

**From a Nest of Rivals to Germany's Agents of Change:
Remarks on 'Values and Conflicts'
with Regard to the German Greens in the 1980s and 1990s***

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1 Introduction

Among the most conspicuous characteristics of the German Greens is not only their record of electoral success but also a history of internal division and fierce conflict. It was not before 1998 that conflict ceased to be endemic in the party. The German Greens were founded in 1979 by a sort of rainbow coalition composed of persons with rather different values, world views and long-term goals. There was little common understanding beside the aim of forming a party distinct from all existing parties and acting in favor of a bunch of issues neglected so far.

Participating in the organizing activities were representatives of the local 'alternative' and 'colored' initiatives created earlier for participating in municipal elections; furthermore: individual pioneers of ecological reasoning and critique of industrial civilization, disillusioned social democrats, and, last but not least, the remains of the small-scale parties left over from the student movement—some of the 'nondogmatic' socialist kind, others of decidedly 'marxist-leninist' brand. Common views were constrained to the critical assessment of the status quo—as either a logical consequence of capitalism, the dead end of industrialization, or the vicious cycle of self-sufficient party politics. Whereas all groups in the founding assembly were eager to state the arrival of something "new" and distance themselves from social democracy as well as communist ideology, there was only a loose agreement over an anti-

* Several sections of these remarks draw on 'The German Greens: Preparing for another new beginning?' (Wiesenthal 1993, ch. 9).

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institutional understanding of politics and democracy as well as a quest for thorough institutional reforms. Literally anything else became subject to intense fights over the party's profile and platforms.

Leaving aside the early frustration felt by prominent representatives of civilization critique (such as Herbert Gruhl and Baldur Springmann) who left the party soon after its foundation, the period from 1980 until 1987 was marked by the dominance of the more radical segments over the moderates and so-called realists. The enduring conflict saw two groups on either side: the 'Fundis' presented themselves as an alliance of radical ecologists and eco-socialists, while the 'Realos' most often enjoyed the collaboration of the eco-libertarians. Later on, a considerable share of the moderate and mostly undecided majority found themselves on the benches of the group called 'New Beginning' (Aufbruch).

There were at least three predominant themes of conflict: the Greens' collective identity, the party's role in politics, and, last but not least, its organizational form. They will be dealt with in this order.

2 The Conflict over Collective Identity

A major theme of conflict was the degree to which the Greens should base their collective identity on the (most) radical critique of the status quo. Whereas the more radical currents insisted on the crushing critique of the capitalist market economy, its legal framework and the existing measures of social security, the minority of moderate members, most often helplessly, fought for more precise and careful diagnoses of reality. This conflict intensified when, during the second half of the 1980s, the radical wing retained its critique of the entire 'system', while the realists argued in favor of policy priorities that would fit into coalition agreements.

The realists' position implied that there were some features of society, such as civil and political liberties, that deserve to be maintained and even extended instead of being seen as mere symbols. For most persons sympathizing with catastrophic reasoning, conspiracy theories (e.g. of a symbiosis of financial capital, the US government and NATO) or the idea of returning to simple rural life, radicalness served as proof of one's proper 'Green' identity.

In contrast to what early admirers of the Greens (e.g. Fritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnak, 1984) suggested, the first decade offers no proof of the hypothesis that a common basic stance or central idea developed amongst the German Greens. Instead, from the early beginning, there existed considerable differences—and indeed rivalry—between competing

models of identity including some brands of anarchism, deep ecology, philosophical reasoning, Marxism and liberalism. However, because none of these—except the eco-libertarians, for a couple of years—succeed to form a well-organized group, let alone a caucus, the plethora of minor identities became smashed in the overriding conflict over the options of radical opposition and participation in government. It took almost a decade until the departure from radical revolutionary attitudes was achieved and working for rather limited (piecemeal) changes of policy would become a legitimate everyday activity.

There is also a structural explanation of the Greens' susceptibility to radical thinking and ideological conflict. These latter are said to result, above all, from the peculiar nature of the issues of 'new politics'. Because green politics is occupied with a multiplicity of conflictual aspects touching on almost all social spheres—from production, through upbringing and education, state and law, science and technology, to patterns of consumption and individual life-styles—there is no one concise 'key issue', and no permanent 'prime enemy'. As far as the choice of political ends and means is concerned, simple dichotomies such as the historical cleavage between labor and capital, the distinction of 'true and false', 'good and evil', 'us and them' proved insufficient. The diffuse and often fluctuating structure of conflicts would inevitably manifest itself in problems of orientation.

Radicalization of thought and desire are one way of constructing group-identity and stabilizing involvement. Obviously, this is a structural feature—and probably the main reason why catastrophic scenarios, apocalyptic forecasts, and an impassioned critique of civilization and capitalism proved so significant during the Greens' first decade of existence. Radicalness in diagnoses and therapies appeared to offset the lack of a fully-developed theory after the crisis of Marxism and, at the same time, helped to cope with the centrifugal tendencies inherent in postmodern 'new' social movements: i.e. their extremely subjective and particularistic incentive pattern combined with a strong preference for autonomy that runs counter to nearly all the requirements of formal organization.

The fundamentalists' inability to tolerate ambiguities that are real and rooted in the operational context has hindered the Greens to develop their potential for influencing society from the start on. This was most clearly demonstrated in confessional formulas used to comment on peace policy (e.g. 'Out of NATO!'), on women's policy (which was always modeled on the life-style of the 'most radical' feminists of the day), on German unity (which was declared to be the resurrection of the German Reich), or on the first Gulf War (seen as an example of US imperialism).

3 The Conflict over the Party's Role in Politics

The strategic alternatives of either participating in coalition governments or relying on the 'power' of social movements resembled two opposed world views and political value systems.

On the surface, the denial of the government function rooted in the fear of compromising central features of the party's identity. However, as became clear in the mid-1980s, the proponents of the radical currents followed a concept of politics that appeared to be anti-parliamentarian. The underlying idea was to wait for, and if possible further, a situation of revolutionary turmoil that would allow to abolish capitalist relations of production and introduce some variant of socialism together with institutions of self-governance and direct democracy. Violent illegal action, e.g. the destruction of high-voltage current cables during anti-nuclear campaigns, appeared to be an appropriate means. In the absence of a revolutionary situation, political practice was seen to consist primarily in the manifestation of identities and intentions. Parliament was to be used only as a 'stage', not as a means of participating in the elaboration of policy decisions, let alone the formation of governmental coalitions.

This position, however, suffered from declining support among the membership because an increasing share of it enjoyed the opportunity of participating in policy-making following the party's success in local and state elections. Thus, the radical wing lost their hold on the majority of delegates on party conventions with increasing frequency. At the same time, the option of Red-Green coalitions began to appear a viable one in more and more states. This in its turn was due more to the growing dissatisfaction of the voters with conservative-liberal coalitions than to the proposals of reform put forward by the SPD and Greens. Furthermore, there was a certain weariness with the fundamentalist plea for a critical attitude to the system and for abstinence from politics, a fall in the number of votes won in the fundamentalist strongholds, and seemingly attractive opportunities offered by participation in government. Thus, even in erstwhile 'radical' regional party organs the option of political co-operation would win a majority vote.

In 1989, the break with the Greens' radical past became definite. On the one hand, the decline and final collapse of state socialism in the USSR, Poland, Hungary and finally the GDR cleared away the remainders of sympathy with Marxist ideology that already had lost much of its weight. On the other hand, the decision of the West Berlin Greens (AL), a party organization with an indisputable leftist tradition, to form a municipal government with the SPD was a real breakthrough to a productive conception of politics as it was introduced by the

Hessian Realos already in 1985. The pattern was followed shortly afterwards by the Greens in Lower Saxony.

Now, the traditional alliance between fundamentalists and 'left-wingers' in the regional executive committees of Northrhine-Westfalia, Schleswig-Holstein, and Hamburg began to collapse. As late as 1990, the 'eco-socialists' around Rainer Trampert and Thomas Ebermann left the Greens; in spring 1991 the 'radical ecologists' around Jutta Ditfurth announced their departure. Now even moderate 'left-wingers' joined in the critique of fundamentalism which they had previously supported. Their willingness to team up with the pragmatists, their erstwhile pet enemies, helped to strengthen the party's capacity for integration and political action on state and federal level.

4 The Conflict over the Party's Organizational Form

Radicals and realists fought for different models of organizational structure and development, the former seeking the realization of utopian ideals, whereas the latter striving for decision-making efficiency and effectiveness as a political actor in society. As is well known, the Greens' approach to politics has a formal as well as a material (or policy-oriented) side. There has been an attempt, through the choice of organizational structures and procedural rules, to take account of the fact that attitudes and preferences do not simply flow into the party from outside but are also shaped by the party itself, indeed are in some cases self-generated. What the party wants and how it acts is dependent to an important degree on how it is organized. In order to guarantee the effective operation of members' interests—which in bureaucratic organizations and hierarchical decision-making structures are often at a disadvantage—the Greens expressly pledged themselves to the principles of 'grass-roots democracy'.

These principles are familiar from the anarchist traditions of the labor movement. The Greens established the principle of the rotation of official posts, which allowed for short periods of office (from one to two years) and excluded re-election of office-holders. They prohibited the simultaneous holding of a number of offices, particularly the combination of a party office and a parliamentary mandate (the 'incompatibility rule'). They experimented with the imperative mandate, which binds delegates to the resolutions of the body that has delegated them. And they tried (prompted also by a lack of money) to fulfill most organizational tasks using voluntary, honorary, and unpaid workers rather than a paid staff.

The effects of Green grass-roots democracy were highly ambivalent. Above all, one has to distinguish between the effects which it had outside the Greens and those which it had inside—i.e. for the Greens themselves. The 'external' effects of the Green experiment in democracy can be adjudged to have been unreservedly positive, and may be said to continue to be felt to this day. The fact that organizations could not only function but also be politically effective without permanent functionaries, provided members occupied a 'strong' position and there was a high degree of transparency in all (formal) procedures, came as a positive surprise. Its 'radiating power' affected many other organizations setting them under pressure to democratize.

Of course, the internal effects appeared much less favorable. The formal application of the principle of rotation, of the incompatibility rule, and of various other forms of 'grass-roots monitoring' of elected party representatives produced the same sort of tendencies to alienation and detachment as are claimed for a rigid ruling hierarchy. Instead of a lively organizational democracy, what often developed was a 'culture of distrust' (Kitschelt, 1989a, p. 72).

Because the fundamentalists were the ones who continually devoted themselves to the development of the organization and, until very recently, held the majority in party congresses, they had a monopoly on the intellectual interpretation of the party's image. The impassioned defense of grass-roots principles and any issues concerning the organizational 'form' of politics were declared to be key political issues. In particular, younger fundamentalists regarded the formal principles of grass-roots democracy as having great value in themselves. This inclination impacted heavily on what became around 1990 the fundamental problem of the Greens' internal process, their inability to combine legitimacy and efficiency as Joachim Raschke (1991, p. 10) put it. What they regarded as legitimate—namely laxer rules of membership and a high degree of fluctuation, institutionalized distrust and intense self-reflection—was inefficient as far as intervention in society is concerned. However, the things that would be efficient—the fostering of creativity, the ability to communicate and co-operate, the delegation of responsibility for a fixed term, the acknowledgement and corroboration of successful work—were considered illegitimate.

When the Greens failed to secure entry into the first all-German parliament in December 1990, they were not just paying the penalty with the voters for having shown themselves indecisive and petty-minded vis-à-vis the historic opportunity offered by unification; their predicament was also a consequence of their irritating 'performance', a result of the distrust fomented by Greens against other Greens.

Did all these harmful features vanish with the Greens participating in the Federal government? The answer is a definite no. Although the party undertook a thorough organizational reform in the mid-1990s in the course of which most rigidities of grass-root democracy were abolished, collective decision-making procedures still appear to be aggravated by the task to address constituencies with diverging value patterns. Because of frequent compromising between rivaling demands and expectations on behalf of the rank-and-file, the time horizon of strategic planning remains rather limited (Joachim Raschke, 2001). However, this is not to deny that great improvements in terms of political rationality were already achieved.

5 Exactly How was Fundamentalism Overcome?

Radicalness ceased to be the central feature of the collective identity as a consequence of the Green lobbyists joining forces with the moderates and the pragmatists. The instances of a 'change of mind' are less numerous. The end of fundamentalism could well be described as the process of political learning undertaken by the entire party. This, however, would meet the truth only halfway. In fact, one has to acknowledge a twofold process. On the one hand, fundamentalism suffered from its inherent inconsistencies and a certain lack of clarity. This is, among other things, demonstrated by the willingness and enthusiasm of its most prominent proponents to work for favorable election results. Even if the new members of parliament had an affiliation with the radical current, they soon felt dissatisfied with the relative powerlessness of the parliamentary opposition and began to see partnership at government as a supreme alternative. This was the more so, the stronger Green representatives felt driven to further certain policies for which they claimed responsibility vis-à-vis their voters.

Until the mid-1980s the fundamentalists were the ones who continually devoted themselves to the development of both the party platform as well the party's organization. Because they held the majority in party congresses, they also had a monopoly on the intellectual interpretation of the party's image. It was thanks to this monopoly that there occurred, in the early 1980s, a rather strange-looking reversion to the traditions of the early workers' movement, to its rhetoric and its schemes of institutional reform, i.e. socialization of the means of production, establishing a system of councils in addition to or instead of parliament and similar things.

At this time, there was a gulf between the self-constructed identity of the Greens, on the one side, and their public perception as a fresh and innovative political actor, on the other. The Greens achieved significant gains in state and federal elections despite their rather radical and

neo-socialist self-presentation. The general public as well as the mass media continued to picture the Greens as a mainly environmentalist party with a sense for minorities and women rights. Although the conflict between the radical and the realist wing found broad coverage in the media, the realists proved superior in forming the Greens' public image.

Whereas electoral success led to the broadening of the Green constituency beyond the narrow strata of well-informed or devoted voters, parliamentarism gave rise to the development of an additional factor undermining fundamentalism: Green lobbyism. Newly formed lobby groups within the party contributed greatly to the change in the party's image as well as the processes whereby its objectives were formulated. Green 'lobbyists' came in two versions. The first consisted of lobbyists who represent more or less legitimate individual interests, namely those involved in self-managed businesses or projects (e.g. production companies, bookshops, alternative newspapers, cultural centers, music and theatre groups). The second group were advocates of those kinds of collective interests that figure high in the catalogue of 'new politics': e.g. representatives of citizens' initiatives, of environmental or conservation groups, of women's refuges, of immigrants and workers of foreign origin a.s.o. Both 'lobby factions' regularly succeeded in persuading the fundamentalists to support their particular, more realistic and more short-term political objectives. In return, they gave their backing to the fundamentalists when it was a question of occupying positions of influence or of defending 'radical' formulas of identity against the pragmatists' practical view of politics.

However, because the 'lobbyists' had little scruples to ally themselves —before important elections—with the 'pragmatists', they more frequently held fundamentalism in check and, in fact, stopped pragmatists leaving the Greens. Although the champions of ecological and social special interests began by being scarcely less radical than the convinced fundamentalists, as they experienced the benefits of parliamentarism, their view of politics came closer to that of the pragmatists. As policy experts they enjoyed a certain amount of attention in the media and were respected even by officials of other parties—a fact which increasingly had a beneficial effect on both their world view and the interests which they represented.

Strictly speaking, the ideological predominance of fundamentalism was broken not so much by the 'internal' value of better arguments from the pragmatists, but as a consequence of the profile change that followed the favorable election results obtained through the co-operation of pragmatists and lobbyists. This continuous change of profile and self-image was ratified by fundamentalists leaving the party and the increasing share of moderate and pragmatist members. However, according to the 'law of curvilinear disparity' (Herbert Kitschelt, 1989b), party

functionaries with their more radical aspirations quite often keep dominating the assembly of delegates. This, paradoxically, gave rise to the recent conflict over the right of rank and file to decide over the reform of grass-root democracy mentioned above. The poll was held against the explicit will of the erstwhile advocates of grass-roots' power.

6 Favorable Circumstances Furthered the Emergence of the Greens

The German Greens benefited from an institutional setting providing strong incentives for withstanding their self-destructive tendencies. The joint political project named 'Green Party' filled a gap in supply of a kind that was unknown in the political systems of other Western European countries, namely the specific German lack of a socialist opposition, resulting from the division of the country, the Cold War, and the semi-official anti-communism. The Greens found themselves pushed into this role, and were simultaneously the subject and object of an unexpected 'push effect': as representatives of social minorities, as systematic advocates of the effective enforcement of equal rights for women, as champions of egalitarian principles and morally sound decisions.

The fact that the Greens did not collapse under this strain but managed rather to establish themselves within the network of political actors in the Federal Republic might be described as an effect of various institutional 'pull-factors' providing the Greens with a favorable opportunity structure.

1. The first, and probably most important, condition of success is satisfied by German electoral law, under which all parties at the various levels of representation obtain parliamentary seats in proportion to the votes cast.

2. Second, the 'five-per-cent-clause' performs the function of preventing a fragmentation of the party-system. As far as the creation of the Greens is concerned, this rule was a strong incentive—perhaps the decisive incentive—to construct the party as an alliance of differently oriented forces. Had it not been for the institutional pressure to put aside the many differences that existed, the Greens would not have emerged around 1980, and not in this form.

3. Third, the party system in the Federal Republic owes its stability not only to the post-war 'constitutional patriotism' (as put by Jürgen Habermas) of its citizens, but also to certain institutional precautions against the populist temptations eventually experienced by the political parties. Among them and probably their stoutest pillar is the public financial support granted to the parties—a legally based system of party-finance, the so-called Wahlkampfkostenerstattung. It

provides parties with generous refund of electoral campaign costs according to their record in state and national elections if only they succeeded to win at least .5 per cent of the vote.

4. Four, the federal structure of the German political system provides comparatively favorable opportunities for new parties to develop. It is relatively easy to acquire initial experience and a public profile through participation in local elections (for seats in the city council) or in elections for the state parliament. The state parliaments as well as local governments offer many opportunities for 'new' political approaches to make their mark.

5. Finally, there is positive feedback from close links between the parliamentarian and the corporatist forms of interest representation. According to the corporatist layer of Germany's political system, representatives of the parties present in parliament enjoy ample opportunities to take part in consultative and supervisory organs of varied kinds. Thanks to these opportunities, even small parties benefit from the multiplicatory effect of media coverage.

Summarizing the combined effect of these five elements of relative openness in the political system, the political opportunity structure turned out to be definitely favorable as far as the Green party was concerned. Furthermore, the new actor received plenty incentives to view his survival as an endorsement of his political programme and of his peculiar interpretation of reality, regardless of their inherent weakness.

7 The Greens' Impact on Society

With the rise of the Green Party the entire party system as well as Germany's political culture embarked upon a trip of change. The Greens did not only function as vehicles for environmental interests and the concerns of disadvantaged groups but also as monitors of the conduct of governments, mayors, and administrations. With great persistence they set about uncovering corruption, tacit partnerships between politicians and business, and instances where legal competencies had been exceeded. The influence of the Greens is thus scarcely measurable in terms of votes. Their very presence, their politics, and even their internal disputes have left unmistakable marks. Four points may illustrate this.

1. The general acceptance and 'normalization' of the environmental issue, including the related problems of the link between the industrialized and developing countries, of agricultural policy, of energy policy, etc., are not, of course, due solely to the Greens. But their effect as a catalyst and reinforcer of this set of issues was and is enormous. By transporting the doubts, critical viewpoints, and anxieties of the social movements into the political system and securing a

hearing for 'counter-experts', they ensured greater variety in the relevant information and arguments.

2. Somewhat less striking but no less important is the political 'change of style' fostered (again, not caused solely) by the Greens. Whether because of the dialectic of communicative understanding or because of the career-opportunities which up-and-coming 'non-green' politicians saw in a 'serious' approach to Green issues, the forms as well as the themes of 'green' politics—and indeed something of the radical impetus of the early Greens—became part of political culture. A positive view of pluralism established itself, in which even the representatives of the 'fundamentalist' position enjoyed respect and achieved a certain prominence in the media. Mention should also be made of the successes brought about by the Green-inspired 'feminization' of politics, initially confined to the symbolic but now a yardstick for women's demands and women's presence in all political bodies.

3. One of the surprising, and perhaps paradoxical, effects brought about by the Greens in the 1980s is the reinforcement of left–right polarization in inter-party rivalry. This has several causes. One is related to the 'political ecology' developed by the Greens. Given that many environmental interventions are restrictive in character, it was calculated that there would have to be trade-offs in terms of income and employment. The unjust accusation of hostility to the workers greatly affected the Greens, who saw themselves as both critical of capitalism and socially oriented. They responded with even more voluminous programmes of state expenditure, which, like those of the Social Democrats, adhered to Keynesian logic. But because both business and a majority of the electorate opposed higher taxes and higher public borrowing, the Greens, around 1990, fell into the same credibility trap as the SPD.

4. The most significant success produced by this competition between Greens and Social Democrats is undoubtedly the transformation in programme and 'style' undergone by the SPD. The latter benefited from a strong incentive of building up a new, 'ecological' image, which would improve its prospects with younger voters. One problematic consequence, however, was that the SPD transformed itself rather too quickly into a 'post-modern' party, leaving behind older and more traditionally oriented voters. Exactly the same happened after the Red-Green government decided to impose a program of economic liberalization, budget cuts and retrenchment of welfare expenditure. Now, this 'old-fashioned' section of SPD's former constituency is migrating to the conservatives.

8 The Rise of the German Greens from an Exceptional Background

Assessing the factors that allowed for the significant and rather unparalleled success of the German Greens demands a contextual explanation as well. German Greens appear to be exceptional not only because their career as a political party began relatively early in the late 1970s. They are exceptional in the sense that they filled a structural gap in Germany's political system and culture. In order to understand the political culture from which the German Greens emerged—and in opposition to which they would successfully picture themselves—one has to recall the peculiar features of German post-war history.

West Germany after the downfall of the Hitler regime had to invent a new politico-cultural identity. Given the unholy and truly disastrous experiences from imperial Germany to the Third Reich, the new identity turned out to be of an exclusively economic brand: the proudness of having regained prosperity. This was accompanied by two equally resolute 'separations': the dissociation from National Socialism, and the strict rejection of all things 'communist' or 'socialist'.

Post-war Germany was characterized not so much by social or class divisions as by a political 'cleavage'. In comparison with the majority—probably 90 per cent—of consumer-minded, security-oriented, and politically abstinent citizens, there was only a small minority of left-wing, left-liberal souls with an eye for the past and a critical attitude to the self-satisfied society. However, it was not before the years around '1968' that the present liberal, pluralist society of the Federal Republic, with its capacity for self-critical analysis, emerged. Only in the 1970s and 1980s, did knowledge of the National Socialist past combine with moral horror at the fact that this past had been possible, was entirely German-made and has become irreparable.

There was another, more recent historical landmark that impinged on the founders of the Green party. This was '1977', a year of extreme events in politics, when a high wave of left-wing terrorist actions coincided with the last surge of the mass movement against the construction of nuclear power stations. If '1968' had been the symbol of a period of liberalization overloaded with utopian revolutionary ideas, the 'German autumn' of 1977 became the symbol of worries that the pluralist-liberal democracy could give way to a more authoritarian model of state rule, given the great power of interpretation and repression that a unified ruling elite could exert. When individuals from rather different political background collaborated in the founding process of the Green party, they also thought to respond to this situation by means of a preemptive strike.

9 A Final Remark on the German Greens as an Object of Myths

The German Greens resemble an exception in just another way. They have become, much more than any other green party, the victim of myths.

There is the myth that the foundation and early electoral successes of the German Greens were due to a particularly strong ecological and pacifist mood in West German society. However, unconditional pacifism and the ecological critique of civilization as it was advanced by the radical ecologists were present only in a tiny share of voters and only among a minority of party members.

Also mythical is the belief that the German Greens are the successful creation of charismatic personalities such as Petra Kelly, Rudi Dutschke and Rudolf Bahro. Although, these personalities made extremely valuable contributions to the formation of an advantageous picture of the Greens, the party took shape far beyond the influence and the wishes of the Green 'celebrities'.

Another myth is the opinion that most of the political activities and conflicts in which the Greens appeared to be involved were associated with the advancement of ecological issues and values. Whereas this opinion gave rise to the notion of the Greens as being a single-issue party, it is nonetheless totally wrong. On the contrary, from the very beginning the German Greens had concerned themselves with the full range of economic, social and judicial issues that formed an ambitious programme of societal renewal.

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