from cities around the world; perspectives from lesbians and gays of color and special reports on issues within minority communities; music, humor and art; reviews of books and films; children of lesbians and gays; and more.

The project is sponsored by RadioWest, a network of independent public radio producers based in Los Angeles. RESIST's grant of $350 will be used to distribute cassette samples to 500 radio stations who may want to air the program.

Albuquerque Mobilization for Survival, 1107 Edith St., SE, Albuquerque, NM 87102

Since the detonation of the first atomic bomb at Trinity Site in the New Mexico desert in 1945, virtually the entire state has become a vast nuclear armaments complex. U.S. nuclear weapons research and development takes place at three national laboratories, two of which are located in NM. The heart of the weapons complex is in Albuquerque, at Kirtland Air Force Base, and it is here that the Dept. of Energy, Dept. of Defense and major corporations have joined forces to create a major international nerve center for the arms race. Almost all of the 26,000 nuclear weapons now in the U.S. arsenal were designed, produced and tested at facilities managed by the DOE's Albuquerque office.

Star Wars research has given the complex new purpose. The most ambitious project in the works is to develop a high tech research corridor along a 300-mile stretch of the Rio Grande River from Los Alamos to Las Cruces. The planned labs, universities and test sites will rival the Silicon Valley in California and will include facilities for genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, robotics, optics and microelectronics, all with funding from the Star Wars budget. The PR calls it a "clean, high technology industry" that will give the area a new economic base, and in Albuquerque there are few voices to say otherwise.

Fortunately, for those who want to stop the Star Wars steamroller, a small but active network of groups in Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Las Cruces have formed the Rio Grande Corridor Action Coalition. They are planning four days of Actions in October that will draw national attention to the issue, including a Peace Camp near Kirtland AFB that will be the educational focal point for the event. Also planned are a bike trek from Los Alamos to Santa Fe, and speakers who will address the themes of peace conversion, local economies and community needs.

Albuquerque MOBE, which initiated the coalition, has a history of

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