

“Saving Nature in Socialism:  
East Germany’s Official and Independent Environmentalism, 1968-1990”

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Julia Elizabeth Ault: “Saving Nature in Socialism: East Germany’s Official and  
Oppositional Environmentalism, 1968-1990”  
(Under the direction of Konrad H. Jarausch)

This dissertation explores the social, political, and environmental implications at home and abroad of East Germany’s (German Democratic Republic, GDR) mounting pollution problem. Placing the rise of environmental consciousness in East Germany in conversation with developments in West Germany and Poland, my project examines how the communist dictatorship and the small but growing opposition each grappled with the mounting pollution problem. Specifically, the dissertation considers why the dictatorship embraced environmental protection—even codifying the right to a clean environment in its 1968 constitution—and how it implemented this mandate. Yet, as the new environmental regulation and social policies raised East Germans’ expectations for a cleaner environment and a higher quality of life, their failures became increasingly manifest. As a result, a protest movement formed in the only institution not controlled by the communist party, the Protestant Church. I argue that Christian activists formulated a critique that challenged not only official environmental practices, but ultimately, the system as a whole. Although this criticism figured prominently in the Round Table discussions leading to reunification in 1990, our understanding of the connections between the environment and communism as well as their legacies remain as yet understudied.

This examination of pollution, policy, and protest challenges traditional narratives about environmentalism. First, within the GDR, studying the interactions between institutions, politics, and society illuminates the complex negotiations between state and society under communism.

Because environmentalism was not strictly viewed as oppositional, actors engaged in a range of activities for a common cause. Second, I argue that environmental consciousness arose for a variety of domestic and international reasons under communism, neither simply borrowing from western, liberal democracies nor developing in isolation from them. In fact, environmentalism in the GDR drew on a multitude of outside influences, such as western green movements, Christian texts, Soviet rhetoric, and Eastern European dissidents, to respond to serious, local degradation. This broadens the accepted narratives of environmentalism as originating solely in western, liberal democracies and highlights how both Germanys engaged with the environment to support their claims to legitimacy. Environmentalism in the GDR bridged the Iron Curtain, demonstrating the limitations of bipolar understandings of Europe during the Cold War. Its largest success, perhaps, was how uncontentious environmental cleanup proved to be during the unification process in the 1990s. Both East and West Germans had accepted its importance.

## PREFACE

This dissertation project is eight—if not many more—years in the making. As a college junior, in 2007, I spent a semester abroad in Freiburg, Germany’s “eco-capital,” where I became fascinated with the idea of a successful Green Party. My German roommates, being good environmentalists, were more than happy to discuss such topics with their tag-along “Ami.” Upon returning to Grinnell for my senior year, I knew two things: that I wanted to write a senior thesis on the development of the Greens in West Germany from social movement to political party and that I wanted to return to Germany.

Questions about German history still floated around in my head a year later when I returned as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant. My assigned school, however, was in that God-forsaken place that Freiburgers referred to as “the wild East.” Despite knowing very little about the former East Germany, and having a distinctly western attitude about it when I arrived, I quickly grew to love Jena and the Thuringian countryside. More than anything, though, I enjoyed spending time in the teachers’ lounge at my school, listening to the teachers’ stories. Most of them had been born, educated, begun their teaching careers, and started families before the transition of 1989-90. Without fail, within five minutes of being in the room, one or more teachers (some of whom I hardly knew) would approach me and begin to tell me about their lives “before.” It was almost as if they felt obligated to share their stories with the outsider, to clarify, justify, or defend some earlier action, and I was a more than willing listener.

Eventually, I wanted to find a way to blend these two seemingly unrelated and yet thoroughly entangled histories. Why was the Green Party an established fixture in the West, but

people rarely spoke of it—even in progressive Jena—in the East? Why was it that I had spent so much time in Germany by the time I was twenty-two, and yet I knew next to nothing about East Germany until I landed in it? More than anything, the intersection of environmentalism and East Germany posed numerous questions I could not answer. These questions lie at the core of this dissertation.

I am greatly indebted to the multitude of people who have supported me, personally and professionally, throughout this long process. Three undergraduate professors—Jenny Michaels, Dan Kaiser, and Rob Lewis—fostered intellectual interests that wove their way into my dissertation, probably even more than I realize. Gudrun Keitel and Silke Schimmel warmly welcomed me into their homes in Jena and Nordhausen, and patiently answered my questions about Thuringia, the Harz, and life in East Germany over the course of countless hikes. Whenever I have felt alone in Germany, I’ve always known that a bed is waiting for me at Friedrich-Naumann-Straße.

The research for this project would not have been possible without the support of a variety of grants and fellowships. FLAS grants from Indiana University, the University of Pittsburgh, and the University of North Carolina provided me with the language skills to make my first forays east of the Oder, while Columbia’s Council for European Studies offered the means to conduct research in Berlin, Magdeburg, and Wrocław. The Central European History Society also generously provided funds for research, but it was the Free University’s Berlin Program that truly made this project what it is today. Above all, Karin Goihl’s knowledge, care, and concern were invaluable in navigating German archives and academic culture. Additionally, the discussion and feedback from Paul Nolte and Martin Sabrow’s colloquia challenged me to approach the project from new directions.

A slew of archivists helped me to find the material for this project, often providing the insight of those deeply engaged in their work. At the Robert Havemann Society's *Archiv der Opposition*, Petra Söllner kindly welcomed me every day with a "Guten Morgen, Frau Ault," and brought me innumerable files during the months I spent there. The Federal Archive in Berlin-Lichterfelde and the Federal Commission for the Records of the State Security Service (BStU) also provided a wealth of sources about the functioning of the East German party-state. In particular, Julia Spohr at the BStU helped me to explore the many different ways the Stasi viewed the environment. At the Böll Foundation's *Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis*, Robert Camp and Christoph Becker-Schaum guided me in finding material about the Greens' stance on the East.

But it was the work at the smallest archives that often proved most rewarding. Saskia Paul at the *Archiv Bürgerwegung Leipzig* helped in every way she could, even when that meant leaving me alone for hours on end to read files. It was in the Lusatian hinterland, at Großhennersdorf's Environmental Library, that I had the opportunity not only to access rarely-read files, but also to meet and talk with locals who had been active in the environmental movement. Andreas Schönfelder, who runs the library today, generously spent hours relating his experiences and connecting dots of the former opposition movement.

Since beginning graduate school, I have been incredibly fortunate to find friends and colleagues who have motivated and practically aided me in writing a better dissertation. Scott Krause and Scott Harrison have devoted countless hours listening to half-baked concepts, and then, improving them greatly. During a sometimes trying year of research, these two, along with Adam Blackler, sparked a new passion for this project and academic life. Their company on adventures into Brandenburg and Poland not only broke up the monotony of the archives, but also brought to life communism's lasting mark on the landscape.

Colleagues and friends in Chapel Hill, too, have made the burden of graduate school lighter. Derek Holmgren and Sarah Lowry have plied me with excellent food on many occasions, while Adam Domby and Jennifer Kosmin have provided unstinting moral support. All of my historian and nonhistorian teammates on Rainbow's mighty Baklava deserve credit for keeping me sane over the years. Lars Stiglich, Caroline Nilsen, and Aaron Hale-Dorrell have accommodated my desire to go kick the ball around more times than I can count. The interweaving of collegiality and friendship has made my time at UNC both intellectually stimulating and socially enjoyable. I owe a particular debt of gratitude for the friends and colleagues from a number of institutions who read and edited chapters in the final months, many stepping outside of their comfort zone to do so. Lars Stiglich, Caroline Nilsen, Alex Ruble, Scott Harrison, Scott Krause, Aaron Hale-Dorrell, and Adam Blackler all deserve a lifetime of cookies and beer for their help.

The members of my dissertation committee have each greatly contributed to this project. Chad Bryant has been with this project nearly since its inception, always gently providing thought-provoking comments, praise when it was needed, and an Eastern European perspective. Don Raleigh has offered invaluable insight into the larger Soviet system and the critical questions that only an outside reader can bring. Susan Pennybacker has challenged me to consider that often-neglected "West" in my project and generously shared her own activist experiences. Finally, Chris Browning has always offered kind critiques and summed up what I had been trying to say more concisely than I ever could have.

My advisor, Konrad Jarausch, has been the lynchpin of this project, offering advice and encouragement since before I set foot in Chapel Hill. His ability to see the whole machine of the project, but also each of the moving parts within it has made it a joy and a fruitful challenge to work with him over the last six years. His cogent insights into each chapter have immeasurably



improved this dissertation, and he has patiently and generously supported my decisions as the project has evolved.

My Grinnell and my “real” family have been there for me through every step of this endeavor. Amanda Lewis, Marta Grabowski, Anne Eaton, and Brenna Curley all cheered and consoled their only nonquantitative friend, and Amanda’s expertise in all things German and Fulbright never fails. From college soccer trips to the Women’s World Cup, they have offered laughter and rejuvenation, even when completing the dissertation loomed large. My brother and sister-in-law, Andy Ault and Kerri Pratt, have been a constant source of love and encouragement since the very beginning when they were on hand to celebrate my acceptance to UNC in a Danish youth hostel. Andy has been my most vocal advocate and the one who pushes me the most. Andy, and especially my father, Bruce, have been amazingly patient on-demand chemists, answering all of my environment-related questions and offering insight into the world of science. My mother Helene’s enthusiasm for everything put in front of her, along with a large dose of practicality, has provided an excellent model for approaching grad school, and life in general. Mom and Dad have made the perfectly complementary team. When they when enrolled me at the German-language elementary school in 1991, they never realized how greatly it would influence the course of my life. For that and everything since, danke! I couldn’t have done it without you.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Environmental Policy and Activism: Considering its Potential under Communism**

On June 12, 1988, eight hundred East Germans pilgrimaged through and around the village of Deutzen in Saxony's coalmining region. Unsanctioned by the regime, they congregated under the shadow of a large wooden cross, as a minister offered prayers for increased awareness of the devastation and "grave pollution from nearby power and manufacturing plants."<sup>1</sup> The demonstration on June 12 included not just a pilgrimage but also an environmental church service and podium discussion, during which leaders called for a new campaign entitled "A Mark for Espenhain." Arguing that the local state officials had failed to improve the lives of "the real-existing population," the campaign called for East Germans to individually donate a single Mark for the reparation of the beneficiation plant in the village of Espenhain.<sup>2</sup> These concerned individuals were participating in just one of a growing number of barely tolerated or even unauthorized protests about environmental conditions in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany, GDR) in the 1970s and 1980s. Leading activists demanded progressively broader changes, such as the declassification of environmental data, and Mikhail Gorbachev style democratization of society.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DO 4/805, "Information, 13. Juni 1988," Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO. Beneficiation is the process by which minerals, such as sulfur in this case, is removed from coal before it is burned.

<sup>2</sup> RGH/TH 02/03, "Eine Mark für Espenhain oder Ein Protest bekommt Flügel," Kohle- und Bergbau, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

But the pilgrimage and church service did not happen without officials' knowledge or interference. In fact, regime and church leaders had discussed the organization of the event in the weeks beforehand and state officials insisted on including representatives from a nearby factory and some of the expert speakers. Additionally, both official and unofficial informants closely monitored the proceedings, watching out for anything ranging from the mundane, such as how many participants rode bicycles to the event, to heretical antisocialist sentiments. Afterward, a district official reported to the State Secretary for Church Questions in Berlin and complained that the attendees showed a "deliberate lack of understanding about Marxist positions on environmentalism." Additionally, the organizers had illicitly acquired informational materials about pollution from churches in West Germany.<sup>4</sup> The popularity of the pilgrimage and the officials' close surveillance reflect the growing significance of the environment in the last years of the GDR.

Debates over environmental protection in the GDR dated back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the party-state systematically began to address environmental issues through new ministries and regulation. Within a decade, the Protestant Church, as the only semi-autonomous institution in the GDR, also began to engage with similar questions. Over the next two decades, both recognized the universal relevance of the environment in day-to-day existence and East Germans long term well-being, developing conceptions of environmentalism that addressed these problems. These two interpretations set the groundwork for an ongoing negotiation and contestation over environmental protection as well as the nature of the regime.

Given the production-based nature of communism, why did the Socialist Unity Party (SED) adopt environmental policies and how did it attempt to implement them? In a system that

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<sup>4</sup> DO 4/805, "Information, 13. Juni 1988," Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.

prioritized industrial output at any cost, or what Charles Maier has called “smokestack industrialization,” emphasis on the environmental issues seems like a puzzling if not counterproductive endeavor.<sup>5</sup> However, already in the 1968 version of the constitution, the ruling SED party declared citizens’ right and responsibility to a clean environment, and, thereafter, it systematically established responsible ministries, regulation, and even official mass organizations.<sup>6</sup> With this institutionalization of environmental protection, and even the development of its own conception of “socialist environmentalism,” the SED’s ideal stand on nature and the environment seems clear.<sup>7</sup> These bureaucratic and social efforts highlight this apparent contradiction of idealizing industrial production and attempting to implement environmental protection.

Despite the regime’s regulations, ecological issues became a crucial part of the opposition’s regime critique in the late 1980s. How did environmental protection transform from being a staple of the party-state to a point of protest and frustration? The pollution from the communist bloc’s most industrialized country was devastating. The process of how and why environmental protection transformed from being a constitutionally guaranteed right to also a main tenet of the oppositional movement deserves further attention. As faith in the SED’s ability to solve these problems declined, discontented groups formed to showcase the regime’s failures and to offer their own alternative justifications and practices regarding environmental protection.

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 83-85.

<sup>6</sup> Artikel 15, Absatz 2, Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> In German there is no distinction between environmentalism and environmental protection. Both are encompassed by the word *Umweltschutz*. For the purposes of this study, I use environmental protection to emphasize the legal and regulatory aspects of the broader concept of environmentalism. Environmentalism encompasses a worldview that views the natural world as an interconnected web to which the future of humans intricately tied. For the SED, socialism was the solution, while for western environmentalists, the key concept became sustainability.



Yet the independent movement's relationship to the party-state might be more complex than previously acknowledged. This dissertation explores these interactions and connections as well as reexamines the variation in the movement itself and where it fit within the Church's theological and political framework.

Better understanding how official and independent environmentalism developed also requires placing the GDR in a larger transnational context, linking it to trends in the West and the East. Where do official and independent environmentalism fit into a larger postwar, central European story? The GDR's linguistic and cultural ties to the West along with its political position in Soviet bloc provided a double set of connections that brought in external influences, which combined with internal attitudes to create new conceptions of environmentalism. The rise of ecology movements in the West in the 1970s, and especially the Green Party's electoral successes in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, inspired official and independent activists alike to push for greater environmental regulation in the GDR.<sup>8</sup>

The GDR's position in the communist bloc reflects a second set of social and political factors that shaped the rise of environmentalism. But what was the shared experience of pollution in the Eastern bloc and how did officials and individual citizens respond to it? Poland is an exceptionally useful comparison in Eastern Europe, because it also had an official conservation organization and an independent movement. Moreover, the relationship between the Communist Party and society in Poland provides a point of distinction to the GDR, because Poland had a large and well-organized opposition movement that the GDR lacked. Connections between these countries, officially and unofficially, reveal more about Eastern European societies in the 1980s and how communism fell apart from a transnational perspective.

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<sup>8</sup> Hubertus Knabe, "Neue Soziale Bewegungen im Sozialismus. Zur Genesis alternativer politischer Orientierungen in der DDR," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, vol 40 (1988), 557.

Ultimately, this dissertation asks how environmentalism as a quality of life issue fits into communist, production-oriented society.

### **Historiography**

The rise of environmentalism in the GDR appears contradictory at first glance. A party-state that was premised upon industrial output would be at odds with an environmental movement, much less multiple official and unofficial strains. But upon closer inspection, the environment's growing relevance raises questions about the character of the SED dictatorship, and its place in German history. Within the party-state structure, it is important to understand what modes of expressing oneself in general, and environmental concern more specifically, were encouraged, condoned, tolerated, or forbidden. Finally, environmentalism in the GDR must also be viewed in the larger social and political context of the Cold War, placing it in dialogue with similar developments in other countries on both sides of the divide. Together, the bodies of scholarship demonstrate the need for a study that addresses each of these elements and recasts them in a coherent narrative, beyond a case study or investigation of a single organization or ecological problem.

#### *The SED Dictatorship*

Up to now, scholars of the GDR have tended to view it as either a totalitarian state or a failed experiment with good intentions with most scholars of the GDR tending to focus more on the repression than the “emancipatory features.”<sup>9</sup> Sigrid Meuschel's *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft* detailed the repressive elements of the SED state. Meuschel built on earlier notions of totalitarianism, suggesting that society “withered away” altogether under

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<sup>9</sup> Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 78.

communism.<sup>10</sup> While works such as Meuschel's have become less common since the mid-1990s, a new generation of scholars has continued to focus on the repressive elements of the regime.<sup>11</sup> In particular, continued interest in the Ministry for State Security, such as Gary Bruce's 2010 *The Firm: the Inside Story of the Stasi*, have remained popular. In that work, Bruce argues that "the tendrils of the regime's repression apparatus" made their way even into all levels of East German society to the point that "Germans internalized the Stasi presence" in their everyday lives.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast to Meuschel and Bruce, other scholars have developed more nuanced interpretations, which illuminate both the GDR's dictatorial nature and the variation of people's lives under it. Mary Fulbrook concentrated on the everyday existence and East Germans' ability to live "perfectly ordinary lives."<sup>13</sup> While perhaps overstating her point, Fulbrook shows how East Germans went about their lives, even under repressive regime such as the SED dictatorship. To do so, she has focused on facets of East German society that were not easily explainable within the totalitarian model, like improvements in health care, participation in mass organizations, and the continued influence of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft: zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR, 1945-1989* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 32.

<sup>11</sup> In the German language literature, political scientist Klaus Schroeder has also continued this debate. In works like *Der SED-Staat: Geschichte und Strukturen der DDR, 1949-1969* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2013), Schroeder continues to make arguments about the totalitarian nature of the party-state.

<sup>12</sup> Gary Bruce, *The Firm: the Inside Story of the Stasi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12. Other recent works have continued to explore the Stasi's place in the GDR, including Jens Gieseke's *The History of the Stasi: East Germany's Secret Police, 1945-1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014). Gieseke similarly contends on page 7 that the Stasi were "a central pillar of the power structure of communism."

<sup>13</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), ix.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1999* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Historian Konrad Jarausch has also emphasized the complexity of life in the GDR through his concept of the “welfare dictatorship,” which examined the SED’s repression as well as its “egalitarian aspirations.”<sup>15</sup> This concept highlighted the contradiction inherent in the East German dictatorship. Namely, it sought to provide a certain (equal) standard of living to all of its citizens while at the same time securing its political control over the population through force. Like Fulbrook, Jarausch argues that the earlier totalitarian model “underestimates the importance of collaboration of the masses and proceeds from a simplistic model of action and reaction that leaves social processes largely unexplained.”<sup>16</sup> This focus on social processes is useful for studying environmental impulses, in which awareness about pollution changed East Germans’ attitudes and motivated social engagement through various sanctioned and unsanctioned means.

Debates surrounding the opposition and its influences on society explore the reach of the SED regime into its citizens’ lives. The best-known example of which, Ehrhart Neubert’s foundational work, *Die Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR*, emphasized the Protestant Church’s sway over East German society and places the Church at the center of the opposition.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, environmental groups housed in the Church play a role in his narrative. Unfortunately, he offers little analysis of their emergence or their growth in popularity, instead providing a descriptive account of their activities and only giving them significance in so far as they play a role in the Church. Because Neubert focuses so much on the Protestant Church, he overlooks other impulses for dissent.

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<sup>15</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, “Introduction,” in *Dictatorship as Experience*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” in *Dictatorship as Experience* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 53.

<sup>17</sup> Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1997).

Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, a younger historian in the field, has moved away from crediting the Protestant Church for all sources of dissent. He argues that a classification of “resistant behaviors is necessary to construct a differentiated picture of GDR-society.”<sup>18</sup> Kowalczyk examines a broader range of attitudes and behaviors toward the regime, such as social nonacceptance and protest, political dissidence and mass protest, to help uncover the reasons behind the unrest and the interwoven nature of the different forms of resistance. While elements within independent environmental activism were doubtlessly oppositional, scholarship on the topic must go a step further and investigate its interactions *with*, not just against, the system.

New literature partially begins to address the complexities of East German society and culture without the moralizing tones of earlier generations. Historian Paul Betts, for example, has begun to explore the question of privacy and subcultures in the GDR and what can be learned from them by moving beyond the crude understandings of the Stasi.<sup>19</sup> Andrew Port and Mary Fulbrook’s newest edited volume also take up this call to find “fresh ways of interpreting life behind the Iron Curtain.”<sup>20</sup> Port further argues in the introduction for new scholarship that views the GDR in relationship to larger international developments rather than in isolation.<sup>21</sup> This dissertation begins that process by placing the GDR in a regional context, drawing out its

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<sup>18</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, “Gegenkräfte: Opposition und Widerstand in der DDR – Begriffliche und methodische Probleme,” *Opposition der DDR von den 70er Jahren bis zum Zusammenbruch der SEDHerrschaft*, ed. Eberhard Kuhrt (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1999), 63.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2-4.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew I. Port, “Introduction” in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 14-23.

connections to western—specifically West German—green movements and the structurally similar but culturally different case of Poland.<sup>22</sup>

*Official and Independent Environmentalism in the GDR*

Scholarship explicitly on environmentalism in the GDR whether official or independent is more limited and has tended to be self-referential. Hermann Behrens, a GDR-trained engineer involved in official environmental circles in the 1980s, has published and edited a number of works on the SED's policies and programs, illuminating a range of official attitudes and involvement. His multi-volume edited collection with Jens Hoffmann, *Umweltschutz in der DDR: Analysen und Zeitzeugen*, focuses on three aspects of East German environmental protection.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the chapters in Behrens' volumes focus on the well-intentioned goals of the regime's policies without reconciling them with the pollution that existed. Behrens emphasizes that many of the contributors come from the ranks of the "countless experts active in various contexts for the preservation of the natural basis of life" in the GDR.<sup>24</sup> A new work from Tobias Huff goes a long way toward addressing problems in Behrens and Hoffman's works. He examines the official dimensions of environmentalism in the GDR from the 1950s through the "bankrupting of the system" in the late 1980s. His top-down narrative, however, primarily

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<sup>22</sup> For works on green movements in Western Europe, specifically West Germany, and their place in the "New Social Movements," see Roland Roth, and Dieter Rucht, editors, *Die sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945: Ein Handbuch* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2008). For works on the structure of Eastern European and Soviet society, see for example, Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Hermann Behrens, *Wurzeln der Umweltbewegung: Die Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt“ (GNU) im Kulturbund der DDR* (Marburg, BdWi-Verlag, 1993) and Hermann Behrens and Jens Hoffmann, eds, *Umweltschutz in der DDR: Analysen und Zeitzeugen* (Munich, Oekom, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Hermann Behrens and Jens Hoffmann, "Vorwort" in *Umweltschutz in der DDR: Analysen und Zeitzeugen* (Munich, Oekom, 2008), I. "Natürliche Lebensgrundlagen" refers to the natural environment here.

focuses on balancing the overrepresentation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in environmental histories of Germany.<sup>25</sup>

Another set of literature explores the place of nature in the SED's social policies, especially in its mass organization, the Cultural League. For example, Jan Palmowski's monograph, *Inventing a Socialist Nation*, engages specifically with the SED's mass social organization, the Cultural League, and how it employed nature to create a distinctly East German identity. Tied to longer traditions of nature in German history, Palmowski argues that the SED used nature conservation and *Heimat* (homeland) to establish legitimacy with its citizens.<sup>26</sup> Scott Moranda has expanded on this argument in his 2014 book, *The People's Own Landscape: Nature, Tourism, and Dictatorship in East Germany*, viewing nature as a space onto which the SED mapped a "utopian and destructive agenda."<sup>27</sup> Together these works begin to explore the SED's goals and practices on a variety of political and societal levels, but draw attention to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the environment in the GDR.

The independent movement has received significantly more scholarly and public attention than official environmental policies. Even before 1989, political scientists and Western journalists commented on the increasingly oppositional tendencies within these groups. Often these accounts highlighted the decrepitude of the SED system, lionized the work of small opposition groups, and critiqued ignorance in the West about conditions in the GDR. West Germans such as Peter Wensierski had contacts with some of these activists in the East,

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<sup>25</sup> Tobias Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus: Eine Umweltgeschichte der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Scott Moranda, *The People's Own Landscape: Nature, Tourism, and Dictatorship in East Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 2.

especially in East Berlin, and wrote extensively on degradation in the GDR. Wensierski's works, such as *Von oben nach unten wächst gar nichts mehr: Umweltzerstörung und Protest in der DDR*, are journalistic exposes of environmental and social problems. Wensierski starts with the premise that "environmental problems inherently cross borders and environmental problems can only be solved with [international] cooperation" and contends West Germans are uninformed about the situation in the GDR.<sup>28</sup>

After the fall of the Wall, several leaders of the independent movement took on the task of shaping their own legacies, writing books in which they detailed their involvement and goals. Best-known of these works are Carlo Jordan's *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR, Das "Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche"*, 1988-90, Wolfgang Rüdtenklau's *Störenfried: DDR-Opposition, 1986-1989* and Michael Beleites' *Untergrund: Ein Konflikt mit der Stasi in der Uran-Provinz*.<sup>29</sup> All three include a combination of recounts of personal involvement and run-ins with the secret police, documents from the environmental groups they were involved in and their interpretations of the problems. However, these three works are also tinged with personal experiences and a motivation to shape their own legacy after reunification. Unfortunately, this literature lacks distance from the subject as well as perspective on East German society beyond the authors' own milieu.

#### *Environmentalism in a Cold War Context*

A final set of literature begins to address the relationship between the environment, communism, and the Cold War. While scholarship on the New Social Movements, and within

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Wensierski, *Von oben nach unten wächst gar nichts mehr: Umweltzerstörung und Protest in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1986), 7.

<sup>29</sup> Carlo Jordan, *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR, Das Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche*, "1988-90 (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1995). Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, *Störenfried: DDR-Opposition, mit Texten aus den 'Umweltblättern'* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1992). Micheal Beleites, *Untergrund: Ein Konflikt mit der Stasi in der Uranprovinz* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1991).



that, green movements, on western countries has grown dramatically in the last decade, studies of pollution and activism under communism remain less common. Douglas Weiner's two works on nature conservation in Russia and the Soviet Union illuminate conceptions of the environment, with a strong emphasis on autonomous social organizations and their efforts to create a network of scientific nature preserves.<sup>30</sup> His first work, *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation, and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia*, emphasizes the period from the end of tsarist Russia to the mid-1930s, while his later work, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev*, covers the rest of the Soviet period.<sup>31</sup> These works highlight the ways nature conservation and environmentalism functioned under Soviet-style communism.

To explore comparisons and dynamics within the Eastern bloc, the political scientist Barbara Hicks offers a thorough, though contemporary, accounting of the emergence of an independent environmental movement in Poland in the 1980s.<sup>32</sup> Seeking to bring together the concept of civil society in Poland with western-style New Social Movements, Hicks traces the Polish Communist Party's inability to properly address extreme ecological devastation. She argues that an independent ecological movement helps to explain the "interaction between the regime's strategy for demobilizing social forces and what has been called the 'reconstitution of civil society.'"<sup>33</sup> Given Poland's tradition of social protest under communism, which was larger

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<sup>30</sup> Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachev* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas Weiner, *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland: A Social Movement between Regime and Opposition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

and better organized than in the GDR, Hicks's work engages with many of the same questions as this dissertation, but is more focused on organizational and structural changes than contextualizing them within a larger historical context.

A final body of literature offers new ways of thinking about relationships between nature and politics and raises issues of contending for resources and information between capitalism and communism. In the edited volume *Environmental Histories of the Cold War*, J. R. McNeill and Corinna R. Unger contend that "neither the Cold War nor the environment was constrained by national borders" and that it complements the traditional view of the Cold War as a "conflict fought by diplomats, intelligence agencies, and the military."<sup>34</sup> Stephen Brain's recent work has further considered the place of the environment in the Cold War, arguing Soviet-American competition may have actually benefitted environmental protection.<sup>35</sup> These authors show the connections between the environment and communist system and place them in the broader context of the Cold War. Drawing on their works situates East German environmentalisms in a larger socio and geopolitical context.

### **Methodology and Sources**

A complex topic like environmentalism in the GDR requires a multipronged methodological approach that incorporates both the perspective of state and the independent groups and situates them in a transnational framework. By looking at different aspects of the party-state, where the environment fit into the SED's vision, how it acted on that understanding and what degree of success it achieved all become clearer. This dissertation also explores how and why independent environmental groups developed, particularly within the Protestant Church,

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<sup>34</sup> J.R. McNeill and Corinna R. Unger, "Introduction: The Big Picture" in *Environmental Histories of the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 17.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Brain, "The Appeal of Appearing Green: Soviet-American Ideological Competition and Cold War Environmental Diplomacy," *Cold War History* (October 29, 2014), accessed July 10, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2014.971015>.

and their relationship to the official party-state. Finally, this dissertation asks what outside forces shaped the environmental debate in the GDR, placing it in a larger European context. These factors illustrate how the party-state functioned, independent groups evolved, and their interactions influenced one another as well as with the world around them. Importantly, this dissertation considers rhetoric, institutional decisions and actions all as crucial to the development of environmentalist tendencies in the GDR.

In a system that attempted to control all of its citizens' thoughts and actions, it is how the party-state operated, set the party-state set priorities and made decisions are central to considering why the SED state survived as long as it did. As Stephen Kotkin has contended in his 2009 *Uncivil Society*, numerous factors held the communist countries of Eastern Europe together for roughly forty years and consequently the regimes themselves must be more closely examined.<sup>36</sup> Those working within the regime "enjoyed a full panoply of institutions, associations, patronage and other networks," giving them advantages as well as a motivation to invest in the system.<sup>37</sup> This situation perpetuated inefficiencies and rewarded submission to the party. Nevertheless, the regimes' ability to address at least partially concerns and to act on the behalf of its citizens contributed to its relative stability over a forty year period, fitting into Konrad Jarausch's concept of the "welfare dictatorship."<sup>38</sup> Investigating how the responsible ministries and organizations functioned show what its goals were and how it aimed to implement environmentalism from the top-down.

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Konrad Jarausch, "Care and Coercion," 57-62.

By examining the party-state's attitude toward the environment and the resources it devoted to environmental protection, the SED's goals and priorities come into sharper focus. Found in the Foundation Archive of Party and Mass Organizations of the GDR in Berlin, documents from numerous collections highlight the party-state's position. Resolutions and laws from the Council of Ministers place the environment in the context of the larger socialist project and the realities of the economic situation, while specific ministries focus on the implementation of policy. Ministry for Environmental Protection and Water Management (MfUW) and other related ministries, such as the Ministry for Forestry and Agriculture, illuminate how the regime conceived of environmental protection and implemented its policies. Reports on pollution and discussions of half-measures to unresolvable problems reveal the party-state's true priorities as well as hindrances to better protection. Furthermore, reports from the State Secretary for Church Questions traces the interplay among state officials, the party, and environmental groups housed in the Protestant Church.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, the party-state did not completely control the propaganda and information that its citizens received and, therefore, pressures from outside the Party and official ministries must be included in this narrative. These forces have been labeled in numerous ways: "second society", "sub-publics", "anti-publics", or "civil society".<sup>40</sup> However, civil society is the most inclusive and useful way of considering activities and groups of people coordinating outside of official, party-state organizations. On a conceptual level, historian Jürgen Kocka explains civil society as

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<sup>39</sup> I have also visited regional and local archives in Magdeburg, Merseburg, Halle, and Leipzig to see how these dynamics played out on the district and city level, especially in cities that were known to be highly polluted. I have further conducted research at the Federal Commissioner for Stasi Records (*Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR*, BStU) to gain further insight into the security apparatus's understanding of the environment and environmental movement.

<sup>40</sup> See David Bathrick, *The Power of Speech: the Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) and Elemér Hankiss, "The 'Second Society': Is There an Alternative Social Model Emerging in Hungary?" *Crisis and Reform in Eastern Europe* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1991), 303-34.

both a “type of social action and a...sphere of self-organization,” independent of the state but also outside of the private sphere.<sup>41</sup> Civil society is not explicitly oppositional, though it was at times. Instead it is an alternative to the strictly limited official public that ultimately widened the range of public discourse beyond stultifying party organizations and officially approved means of expression.

While civil society is a useful theoretical concept, or “ideal form” as Kocka has reminded us, the question remains: how does this apply to communist dictatorships Eastern Europe? Civil society describes the process by which society gained influence outside officially-sponsored organizations and began to represent an alternative to the communist party-state. Outspoken intellectual dissidents in Eastern Europe, such as Václav Havel and György Konrád, consciously employed the term to tie themselves to long traditions of civil society in the West, making it both a historical and an analytical concept.<sup>42</sup>

While the GDR lacked an internationally recognized core of intellectual dissidents as in Czechoslovakia or Poland, this organizational independence was asserted through the establishment of working groups under the protection of the Protestant Church. These groups were founded not only to address ecological problems, but also in response to other perceived shortcomings of the party-state. Other issues that found expression within the protection of the Church included the better-known peace movement, gay rights activists, and feminist and human rights groups. In acting “civilly” or “independently,” these groups’ actions implicitly challenged the party-state on a variety of topics.

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<sup>41</sup> Jürgen Kocka, *Civil Society and Dictatorship in Modern Germany* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2010), 21.

<sup>42</sup> Barbara Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (New York, Central European University Press, 2003), 314.

To better understand the importance of the environment to these groups and to the Protestant Church, I visited multiple archives in the former GDR. The Archive of the Opposition in the Robert Havemann Society in Berlin provided the largest collection of documents with pamphlets and information from both ecology groups and Church administration. The Archive of the Opposition also held numerous smaller collections from prominent figures in the independent ecology movement, including from the Environmental Library in Berlin. The Archive of the Citizens' Movement in Leipzig provided more detailed information about the development of ecology groups in and around Saxony's coalmining region, while the Environmental Library in Großhennersdorf offered insight into the movement's development in the GDR's isolated and marginalized southeastern corner. These documents illuminate the independent movement's stance(s) on the environment, its position toward the regime, as well as how these were conveyed to a larger public through conferences, environmental church services and bicycles demonstrations.

The rise of such socio-ethical movements in the GDR has led many scholars to compare them to the New Social Movements (NSM) in the West. In fact, some have suggested that the independent movement mimicked trends in the West, albeit belatedly, emphasizing the similarities in their diffuse organizational structure and the socio-ethical values they embraced.<sup>43</sup> Hubertus Knabe, for example, began writing on these topics already in the 1980s in an effort to draw attention to the budding independent movement, but in doing so, detracted from the distinct set of social and political factors in the GDR.<sup>44</sup> Without discounting the power of the flow of

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<sup>43</sup> Hubertus Knabe, "Neue Soziale Bewegungen im Sozialismus. Zur Genesis alternativer politischer Orientierungen in der DDR," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, vol 40 (1988), 552.

<sup>44</sup> Hubertus Knabe's father, Wilhelm, was a prominent Green Party politician, who had fled the GDR in his youth. Hubertus Knabe had numerous contacts in the East, despite being raised in the West, including a girlfriend in the early 1980s. Later, he became a reactionary figure and is now the conservative head of the Hohenschönhausen memorial in Berlin.

information from West to East, attempting to apply NSM theory to the communist bloc in Eastern Europe ignores the important differences in the limitations of association and expression in a dictatorial system. Moreover, in the West, the NSM are often associated with a post-material turn in values, but this term posed difficulties in the East German context, where shortages of goods and awareness of higher living standards in the West remained a frustration throughout the 1980s.<sup>45</sup> Thus, despite some similarities, fundamental differences between the NSM and the opposition in the East discount a one-to-one comparison.

Yet the GDR's physical, cultural and political connections to West Germany and to the Eastern bloc were vital in the development of environmentalism and place it in a transnational context. On an official level, West Germany was a rival, at its best, spurring on the SED to make improvements, and at its worst, engendering fear and paralysis. On a social level, the success of the green movement turned political party in the Federal Republic inspired reactions from both the SED and independent ecology groups. To better understand western Green intentions toward the East, I visited the Archive for Green Memory, the Green Party archive, in Berlin, where I also began to consider the its position on communism in Eastern Europe more generally. Correspondence between Green politicians and with western nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) shed light on the complicated nature of East-West relationships. Additionally, fliers and newsletters linking environmental groups in the Netherlands, Sweden, Poland and Hungary, suggest ties between the East and the West that includes but were not entirely dependent on either of the Germanys.

Finally, the GDR's position in the Eastern bloc is highlighted by comparing it to another country in the same position, namely Poland, which had a stronger tradition of social protest but

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<sup>45</sup> Roland Roth and Dieter Rucht, editors, *Die sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945: Ein Handbuch* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2008).

was less industrially developed. From visiting the Department of Social Life in the Ossolineum Library in Wrocław and looking at documents from the independent Polish Ecological Club (*Polski Klub Ekologiczny*, PKE) held at the National Library in Berlin, I found evidence of a small but influential environmental movement in Poland. With strong ties to scientists and universities in Poland and contacts abroad, the independent movement in Poland eventually established connections to other Eastern European countries, including the GDR in the late 1980s. The PKE and other groups demonstrate the expansion of ecological concerns in Eastern Europe in the communism's last decade and draw attention to their transnational character.

### **Chapter Organization**

This dissertation proceeds primarily chronologically to explore the significance and evolution of environmentalism in the GDR. It traces two sets of environmental impulses separately, first the official and then the independent, reflecting the temporal relationship between their origins. Then, the focus of the dissertation shifts to the interactions between official and independent environmentalism, and the ultimate and irreversible collapse of communication and cooperation after Chernobyl in 1986. In the final years before the fall of the Wall, tensions between independent groups and the regime grew and I seek to place these within the context of larger changes within Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War. Finally, this dissertation touches on the environment's place in reunification and the significance of new regulation for the former East Germany.

Chapter 1 provides background on the German traditions surrounding nature and the GDR's physical landscape. On a fundamental level, it seeks to answer the question: what was the SED's relationship to the natural environment and why did it develop an official concept of environmentalism? It lays out the longer history of conservation and consuming nature in German along with the economic realities of a geographically small country seeking to rapidly



rebuild and industrialize after the Second World War. These underlying themes remain pertinent to the SED's understanding of nature, and explain, at least in part, why the party began to engage with environmental issues in a systematic way. It also contextualizes developments in the GDR with trends in the West and in Eastern Europe, especially Poland, highlighting phenomena common to other countries as well as those unique to the GDR.

Chapter 2 delves into the institutionalization of environmental protection, exploring how that was carried out in the state and the party over the course of the 1970s. In founding official ministries dedicated to environmental protection and dealing with pollution, the state created a coterie of experts. The party also took on the environment and established organizations for its maintenance and protection in the Cultural League. Together, the party and the state worked to develop a socialist conception of environmentalism, which blended idealism, ideology, and political necessity. It simultaneously sought to distinguish itself from green movements in the West. Between new regulation and social programs, this period began with an optimistic sense that pollution could be reduced and living conditions improved, but ended in 1982 with the restriction of access to environmental data when that promise fell flat.

Chapter 3 departs from the story of the party-state to examine the rise of the independent movement in the Protestant Church. Though delayed in reaching the GDR, the Club of Rome's 1972 report, *The Limits of Growth*, inspired religious leaders to reconsider the Church's stance on the environment and the future.<sup>46</sup> The Ecclesiastical Research Center (*Kirchliches Forschungsheim*, KFH) in Wittenberg, a center focused on the theological connections between science and religion founded in 1927, was a vital center of this new engagement with ecological concerns. Most notably after the Hans-Peter Gensichen's installation as the head of the KFH, it

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<sup>46</sup> Donella Meadows, et al, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, Second Edition (New York, Universe Books, 1974).

became a hub of communication and meetings for Christians involved in the independent movement until the fall of communism in 1989-90.<sup>47</sup>

Chapter 4 considers how official and independent environmentalism interacted with one another and why their uneasy coexistence broke down after 1982. It examines the development of environmental groups in different regions, paying close attention to Berlin, Leipzig/Halle, and far southeastern Großhennersdorf, in order to illustrate regional variation in the movement. It argues that by initially focusing on localized issues and then expanding demands to more universal ones, environmental groups established networks and contacts throughout the country. Additionally, it explores the importance of a Christian-based rhetoric in undermining the SED's authority. Yet, during the same period, the SED sought to reverse—or at least contain—this trend by expanding its environmental institutes and creating new mass social campaigns. The independent movement provided a more convincing alternative than the ritualized, and ever hollower, answers from the SED.

After Gorbachev's rise to power in the Soviet Union and the devastating impact of the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in 1986, awareness of environmental problems grew tremendously. Chapter 5 asks where the increasingly oppositional independent movement fits with changes in the rest of the Eastern Europe. Although Chernobyl became an obvious point of contention, it was also tangled up in a variety of other complaints about the environment for which it marked a symbolic breaking point. Public expressions of dissatisfaction with the regime about pollution became more common and independent activists networked more with comrades both in the West and in other Eastern European countries. At the core of this movement was the well-established and clearly tolerated Polish Ecological Club based in Kraków. These developments

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<sup>47</sup> "Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg," Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, accessed November 7, 2013, <http://www.havemann-gesellschaft.de/index.php?id=80>.

do not reflect a teleological trajectory to the end of communism, but suggest swelling discontent on a variety of topics. The regimes' inability to adapt and to address issues highlighted these ongoing problems.

The final chapter of this dissertation asks how these different impulses played out in the reunification process of 1989-90. The different experiences of Greens in the West from environmental activists in the GDR, whether official or independent, posed new challenges for cooperation and setting regulations. Those working in the GDR's institutions were discredited for their previous ineffectiveness, but independent activists were better equipped to protest than to create new policies and spearhead the reforms. West German law and bureaucrats, then, shaped many of the laws for new regulation, but created unforeseen economic and social problems for the former GDR. The question of environmental protection might have been resolved with the collapse of the political system, but its legacies continue.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Planting the Seeds: East Germany and the Environment to 1971**

In 1968, the SED declared the importance of nature protection in the party-state's project to build socialism by including it in the GDR's newly rewritten constitution. In two brief paragraphs, Article 15 succinctly explained the SED's conception of nature and its function in East German society. It stated, "The GDR's land is among its precious natural riches. It must be protected and used efficiently." The constitution drew the connection between nature to socialism in a People's Republic, by declaring that "in the interest of the citizens' well-being, state and society ensure the protection of nature."<sup>1</sup> Article 15 further clarified that this included the need to guard against water and air against pollution as well as to preserve biological diversity and the beauty of the natural landscapes. The SED considered its inclusion of nature conservation in the constitution to be a progressive accomplishment, one that few other countries had adopted as enthusiastically as the GDR had—which the East German press widely touted.<sup>2</sup>

Yet for a system deeply devoted to industrial output and economic growth, this comprehensive engagement with nature at first seems surprising. The GDR's planned economy took priority over all else, intensively extracting its limited natural resources. The GDR's landscape was marked with potash, coal and uranium mines, billowing smoke clouds, and startlingly colorful runoff from Stalinist-style factories. In 1968, the casual observer would have

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<sup>1</sup> Artikel 15, Absatz 1 und 2, Verfassung der DDR, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> DO 4/802, "Arbeitsgruppe Umweltverantwortung" der Christlichen Friedenskonferenz in der DDR und des Ev. Jungmännerwerkes, Landesstelle Sachsen-Anhalt, "Bäume und Sträucher in der Stadt: Wie wir sie schützen und pflegen," undated, Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.

been much more likely to comment on the SED's commitment to smokestack-industrial production than its preservation of nature as set out in the constitution. Why did the SED promote nature conservation and comprehensive environmental protection policies when this goal seemed so at odds with the priorities the party-state had already set?

The resolution to this seeming contradiction lies in exploring Germans' relationship to nature from a longer historical perspective, as well as in examining the SED's understanding of itself as a state and a socialist project. Working class traditions of "naturist" movements, such as the Friends of Nature (*Naturfreunde*) that dated back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, informed the SED's perspective on nature. Nature served as both a symbol of the nation and as an equalizing space apart from the social strictures of the urban environment.<sup>3</sup> These interpretations of nature's constructed, political significance paired well with the SED's conception of the GDR as a socialist state that provided for its workers not just physically but culturally and mentally. It is therefore unsurprising that the SED would establish nature conservation clubs within the SED's mass social organization, the Cultural League, as early as the 1950s.

As a satellite state of Soviet communism, though, the GDR was also predicated on a planned, production-oriented economy designed to overtake the Western capitalist economy. The intensive industrial output resembled the Stalinist model of the 1930s in the Soviet Union, dovetailing with propaganda about being superior to the West. The SED's investment in nature was not just cultural, but rather economic and political. Economic growth meant political success as the Cold War raged in the first two decades of the GDR's existence and required the intensive

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<sup>3</sup> John Alexander Williams, *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism and Conservation, 1900-1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007). Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

extraction of the country's natural resources. "Smokestack industrialization," though, made some progress in the early years, which drove the modernist thinkers of the East German economy to continue on a path of ever greater production. The result was devastating for the environment, and as the SED slowly acknowledged, for the economy and the workers, too.

By the late 1960s, the SED's conception of nature was beginning to broaden from traditional preservation to environmental protection just as a global environmental movement emerged. The SED's Cold War mentality expressed itself in pressure to provide for workers on a domestic level and desire to appear progressive internationally, driving it to codify and then institutionalize its position on nature and the environment. The efforts reflected, if not presaged, similar efforts on both sides of the Iron Curtain, as the GDR's neighbors, the Federal Republic and communist Poland, engaged with similar questions.

While the desire to win political and propaganda victories undoubtedly influenced the SED's decisions, it is too simple to argue that that is all its nature protection policy was. The Party had multiple reasons for expanding its understanding of "the environment." It institutionalized environmental policy not only through regulation but also "volunteer" organizations and campaigns in its mass Cultural League. Nature protection in the GDR, therefore, stood at the confluence of older traditions in German culture and society, the practical needs of an industrial economy, and a changing worldview on the environment. The SED's adoption of environmentally-minded policies fit with the Party's confidence in science and technology to build a rational future, in which nature could be used, molded, and protected to serve socialism and the East German people.

Poland's experience in the first two decades after the war reflected structural similarities in the Soviet bloc, but also a different relationship to the environment. Stalinist economics also

emphasized heavy industry and visions of building a socialist utopia, but resistance among the population, a perennially weak economy, and a less repressive communist party created a less stable political atmosphere. Lower standards of living than in the GDR and fewer material goods created unrest. Additionally, the Catholic Church's strong organizing power and vehement opposition to communist rule made it more difficult for the Polish Communist Party to focus on other matters. Finally, the Polish relationship to nature focused on experts rather than populist pastimes, meaning that when the Communist Party began to develop conservation organizations, it did not receive the same broad-based interest it did in the GDR.

While the GDR and Poland faced similar structural pressures, the result in the two countries was quite different in the 1960s and 1970s. Perhaps Polish leaders felt less pressure to compete in global politics—especially without a western counterpart to compete with—but more probably they were most concerned with the functioning of the economy. The SED built on its economic growth while also playing into German traditions of conservation to expand its new environmentally-minded policies. These efforts attempted to further legitimacy and social policy at home while also trying to take a progressive stance on the environmental front of the Cold War.

### **Nature in the German Past**

Hiking, conservation, and landscape preservation organizations in the GDR drew on traditions that had begun in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which imbued nature with a social and political importance. John Alexander Williams has argued that these activities, and the associational life that developed around them, constituted a “naturist movement,” which grew out of a reaction to the dizzying transformation of life in the first part of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Seeking an escape from factory work and the frenzy of urban life, clubs

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<sup>4</sup> Williams, *Turning to Nature in Germany*, 2-3.

on the political Left and Right found freedom in nature, not least among the socialist working class.

Traditions in German history of tying the natural landscape to a national endeavor influenced the SED's relationship to nature.<sup>5</sup> For example, this national understanding of nature manifested itself in Germans' belief that they had a special connection to nature or wild animals in the early twentieth century, or in the connections between *Heimat*, nature, and nation.<sup>6</sup>

Traditions of associational life, spending leisure time in nature, and coupling nature with national identity provided a cultural foundation on which the SED later built its nature and environmental policies. Most obviously, these multiple impulses were codified in the 1954 Nature Conservation Law and expressed in the Cultural League's Friends of Nature and Heimat (*Natur- und Heimatfreunde*, NHF), creating a multifaceted understanding of nature.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Germany was undergoing rapid industrialization and urbanization, a point of increasing concern and cultural critique in the early twentieth century. Industrialized life, with an urban proletariat, became the model for socialist visions of the future and featured prominently into the SED's worldview after World War II. The new rhythms of factory work offered novel opportunities, but also introduced new stresses and a kind of repetitiveness foreign to the rural, agrarian lifestyle. Through organizations and activities, working-class Germans rediscovered nature as a space where they could enjoy and relax on the weekends. It became a place for where they could become politically aware, arguing that nature equalized where urban life created social distinctions.<sup>7</sup> Workers described themselves as being

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<sup>5</sup> Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Joachim Radkau, "Germany as a Focus of European 'Particularities' in Environmental History," in *Germany's Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History*, eds. Thomas Lekan and Thomas Zeller (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> Williams, *Turning to Nature*, 68.



freed from the drudgery of daily life and explained that they found a radical equality in nature, away from the pressures of the city.<sup>8</sup>

The desire for this alternative to urban life is reflected in the growing number of participants in nudist groups, such as the *Freie Körper Kultur* (Free Body Culture, FKK), and the very popular hiking group, the Friends of Nature (NF). Nudist groups belong to a larger naturist trend of *Lebensreform*, or “life reform” that “viewed the body as the working-class’s conduit to a nature that would strengthen workers.”<sup>9</sup> Thousands of Germans joined nudist groups, especially the FKK in the early twentieth century, influencing attitudes on nature and nudity for decades to come. Founded in 1895 in Vienna, the NF also focused on the importance of nature for workers. From its founding to its incorporation into the Third Reich’s hiking organization, it cleared trails and built thousands of huts in which hikers could take shelter and sleep. The NF also instilled an ethic of stewardship. These mass actions became some of the earliest public displays of conservation or environmental activism in Germany. As the SED consolidated power after World War II, the expectation that nature was restorative and meant to be consumed by workers prompted the SED to view nature not only pragmatically in terms of natural resources, but holistically.<sup>10</sup>

Nature, closely tied to the German concept of *Heimat* (homeland), also served as a symbol of the nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which the SED later employed to build a sense of nationhood in the GDR. Imbuing nature with national importance

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>10</sup> This perspective on nature varied, for example, from the Russian example where concerns over conservation remained the domain of the scientific elite. For more on the Russian case, see Douglas Weiner, *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation, and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

took multiple forms, some of which became nationalistic and were adopted by the Nazis while others were less obviously exclusionary. Despite these different trends, the concept of Heimat as a constructed ideal of nature ran through them, reaching across the political spectrum. This heritage of seeing the nation in nature became politically significant to the SED after World War II when the GDR's existence was obviously a postwar political construction. In a country where the leadership had a tenuous hold on the population and no historical justification for its existence, the SED had to invent a sense of nationhood and nature was a crucial part of cultivating loyalty.<sup>11</sup> As the 1954 Nature Conservation Law stated, preserving nature secured the workers', youths', and friends' of nature "joy and relaxation in our beautiful German Heimat."<sup>12</sup> Nature inspired a sense of belonging in the GDR, and therefore deserved to be preserved and incorporated into the SED's vision for the country.

How to handle the recent German past proved more problematic, though, as the SED was forced to confront the conservation movement's collaboration with the Third Reich in the early postwar period. While firmly socialist organizations, such as FKK and the Friends of Nature, were banned, the National Socialist relationship to the bourgeois conservation movement was less contentious. Aspects of the movement that emphasized race and national pride appealed to National Socialist officials and fit with their *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil) ideology, which linked German racial superiority and the German landscape.<sup>13</sup> Yet, as historian Raymond Dominick has argued, conservation and Nazi ideology were not a perfect fit. While conservation offered a justification for care of the physical fatherland, National Socialist ideology was not as

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<sup>11</sup> Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> DC 20 I/3/230, "Gesetz zur Erhaltung und Pflege der heimatlichen Natur," Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>13</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 81-87.

compatible with other aspects of it, such as scientific ecology, public health ,and empathy for nonhuman life. Therefore, conservationists appealed to common themes between them and Nazis to further other goals, though their cooperation later implicated them.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, some assuredly did believe in the Nazi worldview, complicating postwar conservationism and relationships to nature.

In the immediate postwar years, those active in conservation organizations during the Third Reich quickly realized they needed to distance themselves from the recent past. Historian Frank Uekötter argues that the conservationist community was encouraged to confront its past and that those with strong National Socialist ties were pressured to disavow their earlier convictions.<sup>15</sup> They were nevertheless typically blocked from reaching the highest echelon of the Cultural League and policymakers. Instead, those placed in charge of nature or other mass social organizations often had ties to Weimar-era Communist or Social Democratic Parties, had experienced persecution under the National Socialists, and were less ideologically complicated for SED officials. The party-state partially addressed the recent German past, permitting the majority of conservationists to remain active despite their previous associations. But committed socialists held the positions at the very top in order to keep the political messages on point.

When the SED institutionalized nature conservation on a national level in 1954 with the Nature Conservation Law and the Friends of Nature and Heimat (NHF) in the Cultural League, it was still addressing the issues of the past.<sup>16</sup> Initial drafts of the Nature Conservation Law

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<sup>14</sup> Raymond H. Dominick III, *The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1871-1971* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 85-86.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Uekötter, *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 197.

<sup>16</sup> Uwe Wegener and Lutz Reichhof, "Gestaltung und Pflege der Landschaft" in *Umweltschutz in der DDR: Analysen und Zeitzeugenberichte*, edited by Hermann Behrens, (Munich: Oekom Verlag, 2007), 1.

explicitly overrode the Third Reich's major conservation law from 1935, arguing that its "cautious social changes will no longer be acceptable in our German Democratic Republic."<sup>17</sup> The final version, however, did not directly engage with the past, merely stating that the new law repealed its predecessor. On a policy level, officials actively engaged with conservation, explicitly setting aside natural reserves, monuments and quintessential "German" landscapes. These efforts, with directives going all the way down to the local level, recognized the importance of biodiversity, the health of the soil as well as the need to scientifically manage it.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, the SED consolidated power over associational life by placing pressure on independent organizations to become incorporated into the Cultural League. The NHF was a prime example of this trend. While the Cultural League reached out to the conservation community, and "all friends of nature," it was clear that the SED's organizations were the only ones that would be tolerated.<sup>19</sup> In some cases, clubs that had been closely associated with the Nazis, like the German Alpine Society and the Saxon Mountain Climbers League, were shut down to avoid potentially racist ideologies.<sup>20</sup> The NHF offered the approved interpretation of how to be a friend of nature in a society that was building socialism. As such, the SED incorporated older notions about the relationship between humans and nature while pushing against others to create an East German sensibility of nature, Heimat, and conservation.

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<sup>17</sup> DC 20-I/3/230, "Begründung: zu dem Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Erhaltung und Pflege der heimatlichen Natur (Naturschutzgesetz)," 1954, Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>18</sup> DC 20-I/3/320, "Gesetz zur Erhaltung und Pflege der heimatlichen Natur," Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten 1954, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Scott Moranda, "East German Nature Tourism, 1945-1961" in *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism*, eds. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 270.

## **Economic Necessity**

Although the SED developed conservation policies grounded in German history and culture, the natural environment's greatest importance lay in rebuilding the GDR and strengthening the economy. While other impetuses factored into decision-making, economic considerations usually won out when it came to the treatment of nature. Even the Nature Conservation Law of 1954 acknowledged the contradictory character of the SED's position on nature, asserting that the GDR's "extensive use of natural resources required invasions into nature's household." It concluded by cautioning that nature should be "destroyed no more than absolutely necessary."<sup>21</sup> In the early years, emphasis on the economy over nature conservation was an easy decision to defend in the midst of rebuilding from the destruction of World War II and competing with the West. Thus, the economy defined many of the SED's policies regarding nature in the period leading up to the inclusion of environmental protection in the constitution in 1968, and afterward as well.

As a geographically small country with limited natural resources, the GDR had to strictly regulate what it had for the sake of the economy. While the Soviet sector, and later the GDR, was larger than the individual western zones, it was smaller than the Trizone combined. Additionally, it lacked significant reserves of natural resources and the infrastructure needed for heavy industry. The new postwar borders meant that the rich deposits of coal in Silesia now belonged to Poland, while the major coalmining and shell-making region, the Ruhr, lay in the western sectors.<sup>22</sup> Soviet and East German authorities were left with a less efficient grade of coal, lignite, as the only indigenous form of energy to satisfy all of their domestic and industrial

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<sup>21</sup> DC 20-I/3/230, "Gesetz zur Erhaltung und Pflege der heimatlichen Natur," Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten 1954, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 10.

needs. Additionally, officials worried about water supplies, often noting that the GDR was one of the water-poorest countries in the world.<sup>23</sup> The need to secure enough water for industrial production and domestic consumption led the government to create a department of water management as early as 1952.<sup>24</sup>

Alongside these physical limitations and rebuilding after the war, the Soviet sector, and then the GDR, was required to pay reparations as restitution for German destruction in the Soviet Union during the war until 1950. Thereafter, the GDR continued to make military contributions to the Warsaw Pact. The infant country had economically to not only overcome the destruction of a brutal war, but also sent much-needed resources back to the Soviet Union to compensate for losses suffered during the war. Red Army soldiers seized and dismantled factories and machinery as well as food and livestock needed to maintain the Soviet army's occupation of the Eastern zone. By March 1947, roughly 11,800 kilometers of railroad track had been removed, and by the following spring, some 3,400 plants had been dismantled.<sup>25</sup> The removal of so much machinery, even as early as 1945-1946, caused some officials within the Soviet Occupation Authority to worry that this systematic—or not so systematic—removal of the East German means of production would lead to an “economic vacuum.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> SWV 02/02, “Möglichkeiten einer ökologischen Modernisierung des Energiesektors der DDR,” Ökologie Seminare, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>24</sup> Hermann Behrens, “Rückblicke auf den Umweltschutz in der DDR seit 1990,” *Umweltschutz in der DDR: Analysen und Zeitzeugenberichte, Band. 1: Rahmenbedingungen* (Munich: Oekom, 2008), 15.

<sup>25</sup> André Steiner, *The Plans that Failed: An economic History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 18-19.

<sup>26</sup> Jochen Laufer, “Politik und Bilanz der sowjetischen Demontagen,” in *Sowjetische Demontagen in Deutschland, 1944-1949: Hintergründe, Ziele und Wirkungen*, ed. Rainer Karlsch and Jochen Laufer (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 2002), 52.

At the same time, Soviet consolidation of power was radically transforming the sector into a centrally-planned economy with a strong emphasis on heavy industry, or “smokestack industrialization.” The economy, dictated from the top down, focused primarily on producing steel in large plants, like in the newly constructed steel mill in Stalinstadt, rebuilding infrastructure, and coalmining.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the SED began to develop the chemical industry, which among other products, made fertilizers and pesticides, which were crucial to the industrialization and mechanization of East German agriculture. These industries witnessed unexpected successes and production grew tremendously in the first years.<sup>28</sup> Yet economic expansion came at the expense of the natural environment. Little attention was devoted to how these products were made or the impact they had on the natural environment. Environmental concerns were only raised in the context of planning the use of natural resources to fulfill the Five Year Plan, and ideologically, to serve the construction of socialism.

The focus on quick economic growth at any cost forced the SED to regulate its limited resources, shaping officials’ treatment of nature and the environment. The GDR’s Council of Ministers acknowledged the tension between nature and economic performance in the 1954 Nature Conservation Law, asserting that while nature played an important role, the economy came first. The law unsurprisingly stated that soil, water, plants, and animals were all invaluable to the GDR and that it was up to current and future generations of East Germans to protect them. However, as the preamble to the law made clear, the protection of conservation areas and indigenous plants and animals only guarded against the “unwarranted” removal of resources.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> After Stalin’s death in 1953, the town was renamed „Eisenhüttenstadt," or “Iron Works City.”

<sup>28</sup> Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 83-85.

<sup>29</sup> DC 20/I/3/230, “Gesetz zur Erhaltung und Pflege der heimatlichen Natur vom 1954”, July 8, 1954, Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.

Even the conservation law accepted incursions into nature conservation areas, if economic concerns necessitated them. Moreover, the conservation law focused on setting aside specific spaces for recreation and reserves for preservation but did not view the whole of the land as something to be protected. Nature, more broadly, as an interconnected system within and outside of conservation areas was not part of the SED's understanding, especially up to 1968.

Actually, the SED recognized the need to reconcile the “joy and recuperation of all friends of nature” with economic growth, finding its answer in scientific and technological innovation.<sup>30</sup> As in many areas of socialist thought, East German socialists believed in rational solutions to seemingly complicated problems. The SED planned to develop new technology that would allow them to use resources ever more efficiently, focusing on the “extraction and cultivation of reusable materials in waste products.” Given the GDR's limited supply, purifying water runoff for reuse was of special importance and processes to remove salts from the water were developed for the southern Harz region where there was extensive potassium mining.<sup>31</sup> With the goal of developing technology to overcome physical strictures, the relevant ministries anticipated fulfilling lofty economic goals and protecting nature for the workers' relaxation and enjoyment. This faith in science continued throughout the GDR's existence, becoming ever more disconnected from the reality of industrial pollution.

Because the SED's heavy-handed approach to nature and the economy had reasonable success in its first two decades, the party had reason to believe in its methods. The economy experienced similar, if slightly lower, rates of growth compared to Western European countries

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> DC 20/I/3/716, “Nachtrag zur Prognose: Industrielle Abprodukte und planmäßige Gestaltung, einer sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR,” January 1969, Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.



in this period, a nontrivial accomplishment given that the GDR paid reparations to the Soviets while the West German economy received substantial aid from the Marshall Plan.<sup>32</sup> Statistics produced in the GDR typically exaggerated rates of growth, making it difficult to quantify increases in economic production, but the fact that there was considerable growth is undeniable. Additionally, the GDR outperformed the rest of the Eastern bloc and exported numerous of its products to the rest of Eastern Europe, including computers, plastics, and chemicals. These early successes, often forgotten in the face of the Soviet bloc's ultimate failure, provide insight into why the SED and its planners had faith in their abilities to control not only economic success, but also why East Germans were at least nominally willing to go along with the SED's agenda.

### **Environmental Problems**

By the late 1960s, though, East Germans were beginning to regard their conditions, materially and environmentally, with rising dissatisfaction. Sacrifices that had been tolerated in the name of building socialism wore on the population. Not only was the GDR falling behind its western counterpart in terms of standard of living and consumer goods, but continued pollution from fast-paced smokestack industrialization also deteriorated East Germans' health, physical environment and quality of life. Despite greater engagement with environmental themes over the next two decades, these problems continued, and in some cases, worsened. Concentrated in but not limited to highly industrialized regions, they were visible throughout the GDR and challenged the SED's ability to care for its people. Issues of pollution, however, expanded beyond energy concerns to other branches of the economy, like the chemical industry and intensive agriculture. Officials as well as individual East Germans found the situation increasingly unsatisfactory, spurring investigations into the pollution's impact on human and economic well-being.

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<sup>32</sup> Maier, *Dissolution*, 85.

The Leipzig region illustrates the range and intensity of environmental devastation and reflects issues apparent throughout the GDR. In the small villages south of Leipzig, like Espenhain, pollution from the East German style of smokestack socialism left an indelible mark on the physical and social landscape. Due to its lignite deposits, open-pit mines were an established fixture of the landscape. Yet the size and scale of the mining in the GDR eclipsed the earlier industry. Enormous open-pit mines were geographically larger than the villages themselves, destabilized the ground, and lowered the local water table. In this area, approximately fifteen villages were evacuated between 1951 and 1988 and their 7,800 residents resettled on safer ground with more than 3000 of those being moved in the years between 1977 and 1988.<sup>33</sup> Naturally, the removal of people caused social problems, uprooting families who had lived there for centuries and placing them in newly constructed prefabricated apartment blocks of Leipzig and Halle.<sup>34</sup>

For those who remained, air pollution from the beneficiation plant in Espenhain, which refined the coal to be burned for heat and energy throughout the country, often made it nearly impossible to breathe. Originally built during the Third Reich, the plant had continued to run without renovations or even repairs, but refined ever higher quantities of coal. According to engineers working there, the ovens in the plant were being used for two-thirds more than the quantity for which they had been designed.<sup>35</sup> The air quality was nearly unbearable. As one report from the late 1980s detailed, “These towns are falling apart, drab and grey, creating an

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<sup>33</sup> Lausitzer und Mitteldeutsche Bergbau-Verwaltungsgesellschaft mbH, “10 Jahre Sanierungsbergbau mit Tagebaugroßgeräten” (2000), 196.

<sup>34</sup> DK 5/4509, “Eingabe – Gisela Merkel, 1974,” Eingaben 1974-1975 – Umweltverschmutzung, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>35</sup> RHG/ ÜG 03, “Eine Reise nach Mölbis, Rötha und Espenheim: Erlebnisse, Fakten und ein Aufruf!” undated, Arche, Grün-ökologisches Netzwerk in den Ev. Kirchen der DDR, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

oppressive impression of filth in this poisoned atmosphere. The buildings are black with smoke and soot, and crumbling plaster on the facades ... show the clear signs of thick layers of dust.”<sup>36</sup> Residents were unable to leave windows open or hang laundry outside for fear that everything would turn filthy brown-black like the soot in the air.

Though beneficiation plants were generally limited to coal-mining regions, such as around Leipzig, Halle and Cottbus, the low-grade coal fueled power plants and factories all over the country. Complaints about air pollution stemming from them persisted throughout the GDR’s existence. Although the regime attempted to transition to oil and natural gas at various points, the oil shocks of the 1970s and the logistical difficulties of converting to natural gas resulted in a “renaissance for lignite” in the 1970s and 1980s. With the demands of the economy, levels of air pollution rose accordingly over this period.<sup>37</sup> As the following poem describes, smog and air pollution in the winter was exceptionally depressing and unpleasant:

Die Heizungsdüfte sind erwacht  
Motoren brüllen Tag und Nacht  
Es stinkt in allen Ecken.  
O Kohlenduft, o Motorfutz  
Du arme Lunge, atme kurz  
Dir sollen Gifte schmecken!

The fragrance of heating coal stirs  
Motors roar day and night  
The stench permeates every corner  
Oh smell of coal, oh motor farts  
You poor lungs, don’t breathe deep  
You should like the taste of poisons!

Die Welt wird schöner mit jedem Tag  
Ahnt man nicht, was kommen mag?  
Das Atmen wird wohl enden.  
Im Smog liegt auch das fernste Tal  
Du arme Lunge, kannst die Quel,  
Wann wird sich alles wenden?

The world becomes prettier with every passing day  
Can’t you tell, come what may?  
The breathing will surely end.  
Smog lies over even the most distant valley  
You poor lungs, you know the source,  
When will it all change?

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> RHG/Th 02/08, “Aus ‘Umwelt’, 4/83, Dr. Cord Schwartau, “Umweltschutz in der DDR. Zunehmende Luftverschmutzung durch Renaissance der Braunkohle?” Fassung des DIW Wochenberichte, 4/1983,” Luft, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

While the poem was written in the 1980s, it illustrates problems that existed in the 1970s but only began to be expressed in the public sphere later.

Emissions from power plants, industrial production and domestic consumption also generated enormous amounts of air pollution that damaged large tracts of forest across the GDR. The lignite found in the GDR was often laced with sulfur and only partially removed, if at all, so that when it was burned it created acid rain. The acid rain, in turn, devastated the East German landscape, and officials innocuously referred to this phenomenon as “forest damage” (*Forstschaden*).<sup>38</sup> Its widespread effects were most visible in the mountainous Erzgebirge region of the GDR, along the border to Czechoslovakia, where iconic images of dead and dying spruce and pine trees without needles represent the effects of acid today. Entire hillsides and mountain ridges were dotted with corpse-like tree trunks and broken-off branches. Interestingly, the acid rain that caused degradation in the Erzgebirge primarily came from industry in Czechoslovakia, which would have made it more difficult to regulate even if the SED had taken action.<sup>39</sup>

A second widespread set of problems in the GDR revolved around the chemical industry, which was concentrated in but not limited to the Halle district that became known as the Chemical Triangle. Where the GDR was short in natural resources, SED officials sought to make up for shortages through science and technology to use materials more efficiently and to produce synthetic ones when necessary. This faith in science was so prevalent that the complex chemical industry even had its own ministry and produced everything from photo-processing chemicals to fertilizer and pesticides to household cleaning agents. One of the GDR’s most prized projects

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<sup>38</sup> By the mid-1970s, East Germans (although not officials) had begun to import the West German word for this phenomenon: *Waldsterben*, or the dying of the forest. *Waldsterben* became an important plank in the West German Green Party’s platform in the 1980s. Even into the late 1980s, officials denied that *Waldsterben* existed in the GDR.

<sup>39</sup> RHG/Th 02/06, Untitled Pamphlet, 1983, *Waldsterben*, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

was the development of plastics, which it used as an ersatz material for almost anything, including wood in furniture, and pottery for tableware.<sup>40</sup> In the late 1960s, a report announced that the plastics and elastics division of the chemical industry was growing at a rate of fifteen to twenty percent per annum, which was an incredible expansion, especially in a planned economy.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, the processes used to produce these goods had a devastating impact on the natural environment—not to mention being hazardous in the home. By-products were released as gases into the air and into local bodies of water. The air pollution in the Chemical Triangle was so bad that as early as a 1968 prognosis report, experts estimated that the GDR was losing six million Marks per year from damage caused by emissions.<sup>42</sup> In industrialized areas with high levels of particulate and sulfur dioxide pollution, residents were prone to croup, laryngitis and other respiratory illnesses, especially among children. While lay people only observed these symptoms anecdotally in their friends and family, officials from the Ministry for Public Health recorded them faithfully in reports.<sup>43</sup> The air pollution from industrial production was twofold. The first was the coal burned to produce the goods and the second were the byproducts themselves, but the result was widespread health problems, acid rain, corrosion of buildings, and dying vegetation.

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<sup>40</sup> Eli Ruben, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 10-11.

<sup>41</sup> DC 20-I/3/715, „Prognose: Industrielle Abprodukte und planmäßige Gestaltung einer sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR,“ 1968, Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. The value of East German currency is difficult to calculate, because, as Steiner puts it, “They were politically distorted by state-set (and corrected) rates of exchange.” Steiner, *The Plans that Failed*, 120. In this context, however, it is more important that the SED was attempting to understand the financial and economic impact of environmental degradation.

<sup>43</sup> Th 02/08, „PSEUDOKRUPP – Krankheitsverlauf und Therapie,“ Luftverschmutzung, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

Two of the chemical industry's most advanced products were its dyes and plastics, both of which posed hazards to consumers and the environment. The dyes used dangerous heavy metals, such as cadmium, as stabilizers, were dangerous for workers producing the goods as well as the consumers. Despite being well aware that using heavy metals in production was banned in neighboring Poland and Czechoslovakia, the GDR continued its practices.<sup>44</sup> The plastics industry, too, proved problematic. For example, after facing problems with plastic furniture melting, the chemical industry began adding asbestos to be able to withstand heat, such as in pots and pans. Quick fixes to questions of production, like using asbestos in plastics, meant that East Germans received the goods they wanted, but were emblematic of the SED's decision-making process, which covered over problems instead of finding long-term solutions.<sup>45</sup>

Byproducts from the GDR's many industries also flowed unchecked into local water supplies. The prognosis report from 1968 revealed that 66 percent of the GDR's watercourses were "inadmissibly polluted," especially in industry-intensive areas.<sup>46</sup> Water became undrinkable in many districts, though most especially in Halle, and party-state officials privately admitted that they had failed to properly care for its citizens' well-being. By 1980, classified reports from scientists warned that one and half million East Germans were consuming drinking water that had an "impermissibly high level of nitrates" that could have dangerous effects on the health of over thirty thousand pregnant women and children. The administrative areas where water quality was worst (Potsdam, Dresden, Leipzig Erfurt and Karl-Marx-Stadt) represented a nearly third of

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<sup>44</sup> DK 5/5111, "Ergebnisse und Probleme der Umweltschutz 1984," Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>45</sup>Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*, 87.

<sup>46</sup> DC 20-I/3/715, "Prognose: Industrielle Abprodukte und planmäßige Gestaltung einer sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR," Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.

the districts in the GDR and well over a third of the population.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, this strong reproach of the GDR's water quality was removed from the final draft of the report, which only commented that nitrate levels were unacceptably high.

One of the chemical industry's most successful endeavors was its development of chemical fertilizers, which were used in high quantity in the GDR's large-scale industrial agriculture, dumping nitrates into the ground and water supply. As with other products of the chemical industry, water became undrinkable and the Department for Water Management, and later the environmental ministry, admitted that its water purification plants were incapable of cleaning water to the level necessary to make it potable.<sup>48</sup> Eventually, too, these intensive fertilizers leached the soil of its nutrients and could not be maintained indefinitely. In the 1980s, rivers and lakes were so polluted that even if they were in nature preserves swimming was forbidden—or one swam at one's own very serious risk.<sup>49</sup>

These problems and more frustrated the general population and cast a pall on overall quality of life in the GDR just as western standard of living took off in comparison. Health issues, along with the (in)ability to spend time outdoors and enjoy nature wore on the population more and more, a fact supported by the large numbers of petitions submitted to the health and environmental ministries. In many cases, officials were aware of the pollution, but it was not until the late 1960s that the SED began to address individual complaints, from petitions and otherwise, in a systematic way.

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<sup>47</sup> DK 5/2145, "Bericht über Ergebnisse des Umweltschutzes in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1981," Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>48</sup> DK 5/5155, "Information über die Durchführung eines RGW-Symposiums zu theoretischen und technisch-ökonomischen Fragen abproduktarmer und abproduktfreier Technologien vom 15. bis 19. März 1976 in Dresden," Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>49</sup> RG/B 18, "Brief an Freunde von den Umweltblättern," July 10, 1989, Region Berlin, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

## Response and Institutionalization

The effects of the pollution along with the cultural and social dimensions forced the SED to reconsider its policies and to begin to address the environment in a systematic way at the end of the 1960s. At the same time, the Party had faith in socialism's mission to improve its citizens' lives, just as it had brought them out of the chaos of defeat after World War II. The Party trusted science and technological innovation to use resources ever more efficiently for industrial production so that nature could be left as a space for the workers to enjoy, balancing economic and environmental pressures. As the economic impact of environmental degradation became clearer after the completion of the highly condemnatory 1968 prognosis report, the incentive to establish comprehensive environmental protections were amplified. Environmental policies were established in three steps between 1968 and 1972: the inclusion of Article 15 in the 1968 constitution, the creation of the *Landeskulturgesetz* [National Cultivation Law] in 1970, and the establishment of the Ministry for the Environment and Water Management (MfUW) in late 1971.<sup>50</sup> The environment's arrival on a national stage highlighted not only the party-state's shifting domestic position, but also the SED's desire to make the environment an issue of international, political significance.

The Party's emphasis on the economy and the system's inability to reform from within is undeniable and has led scholars either to overlook the party-state's policies or dismiss them as ineffective. Yet, if pragmatic, economic concerns were the party-state's only priority, then why did it embrace environmental protection policies before even most countries in the West? In this light, the party-state's motivations deserve reconsideration. It established numerous laws,

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<sup>50</sup> *Landeskultur* can be translated in a number of ways, including "land stewardship" and "national culture," encompassing both a sense of improving or shaping the land for a specific purpose and at the same time fostering a sense of national identity. This built on the longer German tradition of a constructed, cultivated nature as represented in the term *Heimat*. Additionally, the GDR sought to develop a uniquely socialist form of *Landeskultur* that incorporated both resource management and nature conservation policies. Moreover, in the East German context, early environmentalist thought and policies fell under this heading.



institutions and associations to address environmental concerns and devoted considerable resources to alleviating pollution. Though many of the measures enacted were unsuccessful—or, in some cases, were never implemented—the SED’s support for these measures reflects that it did value the rhetoric of environmentalism and the environment itself. Beyond historical and cultural explanations, social and economic factors, as well as international opinion, spurred the SED leadership to adopt environmental protection policies. How did it come to that conclusion, and what exactly did an ideologically informed environmental protection look like?

In the mid to late 1960s, the high officials in the GDR, including the Council of Ministers, were well aware of the physical and psychological toll pollution was taking on the economy and the population, serving as one catalyst for environmental action. Organized by a deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, Dr. Werner Titel, the 1968 report entitled “Prognosis: Industrial Waste and Planned Development of a socialist National Culture in the GDR” [*Prognose: Industrielle Abprodukte und planmäßige Gestaltung einer sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR*] exposed high levels of pollution and how it impeded economic growth, and argued it was in the regime’s interest to improve environmental conditions.<sup>51</sup> Experts estimated the effects of air pollution on humans, plants, animals and materials cost the GDR over a billion marks annually. The damage that pollution from sulfur-dioxide caused in the Bitterfeld-Wolfen area alone cost the regime six million marks per year, not including the negative impact it had on nearby agriculture. Additionally, heavily salinized runoff from

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<sup>51</sup> The report was the thirteenth contribution to an order from Walter Ulbricht to examine the development of all aspects of society. Tobias Huff, , *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus: Eine Umweltgeschichte der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 169.

potassium mining cost the economy roughly 227 million marks per year and the report argued that improvements would pay for themselves in about three years.<sup>52</sup>

It was not surprising that the SED found it necessary to deal with environmental problems, at least on the very basic level, because they affected its citizens' health and ability to work. The health problems stemming from the pollution cost the economy, and the regime, valuable resources. "Smoke, particulate matter, and gases released into the air caused illnesses of the respiratory tract, eyes and skin" that were untenable for workers, and compromised plants, too.<sup>53</sup> Conditions in which citizens of a workers' state could barely breathe were not ones in which they could be productive and build socialism, as the SED desired. The practical motivations for improving environmental conditions in the GDR, however, have been largely overlooked because they were never greatly ameliorated. The prognosis report illustrates that experts conducted initial but extensive research on the effects of environmental pollution and raised their concerns about health and work safety to the highest levels.

The prognosis report argued that the "cultural values were not included" in the economic calculations, but were another reason for stricter environmental protection. Having clean water for swimming and recreational purposes, not just drinking and industrial purposes, were essential to the SED's promise to its worker-citizens. The report further stated that "social benefits [of investing in environmental regulation] are decidedly higher than the numbers indicate," citing clean water as necessary for the promotion of public health, the well-being of the workers, nature conservation, and the protection against bad-tasting water.<sup>54</sup> This damning report suggested that

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<sup>52</sup> DC 20/I/3/715 "Prognose: Industrielle Abprodukte und planmäßige Gestaltung einer sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR," 1968, Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

the high level of East German officials knew about the extent of the degradation. More importantly, experts from multiple disciplines and ministries urged them to invest in environmental protection, not only for economic reasons, but also for social and cultural reasons. Environmental protection came to be seen as part of a larger social contract between the party-state and its citizens.

### *The Constitution of 1968*

In the late 1960s, the highest levels of SED officials committed the party-state to environmental protection in prominent legal documents. They touted the regime's progressive positions by including the workers' right (and responsibility) to a clean environment, as well as more traditional conceptions of nature conservation and the protection of plants and animals.<sup>55</sup> This inclusion of environmental protection in the constitution served multiple purposes. On one level, these measures were surely aimed at improving conditions within the GDR and inspiring East German citizens to take better care of their natural surroundings, as a task for the "entire society."<sup>56</sup> On another level, the inclusion of environmental protection in the constitution was a symbolic jab at the capitalist West, which was facing its environmental protests around the same time. By inscribing environmental protection in its constitution, the East German regime carried favor at home and sought to discredit the West.

Including elements of environmental protection in the constitution signaled the SED's faith in its own mission to provide for its citizens as well as an expanding conception of nature's role in the GDR. The constitution employed familiar language about nature conservation, but also spoke more broadly of *Landeskultur*, which incorporated a sense of developing or

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<sup>55</sup> Artikel 15, Absatz 2, Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1968.

<sup>56</sup> DK 5/4454, "Entwurf: Prognostische Grundlagen über die Entwicklung von Hauptrichtungen des Umweltschutzes," 1973, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

improving the land as well as engendering a national culture through nature. The constitution stated the need to keep the air and water clean *and* for the protection of plant and animal life and the beauty of the “Heimat.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, the SED leadership blended older ideas about preserving the natural landscape, which defined (East) Germanness, with newer concerns about preventing water and air pollution. Yet the terms “environment” or “environmental protection” did not appear in the constitution. Although they appeared in official documents only a year or two later, they were not yet widely used in the GDR in the late 1960s. Nevertheless, this “conservation plus” mentality acknowledged the challenges the smokestack industrial economy created while framing it in terms that were recognizable to East Germans.<sup>58</sup>

A shift away from Stalinist practices was reflected not only in social and economic reform as well as environmental policy. In 1963, Walther Ulbricht had introduced the New Economic System, which reformed into the Stalinist top-down approach, making changes in economic planning and management.<sup>59</sup> The NES moved away from total central control of the economy and introduced industry-based organizations to collaborate on major decisions. With increased flexibility came a focus on new, “progressive,” or high tech, industries and renewed emphasis on not wasting natural resources. Though the NES was abandoned in the aftermath of Prague Spring, the SED leadership reconsidered its relationship with nature and natural resources in this period and set up what would remain a struggle between “economy and ecology” for the rest of the GDR’s existence.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Artikel 15, Absatz 2, Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1968.

<sup>58</sup> This is my terminology, not the SED’s.

<sup>59</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 37.

<sup>60</sup>Maier, *Dissolution*, 91.

The 1968 constitution also marked a shift, at least rhetorically, in the dynamic between the economy and ecology. Whereas the Nature Conservation Law of 1954 emphasized the need to “not destroy the natural foundations of production more than absolutely necessary,” the 1968 formulation cited the GDR’s “precious natural riches, which must be protected and used efficiently.”<sup>61</sup> The 1954 law had been passed during the rapid, Stalinist reindustrialization after World War II and still dominated East German attitudes towards the economy, and nature and its resources took second place. While resources were intended to be used as rationally as possible in the 1950s, their purpose was to serve the economy, and thereby the East German people. The 1968 constitution, however, restricted the ways in which nature could be used, stipulating, for instance, that land designated for agriculture or forestry could only be used for its intended purpose.

The new constitution was not just a domestic reassessment of values, but a showcase of East German progressiveness aimed at putting the capitalist polluters in the West to shame. In the late 1960s, Cold War posturing still dictated East German politics. Around the same time in Western Europe, environmental, or green, movements were gaining momentum. Coming out of the student protests of 1968, the antinuclear movement in West Germany was especially influential. Yet, they faced governments and corporations reluctant to effectively address industrial pollution.<sup>62</sup> The SED’s inclusion of environmental protection was not only about addressing domestic concerns, but also a political statement to the rest of the world, highlighting the GDR’s progressiveness in contrast to western countries’ refusal to confront pollution.

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<sup>61</sup> DC/20-I/3/230, “Gesetz zur Erhaltung und Pflege der Heimatlichen Natur vom 8.7.1954,” Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO. Artikel 15, Absatz 1, Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1968.

<sup>62</sup> Dominick, *The Environmental Movement in Germany*, 194.

Inclusion of environmental protection in the constitution was directed not only at a domestic audience, but an international one, too.

### *Landeskultur Law*

Because the two brief paragraphs in the constitution were vague on exactly what these protections should look like, two years later, on May 14, 1970, the Council of Ministers issued the “Law for the Planned Development of the Socialist Landeskultur in the German Democratic Republic.” Typically referred as the Landeskultur Law, the law expanded on Article 15 of the 1968 constitution and provided specifics about how the constitutional right should be implemented. The result of the Landeskultur Law was an institutionalization of environmental protections and a hybrid language that was tied to traditions of Heimat and conservation as well as new ideas about environmentalism, using the word “environment” for the first time in a major legal document. The Landeskultur Law reflected the next stage in the SED’s thought on environmentalism, incorporating the older tradition of nature as national symbol and resource as well as an evolving sense of the environment was.

The Landeskultur Law’s use of the word “environment” reflects only a partial change in mentality. In nearly all cases, the word was preceded by either “natural” or “human,” a distinction that suggests the SED and the writers of the law did not view the environment as a single, interconnected system that included both natural and built components. Yet it was more than just nature and natural resources. Moreover, the law tended to frame the environment as something that could be developed or constructed, which reflected the SED’s worldview that anything and everything could be (re)built in a socialist society.<sup>63</sup> The human and natural environments were to be preserved for the future and for the enjoyment of the workers, but also

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<sup>63</sup> II. Gestaltung und Pflege der Landschaft sowie Schutz der heimatlichen Natur, § 10 Zielstellung Gesetz über die planmäßige Gestaltung der sozialistischen Landeskultur in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik—Landeskulturgesetz—vom 14. Mai 1970.

to be molded for economic and national purposes. These different elements, while at times contradictory, help to explain how the SED situated environmental concerns in “real-existing socialism.”

The opening paragraph of the law stated that nature and its riches served the people, providing not only for the workers’ material desires, but also their spiritual-cultural needs. The law stressed the need for industry and society to work together “to protect the socialist Heimat in the interest of current and future generations,” making it a task for all of society to take on as one. It further insisted on only “using natural riches prudently and economically.”<sup>64</sup> Rather than deny the economic importance of nature, the SED sought to reconcile them through a scientific and technical revolution, which would allow the economy to use resources ever more efficiently while leaving the rest of nature as a place for workers to relax and recuperate. The SED’s early understanding of environmentalism often intertwined “increasing the usability [*Nutzbarkeit*] and productivity of natural resources ... [with] guaranteeing the maintenance and beautification of man’s natural environment,” apparently without contradiction.<sup>65</sup>

To clarify how the Landeskultur Law would be implemented, the SED passed four decrees. These included a combination of practical matters, like noise pollution and sanitation disposal, but also traditional conservation of plants and animals and the “protection and care of the socialist national culture.” The conservation decree specifically replaced the 1954 nature conservation law, because while it protected the German nature, it did not appropriately consider the “social demands on the complex development of the [natural] landscape.” This, the last of the four decrees, placed conservation in a broader context, tying it to a new and evolving

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, Präambel.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

understanding of a socialist national culture and arguing that protecting the environment was necessary for both the citizens' well-being and the continued growth of the economy.<sup>66</sup>

The SED declared socialist Landeskultur to be central to the developed socialist system and made the Council of Ministers responsible for the central planning of the national cultural (*landeskulturelle*) tasks. The law further determined that the Council of Ministers had the responsibility, if there were differences of opinion, to decide “which interests of the entire society [should be] given priority.”<sup>67</sup> While this clause seemed to prioritize nature, in another light, it actually permitted the leadership to set other priorities. It simply depended on what the Council of Ministers considered the People's best interests, and it is clear from the decisions they made, that the environment consistently ranked below the economy. This wording exemplified the SED's ongoing mediation between the needs of the economy and environmental protection, including maintaining the beauty of the natural landscape.

The challenge of balancing these two concerns was distinctly different from in Western environmental movements. Green movements under capitalism were explicitly protest movements, which called attention to industries and corporations polluting the environment, and to the governments that were hesitant to regulate them. The green movements did not need to legislate or consider the economic stance—they merely had to protest. The SED, however, had to walk a fine line between promising environmental protections without criticizing its own industries and the pollution they generated. In trying to prove that socialism was more progressive and inclusive than the capitalist West, the SED became tangled in a web of being both polluter and protector. This is not to argue that environmental protection was just a political

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<sup>66</sup> DC 20/I/3/744, “Begründung des Gesetzes,” Ministerrat Sitzung vom 1969, Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>67</sup> Artikel I, Absatz 3, Landeskulturgesetz, May 1970.



talking point for the SED, but rather, that the regime faced an inherent contradiction, one it struggled to reconcile for the next twenty two years.

*The Ministry for Environmental Protection and Water Management*

To regulate and enforce these new laws, the regime established a Ministry for Environmental Protection and Water Management (MfUW) in November 1971. Dr. Werner Titel, the point man for the 1968 prognosis report, became its first minister. A relatively young man, born in 1931, Titel had only received his doctorate in agricultural science from the Humboldt University in 1965. In 1967, he became a member of the People's Chamber and one of many deputy chairs in the Council of Ministers. In 1969, he was placed in charge of the first in depth analysis of environmental degradation in the GDR and became intimately involved in the writing of the Landeskultur Law. It followed logically, that he assumed leadership of the environmental ministry in November 1971, even before it was officially established.<sup>68</sup> Shockingly, though, he died shortly after its establishment on Christmas Day 1971, presumably of a heart attack, at the tender age of forty.<sup>69</sup> His legacy seems to have been to challenge the status quo on environmental issues in the Council of Ministers, raising serious questions that needed to be addressed.

Hans Reichelt was tapped to replace Titel in January 1972 and remained in the position until January 1990 and was virtually the only minister of the MfUW in the GDR. Reichelt had a less than ideal past, but overcame it to rise within the ranks of the SED. Born in 1925 to an unwed mother, Reichelt finished school in 1943 only to be drafted into the *Wehrmacht*, serving in various infantry units and eventually rising to the rank of lieutenant before being caught by the

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<sup>68</sup> Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 174.

<sup>69</sup> "Werner Titel," <http://bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-%2363%3B-1424.html?ID=3547> accessed February 12, 2014. "Dr. Werner Titel Verstorben," December 27, 1971, *Neues Deutschland*, Jahrgang 27, Ausgabe 357, 1.

Red Army and being sent to a prisoner of war camp. Between 1945 and 1949, Reichelt was a Soviet prisoner of war, during which time he attended an antifascist school. Upon his release, Reichelt traveled to the newly-founded GDR and became politically active in the *Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands* (DBD), the SED approved agrarian party. Later, he returned to school and earned a *Diplom* degree in economics at a technical college (as opposed to a university) in Berlin, and then reentered politics.<sup>70</sup>

Unlike Titel, Reichelt had been trained as an economist and did not have an extensive background in agricultural or environmental science. While it is simplistic to say that Reichelt's education and training made him unfit to be minister, it does suggest that he was not formally trained in, or perhaps as committed to, environmental protection. Generally considered to be key economic adviser Günter Mittag's lackey, Reichelt was more of a political figure than an expert in the field. In later years, his ineffectiveness as environmental minister became a sore point for those within the ministry and outside of it.

Under Reichelt's guidance, the MfUW continued to develop a definition of "environmental protection" closely related to the older concept of *Landeskultur*. Only slowly did the ministry adopt the newer formulation of "socialist environmental protection" to refer to its nature and environment policies, even as it included the new term in the ministry's title. The official definition of environmental protection was still based on the idea of balancing the material needs of the economy with the improvement citizens' working and living conditions. In addition, scientific and technological innovations were supposed to develop more efficient ways

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<sup>70</sup> DC 20/I-3/932, "Reichelt, Hans. Kurzbiographie," January 26, 1972, Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO. As opposed to university-trained ecologists, the DBD and the agrarian interests it represented tended to be more pragmatic than idealistic. Huff suggests that the SED was not fully satisfied with having Reichelt replace Titel, but has no better alternatives. Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus*, 178.

to use available resources rather focusing explicitly on reducing the consumption of resources. Socialist progress and innovation would solve economic and environmental challenges, because it rationally applied a plan to the problems at hand. In the early 1970s, confidence in technology and the planned economy led SED officials to promulgate the illusion that “socialist environmental protection” avoided the exploitation of both the workers and nature.

This combination of faith in science and the ability to create a better future became part of “socialist environmentalism,” an entirely “socialist” conception of conservation, environmentalism and environmental protection. It linked pragmatic resource management concerns through scientific innovation to longer cultural traditions and important ideological obligations to the People. In a workers’ state, the SED contended that new relationships existed between society and nature, because for the “first time in history of humanity the interests of the working class define human life and with it, the relationship between humans and nature.”<sup>71</sup> SED and government officials in the late 1960s and early 1970s maintained that socialism and a planned economy could provide both environmental protection and economic growth through efficient use of resources and better environmental regulation. Based on relative economic successes of the 1950s, their reasoning was not entirely unfounded, and reveals an important moment in the GDR’s existence when it had mostly recovered from the war but believed in a better socialist future.

#### *Nature and Society: The Cultural League*

The SED’s social and cultural objectives were most clearly laid out in the SED’s mass organization, the Cultural League and its subordinate groups. Already founded in the mid-1950s, the Cultural League’s Friends of Nature and the Heimat (*Natur- und Heimatfreunde*, NHF) had

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<sup>71</sup> DK 5/2428, “Die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Landeskultur,” 1972, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

focused on technical sub-groups, such as ornithology and botany, while also educating East Germans about nature and instilling a love of Heimat. By the mid-1960s, the NHF was engaging with questions of Landeskultur, and was expanding its purview beyond the traditional, “narrower” definition, based “primarily [on the] preservation of nature.”<sup>72</sup> Yet, the bulk of the NHF’s work remained tied to maintaining local landscapes and the Heimat, even as it slowly began to incorporate not only Landeskultur, but environmentalism into its mission. As the state institutionalized Landeskultur and environmental protection in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Cultural League’s organizations also reflected this transition period, straddling old and new conceptions of nature and the environment.

In March 1969, Dr. Werner Titel hosted a meeting between the Cultural Leagues’ Central Planning Commission and a delegation from the Presidium of the Council of Ministers to address environmental issues.<sup>73</sup> Taking place not quite a year after the new constitution had been approved by the East German parliament, Titel argued in the meeting for the “closer coordination between the state leadership and the social powers of the Cultural League.” The NHF’s Central Commission was promptly charged with organization campaigns on the district and local levels to disseminate information about the new constitutional article and to educate East Germans about nature and Landeskultur. Projects like “Nature Conservation Week” and regional “Landscape Days” were supposed to tie together the familiar notions of Heimat and nature while introducing Landeskultur and environmentalism to participants.<sup>74</sup> Typical of the

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<sup>72</sup> DY 27/5649, “Sozialistische Heimatkunde – Zu den Hauptaufgaben,” 1971, Wirksamkeit des Kulturbundes, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>73</sup> The Presidium was a smaller circle of ministers within the Council of Ministers with the power to make decisions when the entire Council was not convened.

<sup>74</sup> DY 27/5649, “Sozialistische Heimatkunde – Zu den Hauptaufgaben,” 1971, Wirksamkeit des Kulturbundes, BArch-SAPMO.

SED's totalizing project, it sought not only to create a utopian and ideological political framework, but to educate its citizens through mass campaigns and tightly controlled social organizations.

Despite the new laws and ministry at the state-level, structural change in the party-level social organizations occurred more slowly. Starting in 1969, the Cultural League discussed creating a new, environment-oriented mass organization, as opposed to NHF, which was focused on nature and Heimat. However, it took until 1980 for that organization, the Society for Nature and the Environment (*Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt*, GNU) to be founded. Even though substantive changes in the Cultural League's handling of the environment were delayed, its political goals were always apparent. As a member of the NHF's Central Commission stated in a speech in May 1971: "Our socialist Landeskultur is an explicitly political mission, a part of the world-wide struggle between socialism and imperialism... [And] it relies on its citizens' sense of political responsibility." In the same year, conservation groups from the Soviet Union and Poland gathered in the northern city of Rostock to share information about their activities and to declare their commitment to the "development and protection of the environment through state and society."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, as the SED developed its conception of the environment for domestic purposes, it was ever conscious of how these new policies played on an international stage.

#### **"Socialist Environmentalism" and the West**

The SED's engagement with environmental protection, and what that meant for a socialist state, corresponds to broader context and change. Not only did the GDR, as part of the Soviet bloc, perceive itself central to the struggle between "socialism" and "imperialism," but it also embraced certain aspects of the 1960s student and extraparliamentary protests in West

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<sup>75</sup> DY 27/5649, Quoted in "Sozialistische Heimatkunde – Zu den Hauptaufgaben," 1971, Wirksamkeit des Kulturbundes, BArch-SAPMO.

Germany, as fellow critics of the capitalist West. Environmental protest and green movements across the western world thus appealed to the SED, reinforcing its commitment to the environment. Furthermore, the United Nations and other international organizations began to address environmental issues after the publication of the 1972 Club of Rome report, *The Limits to Growth*, which changed the discourse on environmental pollution on both sides of the Cold War divide. Together, these influences explicitly and implicitly shaped East German understandings of the environment, at times blending and at other times clashing with official “socialist environmentalism.”

Though environmental concerns had begun to receive public attention in the West in the 1950s with protests against nuclear testing, scholars generally agree it was Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* that sparked the modern global environmental movement. Rather than listing a slew of pollutants and problems, Carson focused on just one, the effects of the DDT on the food chain. Noted historian Joachim Radkau has argued that this tactic was effective, because it offered one tangible problem with a concrete solution. Radkau further contends that *Silent Spring* resonated so strongly because it raised concerns about the environment that had been simmering under the surface for a long time.<sup>76</sup> With *Silent Spring* as a symbolic banner of the environmental movement, other issues were able to coalesce under it. Protests against other pollutants in the air and water, and especially questions about the repercussions of nuclear testing, gained resonance with a broader public than they had in the 1950s.

Numerous other works published in the 1960s and early 1970s raised concern not only about pollutants in the West, but also about the consumption of natural resources. Books such as the 1968 *Only One Earth* and reports like the Club of Rome’s 1972 *The Limits to Growth* further

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<sup>76</sup> Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 269.

raised awareness about the global impact of sometimes seemingly small-scale issues. The Club of Rome, for example, first convened in 1968 as an informal collection of thirty individuals from ten countries to discuss “the present and future predicament of man.” A group of experts from a variety of backgrounds—scientists, educators, economists, humanists, industrialists, and civil servants—met to discuss the interdependent nature of the “global system in which we all live.”<sup>77</sup> They questioned contemporary rates of consumption and the use of the earth’s finite resources.<sup>78</sup> Together, these works and others like them argued that such waste damaged the natural environment and became a call to arms more proactive and coordinated stances on environmental policy.

Just as environmental problems were coming into the public eye, the student and extra-parliamentary protests of the late 1960s changed the face of both the United States and Western Europe. Among other points of contention, such as the U.S. involvement in Vietnam and institutional hierarchy in universities, environmental problems spawned a number of interrelated “New Social Movements” (NSM) in the late 1960s and early 1970s that addressed green, women’s rights, and peace issues. These movements tended to start at the grassroots level and be nonhierarchical in nature, which intentionally stood in opposition to what students viewed as a rigid and old-fashioned society.<sup>79</sup> The grassroots nature of the NSM was particularly effective for responding to environmental problems, because they often manifested themselves in response

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<sup>77</sup> Donella Meadows, et al, “Forward,” *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind, Second Edition* (New York: Universe Books, 1974), 9.

<sup>78</sup> The term we now associate with this is “sustainability,” but that term did not come into common usage until after the 1986 Brundtland Report.

<sup>79</sup> Roland Roth and Dieter Rucht, ed. *Neue soziale Bewegungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1987), 20.

to local factories or other polluters, protesting both against the corporations that created the pollution and the governments, which hesitated to instate environmental regulations.

Some younger historians, such as Stephen Milder, have argued that the New Social Movement trends cannot be viewed in isolation from one another. His dissertation, for example, explores the interconnected nature of antinuclear protests in West Germany, which gained widespread sympathy and that had trans- and international ramifications. Milder demonstrates that previous work on the so-called New Social Movements has focused too much on the “value change” and discontinuities of the past rather than exploring how earlier movements set precedents for them.<sup>80</sup> This position is reflected in my own work, which argues that environmentalism in the GDR had longer, if implicit, antecedents.

The late 1960s and early 1970s reflected a transition in the West, and specifically in West Germany, from thinking in terms of “nature” to “environment.” As Sandra Chaney argues in *Nature of the Miracle Years: Conservation in West Germany, 1945-1975*, though the term environment (*Umwelt*) was imported from the American movement, it became a useful and overarching term in the West German context. It resonated deeply with individuals who viewed a range of issues, such as nuclear testing and industrial pollution, as part of a larger, complex system, not simply a matter of caring for the landscape. As students protested against the materialism and waste of affluent postwar society, they questioned human interaction with the natural world, the squandering of resources, and the resulting pollution, for which the broader concept of “environment” became eminently useful.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the SED slowly adopted the

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<sup>80</sup> Stephen Milder, “Today the Fish, Tomorrow Us: Anti-Nuclear Activism in the Rhine Valley and Beyond, 1970-1979,” (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012), 8.

<sup>81</sup> Sandra Chaney, *Nature of the Miracle Years: Conservation in West Germany, 1945-1975* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 176-177.



term “environment” in the early 1970s, as the Party expanded its conception of the environment beyond nature and resources to a more inclusive but still technologically determined one.

West German officials, especially from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, began to promote the term around 1970. They also viewed environmental protection as a “state-planning project that could be managed with better laws, the latest technologies, and professional expertise.”<sup>82</sup> Despite different ideological foundations, East German officials presented surprisingly similar ideas to those expressed by their western counterparts. Both argued that science and technology, along with planning would alleviate the environmental degradation both states faced. Typically, Western democracies are considered the birthplace of the modern environmental movement—and this is undoubtedly true. The parallels, however, between early official reactions to pollution and potential solutions in the Federal Republic and the GDR suggest more overlap than has been previously acknowledged.

One major difference between the East and West German responses to environmental pollution stemmed from the nature of the political systems. The green movement in the West was opposed the government’s stance on environmental pollution and the corporations creating it. The government was slower to reconsider its stance and adopt new regulations to curb emissions and runoff, as it considered the economic impact that would have on the country. Structurally, the protesters, the government, and the corporations were each independent actors with different decision-making priorities and desired outcomes. In the totalizing system of the GDR, which lacked an autonomous civil society or economy, the SED took on all three roles, calling for environmental protection even as it caused the pollution and prioritized the economy over other

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 177.

concerns. This strategically difficult situation eventually proved to be ineffective and led to the rise of an environmental movement outside of the system in the 1980s.

The late 1960s and early 1970s reflected a transition in how both the East and the West thought and talked about the world around them. Governments and even the United Nations took up the call and established international conferences to address them. The 1972 Environmental Conference in Stockholm, Sweden, was the first such meeting and enjoyed widespread support from countries in the eastern and the western blocs. Proposed in 1968, countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain agreed on the importance of environmental problems.<sup>83</sup> Although western countries expected criticism from the Soviet bloc the SED refrained, stating the “problems of environmental protection are, according to their nature, universal.”<sup>84</sup> Environmental issues were further raised in the Helsinki Accords in 1975, along with human rights and other major topics of the day. In this context of growing awareness about environmental problems on the local and the global level, the SED sought to place its stance on environmental issues in an international context.

### **Communist Comparisons: Poland**

Within the Soviet bloc, directives from the Soviet Union created a level uniformity in how the constitutive states regarded the environment. Still, the character of the political establishment and each country’s longer relationship to nature created variation in the development of environmentalism. Similar to the GDR, Poland faced pollution in the postwar period and began to establish nature and environmental laws in the 1960s. Despite having a

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<sup>83</sup> Kai Hünemörder, “Environmental Crisis and Soft Politics: Détente and the Global Environment, 1968-1975” in *Environmental Histories of the Cold War*, edited by J.R. McNeill and Corinna R. Unger (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 262.

<sup>84</sup> DC 20-I/3/948, “Vertrauliche Ministerratssache: Beschluß über eine Erklärung der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zur Stockholmer Umweltkonferenz vom 13. März 1972,” Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, 1972, BArch-SAPMO.

small, but well-organized Nature Protection League (*Liga Ochrony Przyrody*, LOP) since the 1920s, participation in conservation activities was significantly lower in Poland and the concept of Heimat did not carry the significance that it did in the German context. Accordingly, nascent environmental efforts were slower to rise in popularity than in the GDR and would have lasting consequences on the development of Polish environmental protection.

The social and political situation in Poland, however, was more contentious and less stable than the East German one. The country's economic difficulties also generated mass opposition and protest that were essentially absent in the GDR. Communist leaders in Poland attempted to push nature policies from the top-down without meeting a certain quality of life and without a strong heritage of environmentalism. Environmentally-minded policies lacked two of the major foundations of environmental protection present in the GDR, limiting the degree to which it resonated among officials and the general population in Poland in the 1960s and 1970s.

Additionally, the social climate in Poland varied greatly from that of the GDR, which also shaped society's prioritization (or lack thereof) of environmental concerns. In part because Poland had been less industrialized before the war, it lacked a strong communist tradition so that the Soviets did not have a large pool of communists from which to draw local support. Combined with constant economic woes, the Party's hold over the population remained tenuous. Entrenched resentment against the Soviets, both ages-old and newly reinforced, led to a less than sanguine rebuilding process. Strikes and an organized opposition proved stronger in Poland as Władysław Gomułka's reforms in 1956 undid collectivization against Soviet wishes, and then, student protests in 1968 and strikes in 1970 challenged the regime's control over its people.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Maier, *Dissolution*, 25. Gomułka was the leader of Poland from 1945 to 1948, and again from 1956 to 1970.

At the center of the opposition in Poland lay the Catholic Church. Its vehement opposition to communism, based on religious morality as well as popular resentment of Russian control, provided an alternative value system that was deeply ingrained in Polish society. The history of political partition had transformed the Catholic Church into a national symbol as well as a religious one. It stood for Polishness, morality and everything that was wrong with the communist party-state.<sup>86</sup> Although the Catholic Church was forced to compromise in a number of areas, including its charitable activities, it remained a space where opposition could form, and structurally, provided a safe haven for alternative thought. It was both a physical place to meet and symbolic act against the Marxist vision of an atheist utopia. Hence, praying to the Virgin Mary and praying for the Polish state in the same breath did not lead to a cognitive dissonance under state-socialism in Poland, but left little space for other forms of protest. Questions of environmental pollution and ecology took a backseat to political, economic, and religious concerns.

Like the GDR, Poland faced rapid rebuilding and industrialization after the Second World War, having been thoroughly decimated by six years of German and Soviet occupation. Warsaw lay in rubble, while other once-industrial cities like Wrocław (Breslau) fared only slightly better.<sup>87</sup> Stalinist policies in the immediate postwar years sparked rapid economic growth in heavy industry with a focus on energy-intensive plants and large coal-burning facilities, but which left little room for other quality of life concerns such as consumer goods. The large coal-mining region, Silesia, provided the cheap energy required for massive steel production. Poland

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<sup>86</sup> Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols and the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 104-105.

<sup>87</sup> Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 14.

simultaneously faced rapid urbanization and the environmental problems associated with housing shortages (also in part because of wartime destruction), insufficient water supplies, and sewage treatment.<sup>88</sup> Despite rapid economic growth and rebuilding, Poland lagged behind the GDR in living conditions and in satisfying the population.

One of the projects most representative of Poland's Stalinist economic recovery was the steel mill and planned town outside of Kraków called Nowa Huta. Begun in 1949, it was designed as a socialist realist town for industrial workers to live closer to the Lenin Steel Works, which opened in 1954. Environmental degradation in and around Kraków, stemming in part from the Lenin Steel Works, became a point of contention with the Communist leaders.<sup>89</sup> Kraków also suffered environmental degradation from a nearby aluminum smelting plant, and between these two sources of pollution, the city became the heart of an independent environmental movement in the 1980s.<sup>90</sup> Similar to the GDR, heavy industry based on steel production resulted in high levels of air pollution, as well as respiratory and circulatory illnesses across Poland.<sup>91</sup> Despite the environmental degradation, the Communist Party's social and economic struggles dominated officials' decision-making.

The Communist Party in Poland began to acknowledge pollution and environmental problems in the 1960s, and along with the Soviet Union, the GDR, and other countries in the Soviet bloc, wrote environmental laws in the late 1960s and 1970s. The 1949 law on the

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<sup>88</sup> Barbara Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland: A Social Movement between Regime and Opposition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 37-38.

<sup>89</sup> Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949-1956* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 14.

<sup>90</sup> Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland*, 123-24.

<sup>91</sup> B II/3/1110, "Appell an den Sejm betreffend die 'Huta im. Lenina' – Stahlwerke," 1988, Bundestagsfraktion, Polski Klub Ekologiczny, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Berlin.

protection of nature was not able to foresee the immense increase in air and water pollution that Poland's industry generated in the following decades, nor the effect it would have on the natural environment. Officials began to regulate both water and air quality in a piecemeal fashion, setting up inspection organizations, similar to those established in the Landeskultur Law, and even an environmental ministry in 1973. Unlike the GDR, though, Poland did not write a comprehensive environmental law until 1980. As Barbara Hick argues, the law "was the first major coordinated attempt to control the destruction of the environment, not only as nature had created it but also as humans had transformed it."<sup>92</sup> Polish officials' treatment of the environment reflected the country's cultural and economic experience.

Communist officials in Poland, too, took up the call of nature conservation, and eventually environment protection, on a social level. In the 1960s, Polish officials expanded their conservation organization, the Nature Conservation League (*Liga Ochrony Przyrody*, LOP). The LOP had been founded in 1927, during Poland's short-lived interwar democracy, admitted to the International Bureau for the Protection of Nature in 1932, and reestablished under communist control in January 1946. As part of the Party's mass social organizations, the LOP had branches in Warsaw, Lublin, and Gdynia (near Gdańsk). By the 1960s, the Communist Party expanded the LOP's activities, specifically targeting youth organizations and schools. In 1967, only about 8.5% of the LOP's members were adults; the other 91.5% were young recruits from youth and school programs. In 1968, the LOP's status was raised to an "Association of Higher Interest," reflecting a Soviet-wide concern about how to handle resources, the natural environment and

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<sup>92</sup> Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland*, 56.

health. Then in the 1970s, the LOP expanded its efforts to include a larger definition of nature and the environment, similar to efforts in the GDR.<sup>93</sup>

Nature conservation in Poland expanded both its legal parameters and social (relative) voluntarism contemporaneously with the GDR with the major exception of a single, comprehensive environmental law. Despite growing activity, nature and environmental concerns did not resonate as strongly in Poland as they did in the GDR. Polish participation in social organizations and open commitment from the party-state lacked the GDR's carefully cultivated connections between nature, national identity and legitimacy. While following directions from the Soviet Union, Polish Communists did not engage with nature or with environmental concerns on the same level as the SED. The communists' tenuous hold on the population and a nearly constantly struggling economy added to their difficulties and created a weaker foundation for environmental policy and official activism than in the GDR.

### **Conclusion**

As the SED entered its third decade of existence, its stance on nature and the environment underwent a transformation. Grounded in long cultural and social traditions of spending time in nature along with a pragmatic need to manage resources, the SED embraced and institutionalized environmental protection. From the party leadership's perspective, environmental protection was not necessarily at odds with the country's economic needs. With a faith in science and technology to more efficiently use natural resources, and, accordingly, raise productivity, the GDR could raise material living standards as well as quality of life through a pristine natural environment. Based on the GDR's economic successes of the early postwar period, political

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<sup>93</sup> „Historia Ligi Ochrony Przyrody,” accessed February 12, 2014, [http://www.lop.org.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=18&Itemid=24](http://www.lop.org.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18&Itemid=24).

leadership as well as scientists had confidence that the environment was the next obstacle to be managed and submitted to the socialist will.

At the same time, governments in both the East and the West began to recognize pollution's toll on the economy and their citizens. In the West, this concern invaded the public consciousness, generating a grassroots movement that pushed democratically elected officials to address the problems. Additionally, the intellectual freedom of the West created an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual concern, which inspired such groups as the Club of Rome, and later, the 1972 Environmental Conference in Stockholm. In the East, however, the impetus for environmental protection largely came from the top-down, as the SED sought to make its economy more efficient as well as to paternalistically provide for its workers in a workers' state. It investigated the effects of pollution on the people and increasingly developed a broader concept of environmentalism that extended beyond traditional preservation and landscape management projects, even as it played the role of both polluter and protector.

Finally, the GDR had political aims for its environmental policy. As one of the only countries in the world to include the right to a clean environment in its constitution as well as being among the first countries in the world to establish an environmental ministry were talking points that officials would come back to time and again over the next twenty years. More than anything, the SED sought to showcase the progressiveness of real existing socialism while criticizing governments in the West for being slow to implement environmental regulation. Thus the SED believed that it had much to gain domestically and internationally from engaging with environmental concerns and institutionalizing its protection in law and in mass social organizations.



## CHAPTER 2

### The Practice of “Socialist Environmentalism,” 1971-1982

At the VIII Party Congress in 1971, newly instated leader Erich Honecker declared that “the planned development of *Landeskultur* and environmental protection” hold the status of “main task” for the SED. He argued that “the connection between the means of production and the GDR and the lived environment is a task for all of society central to the improvement of working and living conditions for workers, for health and capacity to work and for citizens’ well-being.”<sup>1</sup> Already two years earlier party members in the Cultural League had noted that “the struggle for people’s thoughts and emotions had become a flashpoint” and the environment was the newest front in that battle.<sup>2</sup> In order to fight the threat of imperialism from the West and to turn socialist environmentalism into a mass movement in the GDR, one professor argued it was necessary to “foster the people’s connectedness to a socialist nature and Heimat.”<sup>3</sup> The challenge was to tie together official rhetoric, environmental, and social policy in order to enlighten the East German people and win them over to the cause of “socialist environmentalism.” This chapter explores how the party-state practiced environmental protection following the institution of the *Landeskultur* Law and where it succeeded and where it struggled.

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<sup>1</sup> DK 5/4454, “Entwurf: Prognostische Grundlagen über die Entwicklung von Hauptrichtungen des Umweltschutzes,” November 1973, Zeitweilige Arbeitsgruppe „Zur Entwicklung des Umweltschutzes,“ Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>2</sup> DY 27/5649, “Zur Perspektive der Tätigkeit des Deutschen Kulturbundes auf dem Gebiet des sozialistischen Heimatkunde,” February 20, 1969, Wirksamkeit des Kulturbundes auf dem Gebiet Umweltschutz, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>3</sup> DY 27/5649, “Überlegungen und Hinweise zur Perspektive der inhaltlichen Tätigkeit des DKBs auf dem Gebiete der sozialistischen Heimatkunde und zu einigen damit eng gebundenen Strukturfragen,” undated, Wirksamkeit des Kulturbundes auf dem Gebiet Umweltschutz, BArch-SAPMO.

Over the next decade, the SED created one program after another to promote the party-state's new environmental position and drew on both traditional and an evolving language to further their aims.<sup>4</sup> Projects brought together different segments of society, including politicians, conservationists, trained scientists, and everyday workers to create the image of everyone striving for one common goal. In practice, the SED continued traditional celebrations of the *Heimat*, such as days committed to preserving the natural landscape and campaigns to *Mach mit!* [Take part!] in beautifying communities.<sup>5</sup> Bringing together the Friends of Nature and Heimat (NHF) and other mass social organizations, the SED sought to disseminate knowledge about socialist environmentalism from the top-down, even where it found little local resonance. Ultimately, after a decade of planning, the SED combined all of these efforts in a new Society for Nature and the Environment (GNU) in 1980.<sup>6</sup>

As the SED solidified its commitment to the environment on a societal level, the question of how to implement and enforce the new regulations remained unresolved. Here, the SED and economic planners confronted the challenge of balancing environmental needs with economic productivity. But, despite an expanding number of laws, directives and recommendations, conditions did not dramatically improve, and in some regions, worsened. Citizens' growing frustration with official inaction is clearly illustrated in the *Eingaben*, or petitions, that they

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<sup>4</sup> The National Front was another mass social organization that joined in some of the environmental social projects that will be mentioned. It was a conglomeration of political parties and mass organizations in the GDR that was controlled by the SED. Like the Cultural League, the National Front was charged with organizing mass social projects and campaigns, but since it only collaborated on environmental projects; my focus will remain on the Cultural League and its sub-organizations.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Palmowski translates "Mach mit!" as "Join in!" in his work, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945- 1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), but the intention of mass participation is clear either way.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Behrens' volumes on *Umweltschutz in der DDR* (Oekom: Munich, 2008) discuss the conception and practices of these tasks, yet fail to connect them to the SED's larger socialist project and the global economic context of the 1970s.

submitted to the MfUW. Although official reactions to the petitions demonstrated responsiveness to East Germans' concerns, ineffective solutions and drawn out appeals wore on East Germans who tried to improve their quality of life through these new avenues. Therefore, just as the party-state incorporated environmental elements into its commitment to raise living standards for workers, the unrealistic nature of those promises became painfully obvious to officials as well as ordinary citizens. Over the course of the 1970s, the optimism of the new laws and the faith in the socialist future dimmed and the promises became hollow.

At the same time, structural changes internationally posed new challenges for the SED state that undermined its environmental rhetoric. The deindustrialization of Western economies redefined the competition between Eastern and Western Europe in a way that the GDR struggled to maintain. The East German economy remained focused on quantity of production with now aging infrastructure as Western Europe turned to high tech industries and outsourced its production of consumer goods. At the same time, the reduction in oil imports from the Soviet Union meant renewed pressure to mine brown coal, further damaging the environment, and with an obviously low rate of return. As the West's changed in the aftermath of the oil shocks, the GDR dug its feet in and reaffirmed its commitment to a materialist, production-oriented system with the result that it fell further and further behind the West. By the late 1970s, not only had the GDR's economic standing dropped dramatically in the world, and its budding reputation as a progressive, environmentally-minded country was severely tarnished.

Within the communist bloc, however, the SED's environmental programs were a beacon for what socialist environmentalism *could* look like. As the GDR's economy continued to outperform the others, its implementation of the comprehensive Landeskultur Law and social involvement in environmental activities boded well. In the Soviet Union and Poland, expert-

dominated environmentalism limited public involvement on top of pressing economic concerns. Additionally, the growth of the LOP (*Liga Ochrony Przyrody*, Nature Conservation League) and new environmental law—however piecemeal—reflected top-down environmental efforts across the Eastern bloc. In Poland, threats of strikes, economic underperformance, and the resulting material shortages, particularly shaped the limited character of environmental policy and activity. Support for conservation remained limited, largely consigned to a small scientific cadre without much broader political or social influence.

Thus, the SED's environmental policies succeeded in creating a more environmentally-minded population and addressing concerns within the limits of the existing system. The social campaigns brought together East Germans to discuss nature and the environment in a systematic way, even permitting them to air complaints about local pollution, while policies limited the extent of certain industrial abuses. Yet the success of this engagement ultimately challenged the SED as it failed to alleviate the problems it had promised to fix. As conditions worsened in some regions, such as around Leipzig and Halle, even the minor improvements in others could not overcome the larger discrepancy between the expectations and reality, creating an impossible situation for the SED.

### **Social Policies: Environmental Activism from the Top-down**

After solidifying environmental protection in law and institution between 1968 and 1971, the SED had to decide how to present its most recent project to the East German people. It turned to its mass social organizations, especially the Cultural League, and in some cases the National Front, to introduce a multifaceted approach to environmentalism that was ideological and political as well as practical. The SED drew on Friedrich Engels and contemporary geopolitical debates to make its case in the broadest sense, while at the same time, it established projects and campaigns to actively engage East Germans in protecting the environment. Landscape Days,

which celebrated the local landscape and natural monuments, were set up in every district and county (*Bezirk* and *Kreis*) by the end of 1972. Additionally, throughout the decade, high ranking members in the Cultural League and the NHF debated the founding of a new, more-encompassing social organization, ultimately resulting in the creation of the GNU in 1980. The SED's approach to "socialist environmentalism" on a societal level illustrates a commitment to spreading the concept that is often overlooked in discussing its disastrous policies. Furthermore, the effort that it put into raising awareness about environmentalism added to public disillusionment with the party-state when it failed to live up to its own rhetoric.

#### *Foundations and Explanations*

The Cultural League's task was to generate interest in the environment on a mass social level. While these projects could be practical, its focus was not on the economy or health—those topics could be potentially problematic for the SED—but on having East Germans invest in their natural surroundings. Instead, officials in government and in the Cultural League developed a narrative in which the environment—in its variation iterations—had always been central to the socialist project. Harkening back to the pillars of socialism, most notably Friedrich Engels, the SED justified the importance of the environment within the newly founded institutions as well as to the broader population.

In speeches and treatises, the SED drew heavily on Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* in which he warned about humans' desire not only to change the world around them, but to control it. He cautioned, "We should not flatter ourselves too much for our every human victory over nature. For every such victory, [nature] takes revenge upon us." The Cultural League then adapted the text, inserting "environment" where "world" had stood before. In doing so, officials used Engels' warning to make their case for socialist environmentalism. Engels continued, "With every step we must remember...that we do not stand as if outside of nature, but rather with flesh

and blood and mind belong to it and that above all other creatures we can recognize and correctly apply its laws.”<sup>7</sup> Nature, then, was something to be respected, and even feared, an interpretation which fit with other traditions in German culture that viewed nature as something to be used to produce economic and material wealth but also maintained, cultivated, and preserved.

To further this line of argument, the SED employed prominent academics to explain the importance of the environment to the socialist project to the masses. Horst Paucke and Adolf Bauer from the Academy of Sciences in East Berlin specialized in providing the ideological link between socialism and environmentalism, writing on the human-nature relationship in socialism over the span of two decades. Paucke became the leader of an interdisciplinary research group at the Academy of Sciences, and Bauer a member of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Academy of Sciences.<sup>8</sup> In their 1979 book, *Environmental Problems: Humanity's Challenge*, they reinterpreted Marx to demonstrate that environmentalism was actually a central feature of socialism. Paucke and Bauer argued that it was included in his discussion of “associated manufacturers” in order to regulate nature and provide workers with “most worthy and adequate conditions.”<sup>9</sup> Yet to find more than just passing references to nature, they had to return to Engels, this time to his “Outline of a Critique of Political Economy,” in which he called for “humanity’s reconciliation with nature and with itself.”<sup>10</sup> Such ideological jumps suggested that the undertaking of blending socialism and environmentalism was at times tenuous.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in RHG/Th/02-01, “Friedrich Engels zur Umweltproblematik,” undated, DDR Umweltbewegung: Allgemein, 1981-1989, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>8</sup> DY 27/6112, Correspondence between Dr. Manfred Fiedler and Professor Dr. Schulmeister of the GNU, February 15, 1984, Arbeit des Kulturbundes auf dem Gebiet Umweltschutz, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Horst Paucke and Adolf Bauer, *Umweltprobleme: Herausforderung der Menschheit* (Dietz Verlag: Berlin, 1979), 18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

Nevertheless, in 1972, environmental minister Hans Reichelt furthered this line of reasoning. In a speech to the Chamber of Technology, a technical society of engineers and scientists, he charged the members to protect through innovation. Reichelt contended,

Natural resources are the passive part of the means of production, the technology the active part that generates the intensity to transfigure nature. Within the metabolism of nature and resources, the societal relationship defines humans' connections to their environment. Class defines this relationship. This is the true interrelation between the character of society and ecology, of nature and humans.<sup>11</sup>

Reichelt further explained that nature, like workers, could be used to build the socialist project, or exploited for only *some* people's benefit. By extending the concept of exploitation beyond workers and on to the physical environment while at the same time coupling it with Engels' philosophy on the human-nature relationship, the SED made activism seem like the only possible course. This tack conveniently overlooked both Marx's silence on the topic as well as material, production-oriented nature of the GDR economy.

On the basis of the ideological framework, officials often invoked contemporary struggles between the noble socialist project and the imperialist West to build up the GDR. Reichelt pointed out to the members of the Chamber of Technology the obvious weaknesses of the American system: "In the USA and other capitalist countries, the interests of monopoly capitalism sacrifice the fertile earth and protective forests, contaminate the waters and poison the atmosphere with exhaust" for their own profit. Having already asserted that imperialist states exploited nature for "maximum profit," Reichelt further proclaimed—almost backwardly—that this was part of the United States' "global strategy to plan and carry out war [against socialist states]." This was already evident, he claimed in South Vietnam, where it was "bombing

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<sup>11</sup> DK 5/2428, "Referat von Dr. Hans Reichelt," September 21, 1972, Beitrag der Kammer der Technik bei der Gestaltung der sozialistischen Landeskultur und zum Umweltschutz, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

resource[s]...burning forests, using dangerous insecticides and herbicides to destroy harvests...in order to deeply and systematically destroy the environment to gain a military advantage.”<sup>12</sup> In this way, Reichelt and others employed environmental protection as a political and ideological critique of the West.

Paucke and Bauer also tied the environment to the Cold War, arguing that socialism protected people *and* nature from capitalism’s ruthless exploitation and demonstrating the close-knit nature of the East German propaganda machine. True human progress, they contended, could only be made through “the mastery of scientific-technological revolution, the development of new energy sources, advancement in space, more extensive use of the ocean, and consideration for the needs of the biosphere.”<sup>13</sup> Following this logic, promises to raise living and working conditions for workers and enacting environmental policies did not contradict each other, because science was to increase efficiency in the use of resources for workers’ material wealth. Political, social and academic leaders united behind scientific and technological innovation to solve the GDR’s environmental and economic problems.

#### *Mass Projects and Campaigns: Getting the People on Board*

To develop East Germans’ interest in the environment, the Cultural League and the National Front developed a series of projects and campaigns.<sup>14</sup> These activities can roughly be broken down into two types of undertakings. The first were annual events called Landscape, or Landeskultur, Days, which celebrated the uniqueness of a region’s geography. The second type of project was a smaller scale campaign called “Improve our Cities and Communities – Take

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Paucke and Bauer, *Umweltprobleme*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> In part because there was no unified society for nature or the environment until 1980, these campaigns were jointly organized by two mass social organizations, the Cultural League and the National Front. I will discuss the evolution of the GNU over the course of the 1970s in the next section.



part!” (“Take part!”) that focused on local clean up and conservation projects. These projects, among a myriad of other efforts, were the SED’s first steps to engage with East Germans on environmental issues in a mass movement, by connecting them with their local surroundings.

The Landscape Days were first established in 1966 as the SED was just becoming aware of the environment and celebrated nationally or regionally “meaningful and extensive protected areas” to inspire affinity toward and care of the GDR’s nature. Occurring periodically, but not annually, they focused on preserves and conservation sites where the party-state had invested resources and declared them to be culturally significant.<sup>15</sup> Practically, the Landscape Days involved rounding up party, state, factory, and volunteer representatives to address a given topic, usually one specific to the locale. The very first Landscape Day, for example, took place in 1966 in Neubrandenburg and focused on the Müritz Lake Park. Members of a working group dedicated to the topic discussed if it should follow international guidelines to become a UNESCO site or national park. In addition to scientific and practical speeches and presentations, organizers led excursions into the protected area to view the sites. Leaders also discussed and decided on the next few years’ plans for maintenance and care of a given landscape.<sup>16</sup> As East German engineer and scholar Hermann Behrens comments, however, “next to nothing was done to solve problems like unsanctioned construction or water pollution from industrial agriculture.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hermann Behrens, “Umweltprobleme eines Agrarbezirks im Spiegel von ‚Landschaftstagen‘ – Beispiel Bezirk Neubrandenburg,” in *Umweltschutz in der DDR, Band 1: Analysen und Zeitzeugenberichte* (Munich: Oekom, 2008), 261.

<sup>16</sup> DY 27/9616, Joachim Berger, “Kulturbund der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Zentralvorstand der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik: Ziele, Methoden, Ergebnisse,” April 12, 1983, *Angelegenheiten der Abteilung Natur und Umwelt, Kulturbund, BArch-SAPMO*.

<sup>17</sup> Behrens, “Umweltprobleme eines Agrarbezirks im Spiegel von ‚Landschaftstagen,“ 277.

The Landscape Days honoring the Thuringian Forest required collaboration across the three southern administrative districts of Erfurt, Suhl, and Gera. Between 1968 and 1983, the districts carried out seven Landscape Days, requiring significant collaboration and adding prestige to the event. Central GNU officials in Berlin deemed them “very successful,” having “acquired the status of a ‘tradition’” in the region.<sup>18</sup> Like in Neubrandenburg, experts and representatives from local clubs and factories discussed how to make the forest a more enjoyable place for visitors as a place of recreation and research. Their efforts included establishing a “plan for the maintenance of the Thuringian Forest” over the next several years, but also initiatives for excursions to learn about local flora and fauna as well as maintaining hiking trails and markers.<sup>19</sup> By the 1980s, the district administration in Gera was supporting similar but smaller Landscape Days on the county level for the Upper Saale (River) and the *Holzland*, or woodland.<sup>20</sup> These events were supposed to instill a sense of loyalty to East Germans’ local nature and national situation, connecting nature and nation with socialism, and more and more, environmentalism.

At the 1971 “Baltic Sea Week” in Rostock, the Cultural League incorporated a new environmental dimension into a long-standing event. Started in 1958 to ensure that “the Baltic Sea [remained] a sea of freedom,” the Baltic Sea Week had initially focused on the GDR’s efforts to secure its position in the region and legitimize the state. It included a wide variety of

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<sup>18</sup> DY 27/9616, Joachim Berger, “Kulturbund der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Zentralvorstand der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik: Ziele, Methoden, Ergebnisse,” April 12, 1983, Angelegenheiten der Abteilung Natur und Umwelt, Kulturbund, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>19</sup> DY 27/6177, Kurt Harke, “Betr: Auftrag vom 8. Mai 79 zur Ermittlung der agra-Ausstellung in Markleeberg,” GNU im Kulturbund der DDR, BArch-SAPMO. DY 27/5649, “Vorschlag: Gründung der Gesellschaft für Heimat und Umwelt im Kulturbund der DDR,” August 21, 1974, Büro Haines, Gründung einer GNU, Einschätzungen der Bezirksleitungen zur Entwicklung der GNU, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>20</sup> DY 27/6112, “Arbeitsvereinbarung: Zwischen dem Rat des Bezirkes Gera und der Bezirksleitung Gera des Kulturbundes der DDR zur weiteren Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der sozialistischen Landeskultur, des Umweltschutzes und des Erholungswesens,” November 26, 1981, Arbeit des Kulturbundes auf dem Gebiet Natur und Umwelt, BArch-SAPMO.

political, cultural and athletic events, including lectures, symposia and a sailing regatta.<sup>21</sup> In 1971, diplomatic delegations from Scandinavian countries, were joined by Poland's Nature Conservation League (*Liga Ochrony Przyrody*, LOP) and representatives from the Soviet Nature Conservation Society. With the theme "Man and Nature and Socialism: the Landeskultur Law and the Cultural League," the Baltic Sea Week highlighted the SED's new comprehensive environmental law and the progress it represented.

At the center of the Week's events was a 900-square-meter exhibition entitled "Socialist Landeskultur: Development and Protection of the Environment by State and Society." It especially "addressed the vital questions about environmental protection" and how to join the Cultural League's many environmentally-related activities. The presence of representatives from the Soviet Nature Conservation Society and Poland's Nature Conservation League added prestige to the event. The Soviet and Polish components of the exhibition highlighted "their respective organizations' methods and forms of Landeskultur activities." All three parts (the Soviet, Polish and East German) subsequently became a traveling exhibition, which was supposed to "be shown in all districts and counties of the GDR by the end of 1972."<sup>22</sup> The collaboration of multiple Soviet bloc countries added significance the waxing engagement with environmental activism, and after an international agreement on the protection of the Baltic Sea in 1976 in Helsinki, it became one of the SED's showpieces.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> DZ 4/206, "Ostseewoche, 1960," Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindetag, accessed July 10, 2014, [https://www.bundesarchiv.de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/bilder\\_dokumente/04052/index-14.html.de](https://www.bundesarchiv.de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/bilder_dokumente/04052/index-14.html.de).

<sup>22</sup> DY 27/5649, "Sozialistische Heimatkunde: Zu den Hauptaufgaben," undated, Wirksamkeit des Kulturbundes, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>23</sup> I would argue that these collaborative projects between Poland and the GDR reflect more the structure of the Soviet system than a genuine desire to work together on common environmental problems. This official cooperation is very different from the independent environmental movements' efforts in the second half of the 1980s.

Cultural League officials instituted yet another program in 1972, a “Week of Socialist Landeskultur” in accordance a resolution from the SED’s VIII Party Congress. The goal of the campaign was to “inform the citizens in a realistic and factual way about socialist Landeskultur’s improvement efforts, successes, problems and experiences.” Officials in the Cultural League not only wished to display the GDR’s nature to its best advantage, but to convince its citizens that the SED was “mobilizing all of the social forces and local reserves” to this important cause. At the same time, the Cultural League incorporated numerous of its tried and true propaganda tools, juxtaposing the practical, day-to-day aspects with the “multilateral, international cooperation to solve the many of the problems of environmentalism.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, before his untimely death, Titel had pushed for, and succeeded in, the GDR’s inclusion in the United Nations’ 1972 Conference on Environmental Protection.

Take part! campaigns, in contrast, focused on small, local cleanup projects, encouraging East Germans to become more involved in the beautification of their communities. Like the Landscape Days, and typical of East German system, Take part! brought together local industries, party and state officials as well as ordinary East Germans to demonstrate support for cleanup projects from across all of society. A “competition” sponsored by the National Front, towns and neighborhoods were induced to plant more trees, install park benches, or paint buildings. A report from Berlin in 1976 illustrated the so-called “thorough improvements” thanks to the project: “The number of private contracts to care for green spaces [in the city] steadily rose from 2,157 to 2,385 in the years 1971-1974. In 1974, the estimated cost saved through this volunteer work was 526,000 Marks.” At the same time, though, the report acknowledged the

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<sup>24</sup> DK 5/2428, “Referat von Dr. Hans Reichelt,” September 21, 1972, Beitrag der Kammer der Technik bei der Gestaltung der sozialistischen Landeskultur und zum Umweltschutz, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

limits of these efforts to dramatically improve air and water quality in Berlin. The report concluded there was “a high demand for energy sources with lower levels of sulfur that will simply not be accomplishable in the foreseeable future.”<sup>25</sup>

By the 1980s, Cultural League and National Front officials had found Take part! campaigns to be overwhelmingly successful on the local level. An article in the SED’s leading newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, states, “The citizens’ engagement in creating green spaces in their neighborhoods has grown tremendously.” A gardener for the city of Berlin concluded that “It brings [me] joy to see how much is being invested to beautify our city.”<sup>26</sup> In the district of Prenzlauer Berg, took up the call for neighborhood improvement, determining that “no street in this most-densely populated district of Berlin should be...without green.”<sup>27</sup> Each of the five thousand trees slated for planting in Prenzlauer Berg needed a sponsor. Through tree-planting and other small projects, the SED hoped to improve living conditions and build connections to the natural environment without having to invest large sums of money.

The Landscape Days and Weeks as well as the Take part! competitions illustrate rhetorically and practically how the SED conceived of its relationship to the environment. These campaigns got East Germans to “voluntarily” improve their neighborhoods with few resources, but were also spun as great acts of socialist progress. Newspaper coverage of the reports reinforced this attitude by citing dizzyingly high, if arbitrary numbers. Indeed, the more quantifiable the project was, the more impressive it appeared. Whether it was the number of man-hours devoted to a project or the number of trees planted, the SED sought to reinforce its

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<sup>25</sup> DK 5/5155, “Schwerpunktprobleme: Auf dem Gebiet des Umweltschutzes in der Hauptstadt Berlin,” Entwicklung des Umweltschutzes 1976, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>26</sup> Uwe Stemmler, “Schöneres Gesicht für 1300 Lichtenberger Höfe,” *Neues Deutschland*, January 11/12, 1986.

<sup>27</sup> “Für junge Bäume Paten gesucht,” *Neues Deutschland*, January 28, 1986. These two examples come from significantly later, but use tactics that the Cultural League and National Front had employed for several decades.

successes through these methods, even though the numbers were often exaggerated. Moreover, the numbers given, such as how many trees and bushes planted on a Saturday afternoon, were only a small part of a much larger problem.

Landeskultur events and Take part! campaigns were not intended to solve the country's environmental problems alone, but were one component of larger socialist environmentalist project. The SED's goal, within this social dimension was to raise awareness about the SED's progressiveness and establish a bond between the population and the "East German" environment. The activities used to achieve these tasks reflected the continuing practice of conservation on the mass social level. When paired with a language of broad structural change, however, these measures became insufficient, falling short of the SED's bombastic promises. As a result, what appeared to be a small but concrete step in the 1972 was on track to being a worn and unfulfilling ritual by the 1980s.

#### *Evolution of a GNU to Establishment in 1980*

As early as 1969, the Cultural League planned to create a new mass social organization that would focus not only on traditional conservation and Heimat themes, but also include the new concepts of "socialist Landeskultur" and the environment. Rather than coordinating between different organizations in the Cultural League and the campaigns like Take part! in the National Front, this society would consolidate all of those various projects into one organization. However, the planning for this project took nearly eleven years, meaning that the resulting Society for Nature and the Environment (*Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt*, GNU) was not established until 1980. The struggle over how this society was conceived of and eventually implemented over the decade-long process reflected the changes in the party-state's stance on the environment in that period as well as its solidifying stalemate. Because the already existing

institutions were sufficiently carrying out the social environmental tasks, a new organization for the development of socialist environmentalism was not urgent.

The first proposals for such an organization in 1969 were much more closely tied to Heimat and Landeskultur, and least in name and conception, than the society for nature and environment that came to be. Under the guidance of the ill-fated Werner Titel, a delegation from the Presidium and the Cultural League's Central Committee met for the first time to discuss the "much closer collaboration between state leadership and the social forces of the Cultural League."<sup>28</sup> The logic behind this cooperation was that socialism's contest was not only being fought economically, but also in "the people's thoughts and emotions." An important precondition for winning this battle was to show the importance of providing a humane life in a worthy society, so that the people would take up this objective as their own.<sup>29</sup> Naturally, a part of a humane life, in Titel and his associates' eyes was a clean environment. With this lofty ideal, the preparations for a "Society for Heimat and Landeskultur" began.

Despite this promising start, the project stalled over the next decade due to a lack of motivation and coordination. In 1973, a new committee was formed to determine what form this society should take, and many of those involved in its ideological and practical organization remained active in running it well into the 1980s. These officials included Cultural League secretary Dr. Manfred Fiedler, deputy member of the Cultural League's "Nature and Heimat" Central Committee Dr. Hugo Weinitschke, and especially Gerd Haines.<sup>30</sup> In 1973 and 1974,

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<sup>28</sup> DY 27/5649, "Sozialistische Heimatkunde: zu den Hauptaufgaben (Zu a) der Konzeption)," 1969, Wirksamkeit des Kulturbundes, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>29</sup> DY 27/5649, "Zur Perspektive der Tätigkeit des Deutschen Kulturbundes auf dem Gebiet des sozialistischen Heimatkunde," February 20, 1969, Wirksamkeit des Kulturbundes, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>30</sup> DY 27/5649, "Sozialistische Heimatkunde," undated, Gründung einer Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt, Kulturbund der DDR, BArch-SAPMO. Fiedler and Weinitschke both had doctorates in the natural sciences.

these three along with several others revisited the question of what this society should encompass and what its title should be. The now the preferred name was “Society for Heimat and the Environment,” marking a slow shift away from conservation and Landeskultur and toward the newly popular term, environment. This time the society was supposed to be founded the following year in 1975, and despite its new name, the proposed tasks and goal remained essentially the same, to engender love of nature and country.

Gerd Haines, a writer employed by the Cultural League and one of its leaders, was particularly involved in the process of driving the project forward and was instrumental in the eventual founding of the GNU in 1980.<sup>31</sup> Overcoming the inherent lethargy in the workplace as well as coordinating fulltime administrators and volunteers within the Cultural League slowed progress. The political goals of the society did not always align with the interests of the volunteers, nor did those employed by the Cultural League always take an interest in their assigned duty. Haines reported to his superiors that he had to chide his colleagues for not being focused enough on their work, a tendency that was “especially apparent on Fridays” when people often took care of their own business outside of the office.<sup>32</sup> Haines also instituted strict attendance records at meetings, listing each invited person with “presence, “excused absence,” and “unexcused absence.”<sup>33</sup> These problems along with the sufficient functioning of other environmentally-minded societies reduced the immediate need to create a more comprehensive organization.

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<sup>31</sup> Haines held the position of “Bundessekretär,” and figured prominently in the creation of the GNU. After it was founded in 1980, though, the chairman, Dr. Harald Thomasius, became the spokesperson for the society.

<sup>32</sup> DY 27/9061, “Beschlüßprotokoll der Abteilungsleitersitzung vom 28. Mai 1980,” Dienstbesprechungen der Abteilung Natur und Umwelt, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>33</sup> DY 27/9061, “Beschlüßprotokoll der Abteilungsleitersitzung vom 29. Juni 1983,” Dienstbesprechungen der Abteilung Natur und Umwelt, BArch-SAPMO.



When the GNU was officially founded on March 28, 1980, however, a professor of forestry science, Harald Thomasius, was tapped to become the society's chairman. Placing a trained scientist in charge of the society lent the GNU credibility and expertise. In his role as chairman, Thomasius often took part in international conferences and spoke to westerners visiting the GDR about the relationship between humans and nature as well as on more technical topics relating to forestry and the environment.<sup>34</sup> Domestically, Thomasius's new society unified 40,000 members of the Cultural League who had been involved in related work and brought together 1600 working groups on diverse topics, such as dendrology, city ecology, and nature and environment. By 1989, the GNU had expanded from 40,000 to nearly 60,000 members.<sup>35</sup> Although interest and activity level varied, the GNU was one of its most popular subordinate organizations, comprising nearly one quarter of its 230,000 members in 1990.<sup>36</sup>

The GNU's "guiding principles" illustrate how the goal of a Cultural League nature society had changed between 1969 and 1980, as had its place in East German society. While still a far cry from the all-encompassing idea of environmentalism that was developing at the same time in the West, the GNU's aims focused more on a broader definition of the word than the earlier iterations, which referred almost exclusively to nature, Heimat, and Landeskultur. Although these ideas remained imbedded in the text, the concepts had evolved and taken on new tasks such as "increasing the beauty and *diversity* of the landscape" and "the *comprehensive*

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<sup>34</sup> MfS/HA XVIII/12511, "Information, 29.5.86," Hauptabteilung XVIII, Absicherung der Volkswirtschaft, BStU.

<sup>35</sup> Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1997), 453.

<sup>36</sup> Hermann Behrens, *Wurzeln der Ummweltbewegung: Die „Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt“ (GNU) im Kulturbund der DDR* (Marburg: BdWi Verlag, 1993), 14. Naturally, some East Germans belonged to more than one Cultural League organization, but the percentage of people involved in the GNU remains impressive.

protection and improvement of the environment.”<sup>37</sup> This new vocabulary stood in contrast to the earlier emphases on nature as a resource to be used primarily for the construction of socialism or even for engendering a sense of national identity in the East German population. The GNU’s broad goals attempted to find a middle ground between the international discourse on environmentalism and the SED leadership’s conception of the GNU’s place in the Cultural League and in East German society more generally.

The GNU’s founding document further emphasized the importance of environmental protection for “the good of society,” openly acknowledging the complex relationship between nature, the economy, and societal well-being, as it had in the early 1970s.<sup>38</sup> It further proclaimed the GNU’s purpose to educate the general population about the “interconnectedness of nature and society, of man and environment” and to disseminate “social science propaganda for an active environmental protection.”<sup>39</sup> In doing so, the GNU’s founders highlighted the importance of educating the public about the environment and generating a culture of using natural resources more efficiently precisely at the moment when the East German economy was so much ossifying that it could not structurally adapt to very demands its mass social organizations were intended to propagate. The GNU’s guiding principles stated that it aimed to work with related ministries and industries toward a cleaner environment, though the subtext suggested that they did so only as long as they did not challenge the existing economic priorities.

At the opening celebrations for the GNU in March 1980, the underlying contradiction between industry and ecology surfaced again, setting a discouraging tone for the society’s future.

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<sup>37</sup> DK 5/1830, “Leisätze der Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt im Kulturbund der DDR,” January 1980, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO. The italics are my own.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

One invited speaker was a young woman, Monika Liebig, who had been involved in local nature organizations. She argued that “we are all children of the industrial region around Halle and Leipzig and are therefore very concerned with the situation in our local Heimat.” She went on to complain, “After we go swimming in the outdoor pool, we have to come home and bathe again to get clean ... and when driving through the mining region, we have the sense that we have landed on the moon with its dejected crater landscape.” Furthermore, the air pollution from the coal and chemical plants made it difficult to keep the house clean. Pulling at the traditional heartstrings of the mostly male party leaders present, young Monika explained, “Girls are just as vexed as our mothers when the freshly cleaned windows get dirty again after a light rain, or that we must sweep out the window sills after a gust of wind.”<sup>40</sup> Although she immediately tried to soften her criticism, blaming her youth and naiveté for the statements she had just made, the tension between the SED’s promise and the reality of pollution put the GNU in a precarious position.

Organizationally, the founding of the GNU was a top-down project to popularize socialist environmentalism at every level. In the early 1980s, every district was tasked with creating its own chapter of the GNU, and later every county (*Kreis*) was, too.<sup>41</sup> Despite continuing, and even expanding, programs to raise awareness, the pollution remained and the state was at a loss to solve it. Thus, the state and the social organizations worked against each other with the Cultural League trying to invigorate the masses just as state ministries were beginning to acknowledge that it did not know how to solve its pollution.

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<sup>40</sup> DY 27/6112, “Stenografisches Protokoll: Gründung der Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt im Kulturbund der DDR am 28. März 1980,” Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt im Kulturbund, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>41</sup> DY 27/6113, “Gedanken und Feststellungen zur Einschätzung der Entwicklung der Arbeit der GNU im KB im Berichtszeitraum der Abrechnung der Aktionsprogramms zum XI. Parteitag der SED,” Dr. Manfred Fiedler, February 3, 1986, Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt im Kulturbund, BArch-SAPMO.

### **Political Transformation: The Failure of Regulation and Resolution by Petition**

Where the Cultural League rallied East Germans to action, the environmental ministry (MfUW) was supposed to regulate pollution and protect the environment from a policy perspective. The Landeskultur Law of 1969 and its mandates were supposed to go into effect in the 1970s and improve the natural environment for practical and ideological purposes. One way of judging the effectiveness of these laws is through the handling of *Eingaben*, or petitions, which East Germans had the right to submit to local authorities in order to address any number of issues, including living conditions and pollution. Through examining how officials in the MfUW dealt with these complaints, the SED's self-imposed challenge of environmental protection—how it attempted to fulfill its promises—becomes clearer. At the highest levels, the Council of Ministers prioritized political and economic expediency over profound structural changes that might have improved the ecological situation in the GDR. Nevertheless, the practice of these policies demonstrated responsiveness on the part of the party-state. The tension between environmental and economic priorities created a difficult situation, which the MfUW's scientists and bureaucrats attempted to navigate.

#### *Pollution and Policy*

The Council of Ministers' resolutions set high standards for the newly founded ministry, which at least theoretically, involved the implementation of strict regulations. Despite well intentioned environmental experts in the ministry, the intransigence of the system and the continual prioritization of the economy stymied many of the MfUW's stated and implied goals. Much of the MfUW's work in the 1970s revolved not around changing modes of production to protect the environment, but rather measuring pollution levels and managing existing problems. High level officials acknowledged the problems while lower level authorities were left to implement what standards they could and to placate the affected residents. The gravest problems

were entirely removed from the MfUW's purview and transferred to the Ministry for State Security's (MfS) Department XVIII, which addressed threats to the functioning of the economy. The transfer of certain environmental situations to the MfS highlighted the SED's attempt to address pollution within the existing political and economic structures.

The MfUW's clearest goal—and challenge—according to the SED's VII Party Congress in 1971 was systematic development of Landeskultur and environmental protection. At the Congress, environmental protection was defined as a “task for the whole society,” improving “working and living conditions, health, productivity and the well-being of the citizens.”<sup>42</sup> In 1973, the temporary working group “For the Development of Environmental Protection” within the MfUW proposed what the ministry's priorities should be through the year 1990. Focusing on the ability to address “new kinds of environmental problems qualitatively” that would arise from raising the usage intensity, the working group focused on more efficient re-incorporation of waste, byproducts, and recycled products into industrial production.<sup>43</sup> These new problems would admittedly include “heavy pollution of the air, water and ground in industrial regions,” while noise pollution from industrial production and traffic would also assuredly compromise environmental conditions. While offering suggestions for unspecified scientific and technological developments—a hallmark of East German rhetoric—the report clearly identified many of the challenges that the new ministry faced.

In the following decade, the MfUW made a degree of headway with its new regulation, though not as much as intended. For example, one of the new environmental regulators' tasks was to clear new construction and industrial projects. In the 1970s in Halle, for example,

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<sup>42</sup> DK 5/4454, “Entwurf: Prognostische Grundlagen über die Entwicklung Von Hauptrichtungen des Umweltschutzes,” November 1973, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

administrators at the city level (department of environmental protection and water management) signed off on projects to further develop infrastructure in order to improve conditions in different parts of the city. While bringing water and electricity to fast-growing parts of the city was desperately needed, officials also aimed to expand industry by improving the local infrastructure.<sup>44</sup> Bureaucrats from different departments went several rounds over where to lay district heating pipes for chemical plants in Leuna, Buna, and Ammendorf. Eventually, economic and planning advisers made some accommodations to their initial plans, but undertook the intended task anyway. As the city planning commission wrote, “It is not possible to lay the pipes east of the connecting line ... because thousands of cubic meters of earth would have to be removed. Moreover, a large stand of trees would have to be dealt with.”<sup>45</sup> Eventually, engineers agreed on a compromise on where the pipes should be laid, so that the construction of the line was least affected by natural and built impediments. The city level department of environmental protection therefore mediated with the different industries’ interests, earning some concessions from economic interests but making many, too.

In other cases, the MfUW measured pollution levels and informed other ministries of environmental disasters to coordinate crisis management. In 1977, for example, a worker for the department of inspection and control informed the MfS that between five and six hundred kilograms of a deadly pesticide called Wofatex had been spilled into the Mulde River. Senior inspection officials determined that the pesticide consisting of chlorobenzene and methylparathion did not present “a danger to local inhabitants or industry...yet the concentration of the

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<sup>44</sup> The newly constructed Halle-Neustadt was so large that it was administered as its own city, independent of Halle.

<sup>45</sup> Stadtplako 147, Correspondence, Stadplankommission, Stadtarchiv Halle. The original for “district heating” is “Fernwärme” or “Fernheizleitung.”

[pesticide] would potentially be high enough to kill fish” when the Mulde joined the Elbe.<sup>46</sup>

Although the inspector could not confirm if there would be other repercussions from the spill, the true problem for the MfS was not the pollution itself. Rather, the responsible MfS official, a Major General Alfred Kleine, was concerned that dead fish in the Elbe as it flowed into across the border would tip off West German officials to the spill. This time, though, the MfUW and the MfS were lucky enough to succeed in neutralizing the pollutant before it flowed west in the Federal Republic.

These partial successes in the field of environmental protection contributed to a sense that the East German state could and would provide for its citizens. In the 1970s, many factories, especially in places like Halle, were fitted with filters to decrease particle emissions.<sup>47</sup> By 1975, an energy plant in Halle had installed an electrostatic precipitator to reduce pollution from one of its generators, while three others had been converted to the much cleaner natural gas.<sup>48</sup> Places like Halle witnessed reductions in dust emissions after these measures were implemented, dropping between 1975 and 1987 from 20,280 to 17,083 tons per annum. Yet even as dust levels decreased, sulfur dioxide emissions increased, and filters, like the electrostatic precipitators, were rarely repaired or replaced when they broke. By the late 1970s, the positive transition to natural gas had been reversed as the energy crises hit the GDR and forced a renewed emphasis on coal, even as energy plants were tasked with finding ways to minimize the growing

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<sup>46</sup> HA XVIII 18126, “Information über Vergiftung durch Pflanzenschutzmittel,” November 30, 1977, Hauptabteilung XVIII Absicherung der Volkswirtschaft, BStU.

<sup>47</sup> Although the power plant put a filter on one of its generators’ smokestacks to reduce particle emissions, it had not succeeded in introducing processes that reduced sulfur dioxide levels.

<sup>48</sup> The electrostatic precipitator uses the inherent partial charge in dust particles to draw them toward a charged metal plate, essentially catching them rather than releasing them into the atmosphere. Conversation with Dr. Andrew Ault, atmospheric chemist at the University of Michigan, July 28, 2014.

pollution.<sup>49</sup> The hope for a better future through technological innovation marked the beginning part of the 1970s in policy as well as mass social organizations yet faced systemic issues that hindered the GDR from making greater environmental strides.

One of the greatest hindrances to addressing pollution was the structure of the communist party-state itself. Economic performance in the GDR's success in the battle against capitalism took priority over developing more environmentally-conscious processes. As a 1973 report from the ever-expanding MfS explained, environmental protection had three main purposes: to explore the harmful effects of such products as herbicides and insecticides, to manage water levels and usage for industry and agriculture, as well as to represent the GDR at international conferences.<sup>50</sup> The MfS's engagement with environmental protection represented the regime's most pragmatic side, and in some cases extreme, side. The SED ultimately charged the MfS with staving off the economic losses from pollution, managing resources, and presenting the GDR in a positive light abroad. This perspective tarnished the ideals of socialist environmentalism but only represented one dimension of the broader project.

Yet the SED state's top-down bureaucracy and its planned economy led to innumerable inefficiencies, with responsibilities and tasks being divided between different organizations. Given that no single ministry or body had full say over environmental regulations, each partially responsible party tried to administer its portion, but lacked a comprehensive picture. Because the MfUW nominally controlled regulation, it had to coordinate out of necessity with the ministries that generated the pollution, such as the Ministry for Coal and Energy, the Ministry for Chemical

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<sup>49</sup> A. 40 Nummer. 19, Band 1, "Konzeption zur Entwicklung der Umweltbedingungen in der Stadt Halle bis 1990," 1987 and Nummer 41, Band 5, "Zuarbeiten der Abteilung Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, 1973/74," Stadtarchiv Halle.

<sup>50</sup> MfS/HA XVIII 25108, "Arbeitsergebnisse 1973," Hauptabteilung XVIII, Absicherung der Volkswirtschaft, BStU.



Industry, the Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Food Production, and the Ministry for Construction.<sup>51</sup> As much of the improvement in environmental conditions was supposed to be accomplished through advancements in technology, it was not surprising that experts in the MfUW complained that “right now there is not sufficient coordination between individual problems and the scientific-technical tasks.”<sup>52</sup> The need for coordination was abundantly obvious, and yet structurally difficult if not downright impossible.

Additionally, factories could acquire permits to bypass the strict regulations in order to keep the production from being slowed.<sup>53</sup> The Landeskultur Law and its by-laws specified that “as far as incursions into the landscape and its recuperative properties are concerned, those that are unavoidable must receive special permission from the responsible local council.”<sup>54</sup> Because the Council of Ministers was permitted to make decisions about the environment based on the “the best interests of the entire society,” it was possible to circumvent the newly established regulations, if other interests were at stake.<sup>55</sup> The most important interest for the party-state domestically and internationally was the functioning of the economy, and through these exemptions, party-state leaders, such as Günter Mittag, could bypass the new regulations at the

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<sup>51</sup> Jens Hoffmann und Hermann Behrens, “Organisation des Umweltschutzes” in *Umweltschutz in der DDR*, 42-45.

<sup>52</sup> DK 5/3399, “Entwurf: Einschätzung zum Stand und zur Entwicklung auf dem Gebiet der sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR bis 1975,” Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>53</sup> “Hintergrund: Umweltpolitik in der DDR,” September 22, 2011, Bundesministerium für Umweltschutz, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit, accessed August 17, 2014, <http://www.umwelt-im-unterricht.de/hintergrund/umweltpolitik-in-der-ddr/>.

<sup>54</sup> DC 20/I/3/744, “Entwurf: Durchführungsverordnung zum Gesetz über die planmäßige Gestaltung der sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR: Erschließung, Pflege und Entwicklung der Landschaft für die Erholung,” 1969, Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>55</sup> “Gesetz über die planmäßige Gestaltung der sozialistischen Landeskultur in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik—Landeskulturgesetz—vom 14. Mai 1970,” Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Teil I Nr. 12, Berlin den 28. Mai 1970.

expense of workers' health and well-being.<sup>56</sup> Thus, environmental controls were installed when they did not take away from the existing economic structure and the materialist mentality at the heart of the East German party-state.

The MfUW continued to focus on traditional, limited tasks, such as managing natural resources, especially water, for industrial purposes. To this end, the MfUW created the State Oversight for Water in 1977 as general reports from the MfUW and MfS highlighted the continued importance of water management for industrial purposes, and even considered it a matter of state security.<sup>57</sup> Controls and checks focused on maintaining enough water for industry and in attempting to reuse byproducts and waste that were dumped into the water from various industrial processes. Despite official plans to the contrary, the MfUW predicted a 137 percent increase in water usage would overwhelm sanitation plants between 1976 and 1980, so that two thirds of the water ways would fall into the categories of "heavily" or "very heavily polluted."<sup>58</sup> Though these numbers were perhaps a cry for more resources to address water sanitation, the MfUW acknowledged its own shortcomings. This admission highlighted the difficult position of constantly ranking below the needs of the all-important economy.

The MfUW faced numerous difficulties in attempting to improve environmental conditions, which by and large, it was not prepared or permitted to overcome. Coordination between ministries was cumbersome or nonexistent, which made it difficult to reduce pollution across different industries. Further, the MfUW was limited in its jurisdiction, because nothing

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<sup>56</sup> Günter Mittag was an SED party member and economic adviser. In 1976, he became the Secretary for the Economy for the Central Committee of the SED and was instrumental in shaping East German economic policy.

<sup>57</sup> Hermann Behrens, "Rückblicke auf den Umweltschutz in der DDR seit 1990," in *Umweltschutz in der DDR*, 15.

<sup>58</sup> DK 5/3399, "Einschätzung zum Stand und zur Entwicklung auf dem Gebiet der sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR bis 1975," undated, Maßnahmen zur Leitung und Planung der sozialistischen Landeskultur, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

could be perceived as hindering economic productivity, the foundation of a materialist socialist state. By the early 1980s, officials in the related ministries often acknowledged their inability to solve environmental problems, focusing instead on crisis management and denial.

#### *Official Recourse: Petitions*

One of the clearest windows into the functioning of the MfUW was through its handling of petitions.<sup>59</sup> While the SED dictatorship did not allow for open criticism, its citizens were permitted to communicate concerns about any number of topics through them, annually submitting nearly a million of them over the course of the GDR's existence.<sup>60</sup> These petitions, or *Eingaben*, became a gauge for measuring both East Germans' frustrations as well as official responses to them. As Thomas Mühlberg has argued, they became an "an instrument for negotiating conflicts, above all between citizens and administration."<sup>61</sup> From its inception in 1971, the MfUW was inundated with petitions about living, working, health and general environmental conditions.<sup>62</sup> Petitions to environmental officials raised a wide range of issues, but which initially focused on individual or local concerns. The problems officials faced, however, overwhelmed them, despite often earnest attempts to respond to and resolve them within the existing structures.

In the ministry's first years, bureaucrats enthusiastically replied to citizens' problems, confident in their ability to address them. East Germans wrote petitions about noise pollution

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<sup>59</sup> For a useful explanation on the history of the *Eingabe*, see Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005), 271-288, and Felix Mühlberg, *Bürger, Bitten und Behörden: Geschichte der Eingabe in der DDR* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2004).

<sup>60</sup> Felix Mühlberg, *Bürger, Bitten und Behörden: Geschichte der Eingabe in der DDR* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2004), 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 280.

from local auto repair shops and factories to general “environmental pollution” from coal mining to water pollution running off from factories to bees being poisoned from local industry.<sup>63</sup> One series of complaints was about noise pollution from the VEB Elektrokeraamik “Otto Winzer” in Berlin in 1974-1975. After many rounds between the MfUW, the VEB’s director and the petitioners, the factory added a series of equipment to lower noise from production, and for a time, even introduced a “filter system in the outdoor facilities, so that starting on September 4, 1975 the mill’s filter system would not need to be used after 4:30 PM. Therefore, noise pollution would not bother nearby residents after the official closing time.” The factory director further checked back with the petitioners and found that after the new measures had been implemented, “the present citizens confirmed there had been a noticeable reduction in noise pollution.”<sup>64</sup> A willingness to explore options and confront citizens’ problems marked the MfUW’s early years and highlighted its optimism in finding manageable solutions that balanced the economy’s and the citizens’ needs.

Yet not all problems were as easily fixed or as ambitiously addressed, leading to half-measures. In the village of Dorndorf, in southwestern East Germany, one mother complained of pollution from the local chemical plant that affected her, her mother, and her three children. She explained how bad the air was by saying that “if there is a northeasterly wind, it is impossible to remain outside in the garden. Even opening the windows is barely an option, because it results in a thorough and demanding cleaning of living area.” In 1973, they had received 1,000 Marks in cash as compensation for their situation, but it did not improve their living conditions. After

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<sup>63</sup> DK 5/4509, Eingaben 1974/1975, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>64</sup> DK 5/4509, “Protokoll über die Kontrollberatung zum erreichten Stand der Verminderung des vom VEB EKB verursachten Lärms am 29.10.1975 im Klub der Werktätigen ‘Julius Fućik,’” Eingaben 1974/1975, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

again pleading for some kind of improvement, the petitioner concluded her letter by saying “We just hope to live in a manner worthier of humans.”<sup>65</sup>

Over in the district seat, Gera, the local environmental officials debated how to best address this problem, for surely this was not the only family affected by the pollution. The top MfUW person on the matter in Berlin, Comrade Guido Thoms, cited the Landeskultur Law’s statute on clean air and demanded that something be done, while the director of the factory explained in detail all of the measures he had already taken. After the district-level health inspection visited the home, the inspector and the factory director agreed that the family was in fact negatively affected by the pollution. In the end, local officials provided the family with three options to sell their house to the chemical plant and “a) apply for another house in Dorndorf-Steudnitz through the town council, b) have a new house built with the possible [financial] support of the chemical plant, c) move to a newly built apartment in Dorndorf-Steudnitz.”<sup>66</sup> What the officials ultimately offered may have brought the family some relief, but it did not address the larger problem of pollution from the factory. Removing residents from particularly dangerous situations rather than improving the living conditions became a common tactic for resolving complaints, demonstrating responsiveness if not larger solutions.

In other cases, attempts to resolve pollution resulted in suggestions that changed the nature of the problem. In 1975, the temporary working group “On the Development of Environmental Protection,” argued that one way to “improve the air pollution situation and protect the population in the short term,” though it was not a permanent solution, was to build

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<sup>65</sup> DK 5/4509, “Betreff: Umweltverschmutzung,” Eingaben 1974/1975, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>66</sup> DK 5/4509, “Niederschrift über die Grundsatzausssprache beim Rat der Gemeinde Dorndorf-Steudnitz am 11.6.74 zur Klärung der Eingabe Gisela Merkel, 6904 Dorndorf, Jahnstraße 34, vom 19.4.1974 an den Staatsrat der DDR über Umweltverschmutzung,” Eingaben 1974/1975, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

taller smokestacks or chimneys.<sup>67</sup> This idea was tried out near Magdeburg, where residents had complained about smoke from newly built houses nearby in 1976. The local authorities then required the homeowners “with flat roofs to raise their chimneys by three meters.” More commonly used in industry, district officials hoped higher chimneys would ameliorate local pollution by spreading the pollution over a larger area. Unfortunately, by 1980, the chimney extension had only been put on one house and the “measure brought no noticeable improvement.”<sup>68</sup>

Over time, officials became more adversarial toward petitioners, challenging their methods and complaints. In the early 1970s, officials had not balked when individuals from a community submitted petitions collectively, yet by the 1980s, their procedure served as a reason for not passing on the petition to the appropriate ministry or for infinitely stalling its resolution. As one Stasi official pointed out when visiting the author of a petition in 1983, “a special permit is required to collect signatures for a petition,” and accordingly, his complaints would not be addressed. The MfS officer further demanded the author turn over the list with all ninety signatures.<sup>69</sup> Although, officials only noticed a slight rise in the number of petitions in the early 1980s, they believed that the scope of the pollution had expanded. Collective petitions therefore represented a public threat—instead of a private complaint—and had to be suppressed.

These concerns highlight how limited funds and structural intransigence made it more difficult for officials to alleviate the multitude of ecological disasters facing East German society. Yet as officials recognized the scale of the pollution and the insurmountable problems it

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<sup>67</sup> DK 5/4454, “Entwurf: Prognostische Grundlagen über die Entwicklung von Hauptrichtungen des Umweltschutzes,” November 1973, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>68</sup> M 1/9951, Eingaben, Umweltschutz 1976, Landeshauptarchiv Magdeburg.

<sup>69</sup> MfS/BV Bln AKG 3674, “Unrechtmäßige Unterschriftensammlung...” February 1983, Bezirksverwaltung Berlin, Auswertungs- und Kontrollgruppe, BStU.

presented, their perspective changed on what petitions could tell them. Officials transitioned to viewing petitions not as problems to solve, but as a tool for identifying potential troublemakers and systemic problems. In reading the multitude of petitions, the MfUW and the MfS, along with the Council of Ministers, realized the problems raised could be used to make the GDR and the SED look incompetent (which, ironically, would have been quite accurate). Therefore, the focus shifted to restricting access to environmental data and to hiding instead of addressing problems.

#### *Admitting Defeat? Restricting Access*

On November 16, 1982, the party-state took decisive action on the issue of environmental pollution. In a show of defensiveness, the Council of Ministers passed a resolution to restrict access to environmental data as a matter of state security. Although the MfUW estimated that the number of petitions about environmental problems had only slightly increased in recent years, the Council of Ministers had several concerns about the gathering, publication, and interpretation of the relevant data. Socialist environmentalism was supposed to further the SED's agenda and compete with green movements in the West, but instead was becoming a point of contention between the regime and the population.

Thorough policies and well-trained scientists had been meant to awe the West with progressiveness, but in reality exposed the GDR's weaknesses and glaring disparity between promise and practice. An October report leading up to the resolution cited fears that the FRG and other capitalist countries had "systematically misused [environmental] publications from the GDR for political and economic purposes" and to internationally discredit "real-existing socialism in the GDR." Although the GDR participated in numerous international environmental organizations, such as the second basket of the Helsinki Accords and the United Nations Environment Program, it felt threatened by submitting real data to them. The report's conclusion to this problem was "to only submit data from monitoring stations that were unproblematic for

the GDR.” East German scientists representing the GDR abroad, too, were sworn not to reveal damning information about pollution levels, despite accusations at international conferences about sulfur dioxide levels in the air and water quality in rivers that ran from east to west.<sup>70</sup>

Problematically, the highest level officials began to distrust the scientists they had trained in ecology, biology, water management, and other related fields. The October report stated concerns about veterinary and medical presentations at the Karl-Marx-University in Leipzig that openly discussed finding cadmium and other heavy metals in animal feed as well as human food. Most especially, one expert consulted for the report was Prof. Dr. med. habil. H.-J. Dobberkau, a member of the SED and the director the GDR’s leading center for the medical implications of environmental protection. He was concerned about the unreliability of “young scientists” who might not respect the “secrecy of environmental information.”<sup>71</sup> Not trusting the young generation, who had been trained in the programs developed since 1968, illustrated the disparity between the party’s ideals and the reality of how it ruled. Additionally, an ever more obvious generational divide posed an ever larger problem for the aging SED elite and questioned about the party’s ability to lead the GDR into the next decade.

Finally, the decision to restrict access to all environmental data stemmed from a perceived threat from within East German society. The SED believed that information about environmental conditions would lead to—and already had led to—potential unrest. Blaming the “provocateurs” like the West Berlin-based Radio in the American Sector (RIAS), the SED feared its citizens were being turned against them and a “movement” was forming against the party-

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<sup>70</sup> DK 5/1982, “Bericht über Probleme des Geheimnisschutzes beim Informationen zum Umweltschutz,” October 25, 1982, Arbeitsgruppe für Organisation und Inspektion beim Ministerrat, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.



state.<sup>72</sup> The report, though, was also self-critical part, admitting that its “class enemies were justified in their concerns about pollution, because objectively they could not be resolved...and no solution [would be] found” in the foreseeable future. The Council of Ministers’ decision to restrict access became its only viable response to these challenges. Yet the secrecy surrounding the data transformed the environment from a series of localized issues into a question of the system becoming problematic.

### **Structural Changes, International Implications**

The stalling of East German environmental policy stemmed from structural and economic challenges in the GDR as well as from a shifting international context that SED leaders found difficult to navigate. With Erich Honecker’s ascension to power in 1971 in the aftermath of Prague Spring, the SED became concerned with the material wellbeing of its citizens, and especially, with the ability to provide them with consumer goods. The switch to focusing on consumption, however, was made more difficult by the oil crises of the 1970s, when economies on both sides of the Iron Curtain stagnated. At the same time, the West, too, was undergoing a structural transformation through deindustrialization and the rise of service and high-tech industries. In this context of economic stagnation domestically and abroad, challenges to working and living conditions in neighboring Poland struck fear into the hearts of the East German leadership, limiting its potential policy approaches.

#### *Economics of the 1970s in East and West*

When Honecker took power in 1971, he directed the SED to turn its attention to consumer and quality of life concerns. Given that the Prague Spring had shown that there would be no “socialism with a human face,” the best course of action for the ruling communist parties of Eastern Europe was to placate the population with more resources devoted to consumer

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<sup>72</sup> For more on the evolution of an independent environmental movement in this period, see Chapter 3.

goods.<sup>73</sup> The SED's VIII Party Congress in June 1971 reflected this consumer-focused mentality, establishing the "unity of economic and social policy." Honecker declared that the party's primary task was to raise "the people's material and cultural standard of living on the basis of a fast developmental pace of socialist production, of higher efficiency, of scientific technological progress and the growth of productivity of labor."<sup>74</sup> Yet the GDR struggled to develop the technology it so highly touted, while simultaneously devoting more resources to much desired consumer goods and social welfare programs. Thus, Honecker opted to improve material conditions first and hoped better economic performance would follow.<sup>75</sup>

The SED was able to finance this expansion of material wealth through normalization of relations with the Federal Republic and the opportunity it presented to borrow money from the West. In the short term, the loans propped up the economy as Günter Mittag and other advisers developed a strategy to improve efficiency by expanding horizontal *and* vertical integration through *Kombinate*, which became the hallmark of the East German economy in the second half of the country's existence. The increased integration, however, did not raise productivity, and instead led to ever greater dependence on loans from the West. At the same time, the Soviet Union's own economic and political problems, especially with the cooling of international relations in the late 1970s, resulted in less support from within the Soviet sphere.<sup>76</sup> The GDR turned more and more to the West for economic bailouts while attempting to overcome domestic weaknesses through tried and true methods.

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<sup>73</sup> Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 197.

<sup>74</sup> *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des VIII. Parteitag der SED, 15. bis 19. Juni 1971*, Vol. II, Berlin (East) 1971, 296.

<sup>75</sup> André Steiner, *The Plans that Failed: An Economic History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 143.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

Along with indebtedness to the West and decreasing support from the Soviet Union, the GDR faced yet another challenge in the oil crises. Despite remaining primarily dependent on solid fuel throughout its existence, the oil crises nevertheless contributed to the SED's deepening economic woes. Initial responses from chief economic officials like Günter Mittag expressed a certain amount of *Schadenfreude* over the West's struggles to adapt and the GDR's petroleum-based products sold very well on the international market.<sup>77</sup> But, as the crisis deepened, the Soviet Union began to demand higher prices from its fellow bloc members as well as to sell more oil to the West for hard currency. In 1980, the Soviet Union cut its oil supplies to the GDR by two million tons, reducing the total amount from twenty to eighteen million. This 10 percent reduction in crude oil threw the GDR's economy into disarray, because planners had already set production targets based on higher levels. Moreover, the GDR had to use a greater percentage of its oil domestically, leaving less available to produce petroleum-based good and refined oil for the West—a crucial source of hard currency.

The combination of higher prices and lower oil supplies made it impossible for the GDR to shift away from solid fuels, such as lignite.<sup>78</sup> In fact, the Mittag authorized renewed efforts to mine lignite in the late 1970s, and this tacitly acknowledged the GDR's dependence on the low-quality coal for the foreseeable future.<sup>79</sup> In 1981, he specifically stated that the GDR must turn to brown coal to replace imports of hard coal and crude oil, emphasizing that “*this amounts to a*

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<sup>77</sup> Raymond Stokes, “East Germany and the Oil Crises of the 1970s,” in *The East German Economy, 1945-2010*, ed. Hartmut Berghoff and Uta Andrea Balbier (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 131.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-39.

<sup>79</sup> While the GDR did have four nuclear energy plants by the end of its existence, they were never the predominant energy source. Protests from the local population of the construction of a fifth one in Stendal in the 1980s reflected a general skepticism about nuclear power.

*fundamental and permanent orientation of economic strategy.*”<sup>80</sup> Accordingly, between 1980 and 1987, lignite mining increased by 20 percent with disastrous effects for the environment. Sulfur emissions rose by 30 percent other that time period, while the cost of mining crude coal rose from 7.70 Marks to 13.20 Marks between 1980 and 1988 as engineers had to access less accessible and lower quality seams.<sup>81</sup> This decision highlighted the SED’s mentality that the economy—in its existing structure—must take priority over all else.

In part because of the oil crises, the Western economies underwent a structural transformation, which changed the nature of the competition between East and West. The Federal Republic, like much of Western Europe, was deindustrializing and shifting away from the production-oriented economy, in which the East and West had competed since the late 1940s and in which the GDR was still deeply entrenched. The race to rebuild Europe, with its emphasis on heavy industry, was over, and the West began to concentrate on developing the service, science, and technology industries. Although the GDR was the most technologically advanced of the Soviet bloc countries, it trailed further and further behind strides being made in the West. Not only was this deficiency a matter of hurt pride for the GDR, it also meant that its technology-related exports were less and less desirable to the West. In 1977, the SED leadership decided to focus on microelectronics, but where the GDR had been relatively close behind the West in 1970, it now trailed too far behind to catch up and make its electronics appealing on the world market.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Stokes, “East Germany and the Oil Crises,” *The East German Economy*, emphasis in the original, DY 30/6474, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>81</sup> Steiner, *The Plan that Failed*, 173.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

With the East German economy was struggling on a number of fronts, Mittag and the SED leadership made decisions that undermined their new and highly touted environmental policies. The continuing heavy reliance on lignite along with little technological innovation both stemmed from and resulted in further structural intransigence. Technology that had been relatively modern in the 1960s was now antiquated—especially in comparison to the West—as well as falling apart from lack of proper maintenance and repairs. Naturally, this same mentality led to ignoring, and downright denying, of the extent of the pollution in the GDR.

#### *Economics and Environment in Poland*

While the situation in the GDR was challenging in the 1970s, economic and social conditions in Poland proved even less stable. Scarcity of goods and cutbacks in social welfare expenditures led to strikes and general discontent. At the same time, concern for environmental protection primarily came from a relatively small circle of experts, who were active both academically and in the Party's Nature Conservation League (LOP, *Liga Ochrony Przyrody*), rather than from a populist tradition. Despite some legislation, which paralleled developments across the Soviet bloc, Poland did not establish a comprehensive law equivalent to the Landeskultur Law until 1980. Given Poland's larger economic and structural problems, it is perhaps unsurprising that official and popular interest in environmentalism in Poland remained lower than in the GDR, and mass opposition focused instead on political rights and material standard of living.

Following the student and intelligentsia's protests in 1968, normalization in Poland provided an uneasy equilibrium. Though the unrest did not lead to attempted large-scale reforms like in Czechoslovakia, and leader of the Polish Communist Party, Władysław Gomułka,

retained power, dissatisfaction with the regime remained high.<sup>83</sup> By 1970, Polish society was in an uproar again over in austerity measures. The strikes, led by workers this time, were put down, in some cases quite brutally, but Gomułka could not survive this second series of protests, stepping down to be replaced by Edward Gierek.<sup>84</sup> With this rocky start, Gierek precariously ran Poland for the next decade, overcoming another set of major strikes and demonstrations in 1976 in response to drastic price rises of consumer goods, particularly food.<sup>85</sup> It was then that the Workers' Defense Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*, KOR), was founded. Intended as an independent self-help group, KOR provided aide to families' whose relatives were imprisoned or blacklisted for organizing and taking part in the strikes. Out of fear of similar upheavals in the GDR, East German leaders resisted any form of austerity measures like those attempted in Poland.

As in the GDR, Poland turned to the West to solve its economic woes, taking out large loans to ensure some kind of stability. Indeed, between 1971 and 1975, Gierek generated some semblance of acceptance from the Polish people by using western money to improve the general standard of living.<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately, by the early 1980s, western lenders pushed to see returns from the preceding decade's investments, and as historian Charles Maier points out, the Eastern European economies were "drawn into an inter-bloc network of commodity and capital flows."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Robert Zuzowski, *Political Dissent and Opposition in Poland: The Workers' Defense Committee "KOR"* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 38-39.

<sup>84</sup> Steiner, *The Plans that Failed*, 141.

<sup>85</sup> Zuzowski, *Political Dissent and Opposition in Poland*, 59.

<sup>86</sup> Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 33. Kubik argues for the significance of new socialist customs in Gierek's efforts to win over the population. While these measures surely played a role, I focus primarily on the importance of economic performance and standard of living in this period.

<sup>87</sup> Maier, *Dissolution*, 104.

Whether the Soviet Union liked it or not, as it was unable or unwilling to prop up the Eastern European economies. They became ever more closely tied to the West and its economic system. Despite growing economic dependence on the West, this relationship was a somewhat tense one, most notably when Poland declared it could not pay back its loans and the Eastern bloc faced what historian André Steiner has called “a de facto credit boycott.”<sup>88</sup> These constant pressing economic concerns created nearly constant sense of crisis in the Soviet Union’s least reliable bloc member.

Given the Polish government’s struggle to maintain order and a certain standard of living, it is not surprising that environmental protection received even less attention both from officials and from the population at large. Although Poland had established a series of related laws that paralleled ones written concurrently all over the Eastern bloc, it did not write a unified environmental protection law until 1980—nearly a decade after the GDR’s Landeskultur Law. Beyond the 1949 Nature Conservation Law, the regime added a Law on the Protection of the Atmosphere from Pollution in 1966, and laws on water and construction in 1974. The numerous directives and regulations were only considered “advisory,” or as in the GDR, it was fairly easy to get exemptions from legal requirements. Political scientist Barbara Hicks has noted that Poland’s environmental legislation was not any more “disjointed and *post hoc* than those of many other countries [presumably East or West] during that period.”<sup>89</sup> Still, the piecemeal legislation suggests that it was low priority for the Gierek regime.

A professor of law in Warsaw, Michał Kulesza, criticized in 1987, Polish laws lacked—and always had lacked—a comprehensive understanding of the environment as something more

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<sup>88</sup> Steiner, *The Plans that Failed*, 142.

<sup>89</sup> Barbara Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland: A Social Movement between Regime and Opposition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 56-57.

than a series of isolated regulations. Citing the 1949 Nature Conservation Law as well as other minor laws relating to water management and mining, Kulesza, argued that this approach did not properly “protect individuals from environmental dangers [pollution]” and therefore questioned “the legal system as a whole” on that basis.<sup>90</sup> The problem was not “the quantity of the environmental laws...but the quality” of them, because despite these laws, “the prognosis in terms of the practical success” remained limited.<sup>91</sup> Even after the 1980 law went into effect, he claimed that the overlapping and contradictory character of environmental law in Poland prevented them from being effective. Thus, Kulesza clearly outlined the structural problem of environmental legislation not only Poland, but also in the GDR.

Despite its many and varied political and social problems, the Communist Party continued to expand the LOP as its official environmental organization, reflecting the Soviet-style structure imposed across the Eastern bloc. Starting in 1975, the LOP became active in the conservation magazine *Przyroda Polska*, or *Polish Nature*, which highlighted many similar activities to those in the East German Cultural League.<sup>92</sup> As would be the case for the GNU in the 1980s, the LOP stated its goal in 1976 to establish regional branches in all forty-nine voivodeships in the country, including in urban and rural communities, schools, universities and institutions. Whereas the Cultural League in the GDR took ten years to create a new mass social organization that focused on environmental issues, Poland simply redefined the already existing organization. Similar to the Cultural League, though, it reported the decisions of the mass social

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<sup>90</sup> Michał Kulesza, “Efektywność prawa i administracji w zakresie ochrony przyrody i środowiska, Fragment Raportu KOP PAN na III Kongres Nauki Polskiej,” in *Problemy Ochrony Polskiej Przyrody*, eds Romuald Olaczek and Kazimierz Zarzycki (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1988), 23.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>92</sup> For various reasons, the GNU did not have an equivalently comprehensive and popular periodical as *Polish Nature*.



organizations relating to the environment, and even used the same language to describe the “development” or “shaping” of nature and its importance to the “country’s socio-economic progress.”<sup>93</sup> While the Soviet system insisted on the existence of environmental policies and organizations, the implementation was left to the countries, resulting in a diversity of impulses and practices.

Participation in official conservation in both countries attempted to rely heavily on experts who were trained by the state and presumably more loyal to their respective parties. Scientists from the National Academy of Sciences were charged with writing articles in official periodicals, such as *Polish Nature*, and to give addresses at major functions. Scientists were also supposed to represent “socialist environmentalism” abroad. These efforts could be seen in the previously mentioned Baltic Sea Week, which the two countries began together in 1971. The GDR’s MfS, however, was deeply suspicious of these scientists even in the early 1970s, worrying about their “extensive contacts to relatives and individuals they had met within the context of international conferences in the [capitalist West].”<sup>94</sup> In Poland, contact with the West was perhaps less feared, but focused perhaps even more heavily on an expert and non-populist approach to environmentalism, not unlike historian Douglas Weiner’s description of nature conservation in the Soviet and Russian context.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Marian Gawroński, “Nowa organizacja Ligi Ochrony Przyrody,” *Przyroda Polska*, Nr 1 (1), April 1976. The word “*Gestaltung*” in German is very closely related both in meaning and phonetically to the Polish word “*Kształtowanie*.”

<sup>94</sup> MfS JHS MF VVS 681/76, “Die politisch-operative Aufgabenstellung bei der vorbeugenden Absicherung der zentralen staatlichen Leitung des Umweltschutzes unter besondere Berücksichtigung seiner zunehmenden Bedeutung in den internationalen Beziehungen,” 1977, Juristische Hochschule Potsdam, BStU.

<sup>95</sup> Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland*, 173. Douglas Weiner, *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

Polish and East German official environmentalism—both legal and associational—highlight the structure of the Soviet system while also illuminating the space for difference within it. Whether collaborating over the “Baltic Sea Week” in 1971 or laws and social organizations premised on similar conceptions of environmentalism, the technocratic and transferable nature of the system comes to light. Nevertheless, the East German emphasis on a populist approach to nature as well as its self-imposed pressure to compete with the Federal Republic demonstrates a level of variability, too. The greatest difference was not in the official conception of environmentalism, but rather the social and economic situations onto which it was mapped. The lower standard of living and underperformance of the economy in Poland resulted in mass social unrest revolving around the material promises of socialism, and particularly normalization. These issues produced anxiety for the East German leadership, but did not come to fruition until the very end, which led to environmentalism playing a less important role. Official environmentalism succeeded in having a broader impact on society in the GDR than in Poland.

### **Conclusion**

The 1970s began as a decade of promise for environmentalism in the GDR through the expansion of legal and mass social policies. Justified by such great writers as Friedrich Engels, the Cultural League developed numerous projects, and eventually the GNU, to generate mass interest in a “socialist environmentalism.” The SED and its Cultural League did so by drawing older traditions of nature and Heimat, as well as the need to manage natural resources efficiently and on broader conceptions of the “environment.” An often-touted faith in progress and scientific innovation to create a better future played a role in the Cultural League’s call to environmental action, even if in practice, organizations such as the Friends of Nature and the Heimat and later the GNU recycled older activities. These measures, such as lauding the local landscape, cleaning

up parks and planting trees, while beacons for change in the early 1970s, became worn by the early 1980s.

Ironically, just as the SED expanded its environmental activities at the associational level, it began to recognize the challenges of implementing it. Economically, introducing new regulations would be expensive and time consuming, which planners and SED leadership sought to avoid at all costs. Instead of investing in long-term solutions for improving environmental conditions, industries applied for exemptions from regulations on the grounds that any reduction in production or profits would hurt the national economy. As a scientist in the Potsdam district matter-of-factly reported, despite critical evaluations, key industries, such as agriculture, “functioned under exemptions.”<sup>96</sup> Where industries that sought to cooperate with them, often applied haphazard measures with little real effect, such as only installing filters in some smokestacks of a factory, but not all, or not replacing them when they broke. Factories also dumped poisonous waste products without permits or following regulations.<sup>97</sup> In this context, the GDR faced a changing world economy, a shift from heavy to the high-tech industry, less support from the Soviet Union, and increasing indebtedness to the West.

The SED’s self-created paradox of strict environmental regulation and reliance on dirty industries created a legitimacy gap. Although environmental protection was intended to serve the workers, and therefore the state, it instead became a liability. SED and Cultural League officials became ever more concerned that “environmental pessimists, enemies of technology and nihilistic opinions about the future” threatened the well-being of socialist environmentalism, and

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<sup>96</sup> MfS/BV Pdm Abt. XVIII 1324, “Informationsvorlage Umweltschutz im Bezirk Potsdam,” undated, Bezirksverwaltung Potsdam, Absicherung der Volkswirtschaft, BStU.

<sup>97</sup> MfS/HA XX 13945, “Einige Probleme bei der Einleitung des Natur- und Umweltschutzes durch die Landwirtschaft im Bezirk Rostock,” July 30, 1987, Hauptabteilung XX Staatsapparat, Blockparteien, Kirchen, Kultur, politischer Untergrund, BStU.

finally the GDR as a whole.<sup>98</sup> Rather than invest heavily in environmental improvements, however, Honecker, Mittag and the rest of the leadership chose to deny the problem. On November 16, 1982, the Council of Ministers, in cooperation with the MfUW classified all environmental data as a matter of state security in order to defend the GDR against the West. The restriction of the data was a tacit admission that the SED could not or would not solve the GDR's pollution problems, and would instead take the less expensive tack of denial. It was a defeat for the ideal of a socialist environmentalism.

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<sup>98</sup> DY 27/6112, "Stenografisches Protokoll: Gründungsversammlung der Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt," March 28, 1980, Kulturbund der DDR, BArch-SAPMO.

### CHAPTER 3

#### Planting the Seeds: The Origins of Independent Environmentalism, 1972-1983

In 1975, Hans-Peter Gensichen, a young minister from Pritzwalk, Brandenburg, began his new position as the director of the Ecclesiastical Research Center in Wittenberg (*Kirchliches Forschungsheim*, KFH).<sup>1</sup> Having completed seminary, Gensichen wrote his dissertation at the Humboldt University on the founder of the KFH, Otto Kleinschmidt. Already residing in Wittenberg, he became the KFH's director. Since its establishment in 1927, the Center had explored the relationship between science and religion, but under Gensichen's leadership, it began explicitly to address connections between theology and the environment. This institutional support for environmental concerns outside of party-state structures opened a new series of questions about their place in the Protestant Church and East German society as a whole. Yet, the question remains: why did the Protestant Church, in the KFH and other venues, adopt environmental concerns at all?

On one level, church involvement in the environment seems surprising. The relationship between Christianity and nature has long been an uneasy one. Depending on the translation, the Bible commands man to “have dominion,” “rule,” or “reign” over the earth, later charging Adam and Eve to till the soil in Eden.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that Christianity

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<sup>1</sup> DO 4/800, Hans-Peter Gensichen, “Eine neue Phase des Umweltengagements in den Kirchen,” *Die Zeichen der Zeit* 7/88, Heinz Blauer, ed, Berlin (Ost), Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>2</sup> DO 4/800, *Briefe zur Orientierung im Konflikt Mensch—Natur*, 8. Brief, November 1983, Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.

provided the basis for modern, exploitative relationships between humans and nature.<sup>3</sup> Other theologians and scholars have in turn viewed the exact same passages as calls to defend and protect God's creation from exploitation and destruction. Given these longstanding and contradictory claims, it seems somewhat surprising that the Protestant Church in the GDR ultimately embrace environmentalism as its own. An ancillary question then, is to what degree did the Church actually commit itself to environmental activism and what forms did it take?

The relationship between Church and the environment in the GDR had multiple impulses, not all of which were neatly defined. From a top-down perspective, Church leaders adopted environmentalism on a theological and intellectual basis. These concerns often dovetailed with anxiety over increasing consumption and materialism. Since the late 1960s, summits of Church leaders from all over the world (East and West) had begun to engage with questions of economic growth and consumption. In a system like the GDR, which based its legitimacy on industrial output, taking an interest was a logical decision and an easy way to critique the communist party-state which had systematically repressed the Church for the previous two decades. When Gensichen took up the call to investigate the relationship between nature and theology, the assignment was not entirely unexpected.

Yet environmental concerns in the Church also developed outside this sphere of rigorous theological debate in response to location-specific environmental problems and numerous groups based in diffuse parishes. These groups were able to form within the Church as its relationship to the party-state normalized in the 1970s, rejuvenating interest in the Church and raising attendance. Using the structures of the Church, these groups focused on environmental problems specific to their regions and industries with the intention of raising awareness and improving

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<sup>3</sup> See Lynn T. White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" in *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, 3rd edition, ed. Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004).

local conditions. Like the *Eingaben*, small-scale efforts attracted little attention from the party-state apparatus, and slipped under the radar of the MfS for longer than other independent movements in the GDR. The focus, though, on the local and on experience over expert knowledge led to tensions within the Church-related environmental movement. With different goals and motivations, the KFH and the “groups” occasionally struggled to find common ground.

Environmental groups developed in the context of an interconnected set of movements, such as peace, women’s, gay, and human rights, in the Church. In fact, environmental groups gained momentum just as the independent peace movement experienced a major setback in 1982-1983 with the stationing of Pershing missiles in West Germany. These overlapping groups, each with their own emphases, helped to establish a critical mass of individuals hoping to create a more diverse society in the GDR, if not widespread change. Yet the ad hoc nature of these groups also generated distrust and fractures, limiting the influence and scope of the movement. The Church’s interest in the environment came from two different types of actors: Christians and theologians, often of a younger generation, and people looking for a space to express concern about local pollution. Despite some differences in outlook and intent, these two impulses converged in the 1980s, establishing concern among the population and protest against environmental degradation.

The interest in the environment, however, was not strictly delineated between concerned individuals in the party-state apparatus and in the Church. Thanks to improving relations between the Church and the party-state in the 1970s and 1980s, environmental enthusiasts could participate in both official and Church organizations. These “double participants” suggest more continuity and layers of discussion between official and Church environmentalism than has been

previously acknowledged in academic scholarship.<sup>4</sup> The more important question is how they interacted with one another, and what the limits and spaces for each were. In this context, why the Christian environmental movement began to resonate with people on different levels and from different backgrounds deserves attention. This variety, although often disjointed, also provided the groundwork developing a Christian environmental critique of the East German environmental policies that were so clearly ineffective by the early 1980s.

While the independent environmental movement was firmly grounded in GDR-specific problems and debates, activists were all also quite aware of changes in the world around them. The founding and electoral success of a green party in West Germany offered new hope from ecological changes while Solidarność in Poland provided models of behavior that thoroughly intimidated the SED. In this context of challenges to Soviet hegemony in the communist bloc, the SED became more suspicious of Church environmental activity. Eventually, this distrust led to intensive Stasi surveillance and cooptation of some Church leaders, who themselves were uncertain of the environment's place in the Church.

Ultimately, East Germans involved in the Protestant Church found the grounds to critique their party-state in the environment. Initially, this critique was based on scripture and limited to the effects of the political-economic system on nature as well as East Germans' lived reality. The church-based approach eventually defined itself in opposition to the SED's socialist environmentalism, rejecting the goal of efficiency and improved quality of life through technology and material gains. Instead it focused on reducing waste and limiting consumption.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example works by former activists, who downplay the role "double participations, see for example Carlo Jordan, *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR, Das Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche,*" 1988-90 (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1995). Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, *Störenfried:DDR-Opposition, mit Texten aus den ,Umweltblättern'* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1992). Micheal Beleites, *Untergrund: Ein Konflikt mit der Stasi in der Uranprovinz* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1991).



This alternative Christian narrative encouraged Christians and engaged East Germans to take independent action beyond the influence of the party-state. In this way, activists began to critique the SED's handling of the environmental question.

### **The Protestant Church and the SED State**

The unique position of the Protestant Church in the GDR provided a space for environmental concerns to develop outside of the official public sphere.<sup>5</sup> As the only quasi-autonomous institutions in the GDR, the churches became a refuge for those who did not fit into the mainstream, or those who opted out. Because the vast majority of East Germans were Protestant rather than Catholic, the Protestant Church took in those on the margins of society.<sup>6</sup> Yet this relatively welcoming space for environmental and other "groups" was not a given. Institutionally, the Church and the state had been at loggerheads for decades, only resolving their differences to a degree in the 1970s. Moreover, nascent activity in the churches aroused the SED's concern, ramping up the MfS's influence in the Church. Finally, the theological foundations of environmentalism were not inherently obvious. Thus, the Protestant Church's involvement in the development of an environmental movement was not inevitable, but rather, it grew out of a specific constellation of sociopolitical circumstances in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the GDR's first decades, the SED and the churches (both Protestant and Catholic) unsurprisingly had been at sixes and sevens. As the SED consolidated power in the early 1950s, the churches proved difficult to coopt. Given their long history and established organizational

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<sup>5</sup> For more on debates surrounding the public sphere under communism, or dictatorship more generally, see David Bathrick's *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) and Jürgen Kocka's *Civil Society and Dictatorship in Modern Germany* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Though there were some Catholic pockets, such as around Eichsfeld in what is now Thuringia, the Catholic Church was quite small in the GDR. It was also more internally oriented and less politically involved. The Catholic population of East Germany was only about 13% (as opposed to roughly 85% who were Protestant) and relatively less active than the Protestant Church on social or environmental issues.

structure, churches were not easily brought under political or social control, like political parties and associational life. In the confusion of the immediate postwar years, the Protestant Church saw attendance rise in response to the suffering and uncertainty at defeat. It offered what one scholar has called a moral center as well as a familiar institutional setting.<sup>7</sup> Initially, the Soviet occupiers—then East German leaders—attempted a pragmatic partnership with the Church, exempting it from various taxes and nationalization projects, but these efforts quickly broke down. The worldviews of Christianity and atheist Marxism-Leninism offered opposing and all-encompassing interpretations, which could not be reconciled.

Over the next two decades, the relationship between the two worsened, forcing East Germans to choose between the prevailing sociopolitical system and participation in the Church. The SED with its consolidation of power and social organization cracked down on the churches and systematically discriminated against practicing Christians, making it more difficult for them to get into university or access desirable jobs.<sup>8</sup> One serious point of contention in the 1950s was the introduction of *Jugendweihe*, a secular ceremony meant to induct teenagers into communism and to replace Christian confirmation in the Church. The Church expressed serious opposition to inducting youth into a worldview that aimed to end Christianity and then denied them confirmation if they also went through *Jugendweihe*.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, the Churches backed down on their stance on confirmation, because their numbers continued to decrease as East Germans opted for *Jugendweihe* over confirmation. Confirmation, though not the sole conflict between Church and State, exemplified the struggle for dominance—or at least relevance—in the GDR.

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 91-92.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>9</sup> RHG/RG/MV 01, “40 Jahre Kirche in der DDR—Konfrontation oder Kooperation,” 3-4, Gruppe ‘Gewaltfrei Leben,’ Region Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

Over the course of two decades and the corresponding normalization of the regime, many East Germans began to choose the system over the Church. Church attendance dropped and society became more secular, leaving it with less and less leverage. Most apparent was the generational divide. Younger East Germans, especially those born after the war, felt less tied to the Church and questioned its previous connections to nationalistic movements in German history. Between 1950 and 1964, those described themselves as Protestant dropped from 80.5 percent of the population to just 59.3 percent, while those who described themselves as unaffiliated increased from 7.6 percent to nearly one third.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, in 1960, Ulbricht halted official opposition to the Church and instead proclaimed that “Christianity and the humanistic goals of socialism are not opposed to each other.”<sup>11</sup> This accommodation, in turn, took away from the Church’s previous “either or” position, which further eroded its standing.

The Church faced internal divisions, too, especially a generational one about the role of the Church. The Protestant Church’s nationalist tendencies reaching back to the nineteenth century hindered its claims to moral authority.<sup>12</sup> Older Church leaders, in particular, had had questionable associations during the Third Reich. Some wished to retreat from the political realm entirely and to only engage with the spiritual.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, a younger generation—one removed from complicity during the Nazi period—strove to become more politicized again. Younger leadership, such as Gottfried Forck who later became a bishop and Provost Heino

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<sup>10</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 103.

<sup>11</sup> BP, O-4, Information No. 2/68, “Analyse der Vorbereitung und Durchführung des 450. Jahrestages der Reformation 1967,” cited in Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 104.

<sup>12</sup> Claudia Lepp, *Tabu der Einheit? Die Ost-West-Geemeinschaft der evangelischen Christen und die deutsche Teilung (1945-1969)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 25-35.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Pearson, “Faith and Democracy: Political Transformations at the German Protestant *Kirchentag*, 1949-1969” (PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007), 40.

Falcke, believed the Church had a responsibility to engage with the party-state and with political questions. The efforts of this younger generation, many of whose members had been denied access to desirable jobs or university training, pushed for engagement in a form that the older generation had resigned from.

Even as the Church became less threatening to the GDR's existence, the SED continued to monitor and limit its influence. In the 1950s, a State Secretary for Church Questions had been established with the goal of coordinating relations between state and Church leaders. On the one hand, it served as a means for the Church to express its concerns to officials; on the other hand, it kept the state informed on what the mood in the churches was. Additionally, the state used the MfS to plant informants and unofficial collaborators in the churches to supplement its knowledge of Christians' activities and present appeal. Although the level of scrutiny varied over the course of the GDR's existence, depending on the political climate, the Church's collaboration with the party-state and even the Stasi infiltration were well-known facts of life and tolerated by those in the Church.

Another motivation for keeping an eye on the churches was their institutional relationship to their counterparts in the West.<sup>14</sup> Politically speaking, these connections to the capitalist West undermined the SED's project and potentially poisoned East Germans' opinion of their party-state. In practical terms, contacts to the West provided information and goods that were more difficult to attain in the East. The SED's attempts to limit Church contact to the West fit into the larger East German narrative of being unable to compete with the West and cutting itself off. Most obvious in the gradual closing of the German-German border, and eventually construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the SED chose to withdraw rather than compete. The SED actively

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed account of the relationship between the Protestant Churches in East and West Germany, see Lepp, *Tabu der Einheit?*

sought to divide the churches in the GDR from the West, eventually succeeding in 1969 with official separation between the two and the creation of the *Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR* (League of Protestant Churches in the GDR, BEK).<sup>15</sup> Despite the split, western churches continued to materially support their East German counterparts.

By 1970, the GDR's existence was fairly well accepted on both sides of the border and the Church turned its focus to finding a place in East German society. How closely the Church and party-state would collaborate remained debatable, but with the 1969 break from the western Churches, some level of cooperation was the only remaining option. Over the subsequent decade, the BEK and the party-state held a series of meetings, coming to an important understanding in 1978. On March 6, 1978, the Church declared itself to be "the Church in Socialism," citing common, humanistic goals with the state.<sup>16</sup> Although technically independent of the party-state—the only institution in the GDR to have that status—the Church had also admitted defeat. Hopes of fighting back communism and reuniting with the western Churches in an all-German union again were abandoned. As Bishop Werner Krusche stated, "the Church is trying to walk the narrow line between opposition and opportunism, the path of critical solidarity with shared responsibility."<sup>17</sup> The way forward, so it seemed, was one of cooperation, or at least uneasy tolerance.

Ironically, by relinquishing its openly oppositional stance, the Church found a new measure of freedom in the SED system. Because it had, on some level, accepted SED's authority, it could now critique from within the system without posing a fundamental threat to it.

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<sup>15</sup> From this point on, when referring to the "Church," I will be referring to the BEK, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>16</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 109.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1997), 249.

As party-state leaders let go of some of their inherent distrust of the Church, it became less of a target to repression and it developed into a space where Christians and interested individuals could take on new interests. The Church had long been involved in various social charity and outreach projects, but now the Church's horizon broadened, in some cases inspired by events on the other side of the Iron Curtain. After 1978, especially, and with the beginning of the so-called Second Cold War in 1979, the Church became involved in new causes, such as the peace movement and the questioning of military service.<sup>18</sup>

After the relative diplomatic calm of the 1970s, the breakdown of relations between East and West in the late 1970s generated new fears for East Germans. The détente of the early 1970s, led by West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, had eased tensions and even resulted in the signing of the Helsinki Declaration in 1975, the upshot of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. In it, the participants, including East and West Germany, agreed on issues relating to European security, economic and scientific cooperation, and even human rights.<sup>19</sup> Diplomatic relations became strained again at the end of the decade when the party introduced new military service requirements, military education in schools, and clamped down on protest by such as the famous singer and songwriter Wolf Biermann.<sup>20</sup> The Church, with its new relative freedom, gave voice to concerns stemming from the changing political and military situation—and used the Helsinki Accords as the justification for that critique. The Church became a space in which peace, human rights, and later environmental groups could flourish.

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<sup>18</sup> Unlike the environmental groups, the Stasi immediately understood the peace movement to be a threat to state security. Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 207-209.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1993), 39, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 209.

The Church's newfound interest in contemporary issues appealed to a broader cross-section of East German society, and most importantly, to a younger generation, renewing interest in the Church. Church leaders remained divided on many of the new issues that resonated with its newest members, with many who had experienced the repression of the 1950s and 1960s hesitant to disturb the peace. But even as high level officials remained divided—and to a varying degree cooperated with the party-state, the grassroots interest in peace and human rights could not be denied. Some East Germans were coming back to the Church, participating in parish-level groups and services on a level that had not been paralleled since the 1950s.<sup>21</sup> Some have argued that the Church became a “safety valve” for East German society, offering a space to vent frustrations and discontent in a controlled environment.<sup>22</sup> While this assessment has merit, these movements in the Church were not just a way to blow off steam, but became the nexus of an opposition that arose in the 1980s, with contacts to the West.

The Church's position as a host for peace and human rights groups meant renewed interest in religion, despite ambivalence from some of the Church leadership thanks to their controversial nature. Peace and human rights groups, along with like-minded clergy such as Bishop Gottfried Forck, criticized the party-state, not by challenging its right to exist, but its failure to follow through on its promise for peace and human rights. Additionally, they used Christian ethical language to make their point. More radical church leaders contended in 1978, “In our time, human rights have become important. We must deeply lament that human worth and rights have become such a point of contention between East and West.” They further argued

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<sup>21</sup> RGH/RG/B 19, “Gruppen in der Kirche—Orientierung für Konfliktfelder,” undated, Region Berlin, Archiv der Opposition, Berlin.

<sup>22</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

that because “God created man ... man’s freedom can only be achieved through accepting the Creator, to whom this power belongs.” While acknowledging the political reality of a divided Germany, they argued, “We live in a state that does not believe this. That is why we have trouble with it.”<sup>23</sup> In the years after the Helsinki Declaration, with its commitment to human rights, these accusations were more difficult for the SED to ignore.

The peace movement, in part a reaction to the “second Cold War,” led activists to question military service, the militarization of society in general, and the placement of nuclear missiles in West Germany. Contending that “peace can only be maintained, agreed upon, and strengthened when people continually talk with one another anew,” East and West Germans reached out to one another outside of official channels.<sup>24</sup> Though not a unified oppositional movement, numerous independent and loosely connected initiatives arose. Among them were the so-called “Peace Seminars,” which began in 1972, and the group “Swords to Plowshares,” and innumerable peace circles tied to individual parishes. These groups challenged the Soviet narrative about being the “Camp of Peace” as it pursued increasingly militaristic policies, such as required 18-month military service for young men and introducing military education into schools.<sup>25</sup>

The party-state distrusted these trends and kept close track of them through meetings between Church leaders and bureaucrats at the State Secretary for Church Questions, and

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<sup>23</sup> RHG/Ki 05, “Information des Evangelischen Konsistoriums Görlitz an die Gemeindekirchenräte und kirchlichen Werke der Görlitzer Kirchen zur Verhaftung und Verurteilung von Uwe Reimann (telef. Mitschnitt) vom 19.12.1978,” Evangelische Kirche des Görlitzer Kirchengebietes, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> RHG/Ki 21/01, “Ökumenische Versammlung: Informationsdienst, März 1988,” Ökumenische Versammlung für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und die Bewahrung der Schöpfung, Ökumenische Vollversammlung, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.



increasingly the Stasi. Because the independent initiatives challenged the official narrative, the Church leaders like Manfred Stolpe were required meet regularly with state officials and to report what they knew. Church leaders were also guided to keep things calm within the Church and to keep tight reigns on the groups' activities. When these tactics did not provide enough information, however, the Stasi co-opted members of the groups, paying them for information, and even planting agents in the groups. The work of these unofficial informants and agents successfully kept the groups divided, sowing distrust and hindering their ability to expand or to have an influence on the wider society. The peace groups' momentum declined even further in 1983 when they lost the battle to stop NATO from stationing mid-range nuclear missiles in West Germany. Though the peace movement continued throughout the 1980s, often tying into environmental issues, it lacked concrete direction after 1983.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1970s, then, the role of the churches, and especially the Protestant Church, changed in the GDR. The Church acknowledged the permanence of the East German state and sought to work within it, instead of being openly oppositional. This transformation was most clearly signaled by the concept of the "Church in Socialism," as expressed in 1978. Yet by conceding this point, the Church was able to take on new concerns, such as peace and human rights after the signing of the Helsinki Declaration and in the face of cooling diplomatic relations between East and West. The leaders of the Church were divided amongst themselves on how welcoming they should be of these new groups—with some embracing them wholeheartedly and others remaining highly suspicious—but they did not shut them down. The party-state disliked these trends and kept them under constant surveillance.

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<sup>26</sup> Detlef Pollack, *Politischer Protest: Politisch alternative Gruppen in der DDR* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2000), 77-96.

### **Taking Root: Environmentalism and the Church**

Independent environmental impulses in the GDR came out of two different strands. The first was a top-down, intellectual approach to environmentalism, with heavy emphasis on theology, while the second was a bottom-up or grassroots response to local pollution. The top-down approach originated from concerns over consumption and materialism, since religious morality tales dovetailed with environmental concerns about economic growth at any cost. Those high up in the Church structurally and theologically supported environmentalism and gave it a space in which to germinate. This top-down impulse has often been overlooked in the literature, which has primarily focused on the oppositional “groups,” and treated the Church’s commitment to environmentalism as ambivalent at best. It is true that the Church was split on how to deal with the groups; however, it did provide institutional support for them. These two strands of independent environmentalism informed and reinforced one another, which in turn, created a more varied and diverse approach to the environment than has been previously acknowledged.

#### *The Church and the Ecclesiastical Research Center Wittenberg (KFH)*

Concerned Church leaders, such as Dr. Heino Falcke, provided the environmental movement with legitimacy and structural support as early as the mid-1970s. The topic was raised, albeit not systematically, at Church Congresses, and leadership in Magdeburg even gave directives for the KFH to begin studying environmental questions. Accordingly, in 1975, the KFH’s new director, Hans-Peter Gensichen, shifted the center’s focus from debates about genetics to ecology. In part, his and other Church leaders’ engagement with the environment drew on rising international concerns about consumption and growth. Additionally, the environmental movement in the Church developed as a direct response to worsening local conditions. Though Church leaders were by no means all invested in environmental concerns, these impulses created a relatively welcoming atmosphere for the fledgling movement.

One of the environment's most outspoken advocates was Thuringia's provost Dr. Heino Falcke. Having studied in Göttingen and Basel in the late 1940s, Falcke had many contacts in the West before voluntarily moving to the GDR in 1952. Later, after he had a doctorate in theology at the University of Rostock and served as a parish priest, Falcke took on the position of provost in 1973, moving up in the Church hierarchy.<sup>27</sup> Once there he used his influence to raise ecological questions, organizing a number of consultations influenced by peace and environmental issues addressed at the World Council of Church's plenary meetings in Bucharest in 1974 and Nairobi in 1975.<sup>28</sup> By 1978, Falcke was supporting the discussion of environmental problems at the Church Congress in Erfurt and the Conference of Church Leadership (*Konferenz der Kirchenleitung*, KKL), exploring the political implications of environmental engagement in real-existing socialism.<sup>29</sup>

Although Falcke was perhaps the most vocal supporter of environmental issues in the Church's leadership, other dioceses and Church structures also took up the call during the 1970s. The Church's standing committee on "Church and Society" began to delve into these problems by 1975 and would later sponsor numerous reports on major environmental questions in the GDR. Theological and student organizations began to look into "creative forms of cooperation" with nature, and in Saxony, Church leaders formed a working group on "Environment and Church." The impulse for this shift overwhelmingly came from younger clergy and interested individuals, such as those studying theology in the BEK's institutions [*Theologische Studentenabteilung beim BEK*]. Specifically, men banned from studying at university for

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<sup>27</sup> Pfarrer Ricklef Münnich, "Dr. Dr. H.c. Heino Falcke zum 85. Geburtstag am 12. Mai 2014," May 12, 2014, accessed, November 7, 2014, <http://www.gesellschaft-zeitgeschichte.de/geschichte/personen/heino-falcke/>. Falcke was born in West Prussia in 1929.

<sup>28</sup> For more on Western influences on Church's stance on environmentalism, see Section 4.

<sup>29</sup> Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR*, 273-274.

political reasons turned to the Church to pursue an education.<sup>30</sup> These scattered initiatives did not necessarily reflect wide-ranging interest in environmental issues, but implied that both local concern and international concern made inroads into the BEK's structure.

The most systematic institutional support for the environment came from the KFH, in the centrally-located town of Wittenberg, and had a long history of tackling questions of theology and science.<sup>31</sup> Since 1971, the institute's focus shifted increasingly from ideological to ethical questions, such as the place of modern genetics in science, and the groundwork already laid for exploring ethical questions in modern society. In 1973, Church leaders in Magdeburg asked the theologian and scientist on staff, Hans Kleinschmidt and Charlotte Boost, respectively, to take on environmental questions. This shift became more pronounced after 1975 with Hans-Peter Gensichen's installation as director of the KFH. In the late 1970s, he and Boost formed a number of working groups to explain questions of environment and religion, such as "Earth" in 1977 and "Agriculture and Environment" in 1980. That same year 1980, Boost retired and was replaced by Gerd Pfeiffer, a young biologist and ecologist. The choice of an ecologist reflected the KFH's new and deepening commitment to the environment.<sup>32</sup>

From its inception 1977, the working group Earth was active in its correspondence and engagement with environmental and religious thought, yet its influence on the wider society was limited. Gensichen and Boost targeted a select group of individuals trained as "scientists,

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 268, 273.

<sup>31</sup> The KFH dates back to 1927 when it was established to explore the relationship between religion and the natural sciences. Its first director, Otto Kleinschmidt's focus was on the theory of evolution and zoological biology. In the 1960s and 1970s, the center also began to consider the ethics of genetics. Given its focus, the KFH generally had one scientist (usually a biologist) and one theologian on staff.

<sup>32</sup> Hans-Peter Gensichen, "Die Beiträge des Wittenberger Forschungsheimes für die kritische Umweltbewegung in der DDR," in *Umweltschutz in der DDR: Analysen und Zeitzeugenberichte, Band 3: Beruflicher, ehrenamtlicher und freiwilliger Umweltschutz* (Munich: Oekom, 2007), 151-152.

engineers, and theologians,” with a special focus on young professionals. Participation in Earth or Agriculture was a matter of both background and connections within Church circles, drawing on participants from across the GDR. As one of the initial invitations stated in 1977,

In our preparations [for convening], your name became known to us and you are therefore very welcome to join us. If you or your acquaintances (university graduates your age or younger; the working group should be open to various denominations and ideological backgrounds) preregister by the end of May, we will inform you of specifics about our next undertaking in September.<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, despite the groups’ exclusive nature, the biannual retreats were often family friendly with child care and activities.<sup>34</sup> With this sort of mentality, any of the early members, such as Jürgen Morgenstern, remained active in the group for many years. Although Earth was a largely insular circle, which did not seek input from the outside and did not intend to have great influence on the broader society, it signaled institutional interest in taking on environmental issues.

In the fall of 1977, Earth’s first weekend retreat of roughly twenty-five participants divided itself into four discussion groups based on topics relating to consciousness, technology, and quality of life. From slightly different angles, they debated how to address the structural and environmental problems caused by industrialization and modern life. As one discussion group argued,

When people today talk about a ‘Man versus Environment Problem,’ there is an underlying suggestion that it is an ephemeral and contained crisis. As long as man has existed, he has found himself in a particular relationship to his lived environment, to

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<sup>33</sup> RHG/KFH 01, Form Letter, April 1977, Arbeitskreis “Erde,” Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>34</sup> Occasionally, too, the tension between work and socializing at these retreats led to a certain level of chastisement about focus and staying on topic in the follow-up reports. In the GDR, where people were encouraged to have children at a young age, providing child care was essential to garnering participation in weekend long events. For more on reproduction policies in the GDR, see Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), especially Chapter 4, “Restoring Fertility: Reproduction under the Wings of the Mother State.”

nature. Along with that he almost, even if unconsciously reflected, recognizes the vital relationship between God's creatures. So he increasingly conceives of his direct mission to make nature useful. Though starting with a natural state, he sets out to alter and cultivate it. That this cultivation can reach a one-sided intensity that leads to overexploitation shows how bald, how ravaged the erstwhile fruitful bond of life to nature dependence and reliance always exists, comprehensible and visibly daily.<sup>35</sup>

The discussion paper further explicated how industrialization had removed people from having a direct relationship with nature, which had resulted in a loss of respect for it, and fit into a long tradition of Protestant "life reform" movements in German history.

The discussion group's solution to this exploitative relationship with nature was to return to faith and to reject the society that created it, which in their case, was communism. The members argued that "missing harmony and alienation were the price of civilization and economic progress, because man had not only forgotten the hidden wisdom of the great religions, but actually repudiated them." For them, religion was the antidote to the environmental destruction that communism caused. Connecting it to the waste that this system created, they contended that "There are still people who do not want to be captured by a strictly material reality."<sup>36</sup> Thus, they argued for the connection between nature and religion in a way that criticized the SED's worldview as well as offering a different model for understanding how the world should function. Although well aware of criticisms about the relationship between Christianity and environmental degradation, such as those put forward by historian Lynn T. White, the working group Earth offered a Christian answer to the environmental problems facing East Germany.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> RHG/KFH 01, Diskussionspapier aus Arbeitsgruppe 2, Wittenberg, October 21-23, 1977, Arbeitskreis "Erde," Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, numerous scholars developed various critiques of the relationship between Christianity and nature. One of the most famous formulations of this critique came from well-known medieval historian, Lynn T. White, who argued that Christianity was to blame for the ecological crisis of the twentieth century. In his 1967

Despite its generally technical nature, Earth's 1980 project "The Earth is to be saved" became immensely popular within Church environmental circles. Intentionally ambiguous, in the introduction, Gensichen stated that the title could be understood as a moral imperative and that the earth was still able to be saved.<sup>38</sup> This eighty page booklet was often cited, and even reprinted, over the course of the next decade, cementing the relationship between religion and environment as a critique of environmental conditions. Though lamenting how uncomprehensive it was, the authors decided to only focus on

The Club of Rome report, Marxism-Leninism's attitude toward environmental problems, the theory that science is fundamentally destructive, the technical possibilities for environmental protection, the ecologicalization of production, and opportunities for cooperation with the Cultural League's GNU—things which can be only very briefly addressed in the following work.

Having stated their interests—which came from their biannual retreats—the authors explained their conceptualization of the environment and religion question: "A Christian view of environmental problems is never without hope – and will not simply remain a 'view,' but will become an act of change."<sup>39</sup> Good Christians should focus more on "linking spiritual and cultural activities, social engagement and an attitude of solidarity" to improve living conditions for all.<sup>40</sup> This alternative form of communitarianism marked a separation of Christian thinking from party-state's fundamentally materialist self-conception.

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work, *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, argued that Europeans had a particular and exploitative relationship with nature that was in part defined by their interpretation of Christianity.

<sup>38</sup> Hans-Peter Gensichen, "Einleitung" in "Die Erde ist zu retten," Arbeitskreis "Erde," (Wittenberg: Kirchliches Forschungsheim, 1980), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 27.

“The Earth is to be saved” targeted and accordingly resonated with the burgeoning number of “small groups and individual Christians” interested in the topic beyond the KFH.<sup>41</sup> Earth’s members shared their expertise with other groups, providing large- and small-scale suggestions for improving environmental conditions. These tips ranged from turning off the light when leaving a room to reducing the amount of pesticides used in intensive agriculture. The authors argued for everyday actions in part, because “how can one reasonably demand more action on the part of the state if one doesn’t take—on a small scale—these measures for oneself.”<sup>42</sup> This mindset in conjunction with the larger intended audience for this booklet represented the beginnings of a call for personal responsibility and independent action, as charged by a higher, non-socialist authority.

Though later criticized for not being oppositional enough, the KFH, with Gensichen at its center, remained an organizational and intellectual center for Christian and independent environmental concerns. Its place within the Church and focus on theological questions frustrated those who condemned the SED system as a whole, but also provided the space for people to meet and the theological backbone that supported wider critiques of the system. While some involved in the KFH became actively involved in the opposition in the late 1980s, Gensichen remained moderate, cooperating with officials and often negotiating between more radical figures and the state.<sup>43</sup> The KFH walked a fine line between implicitly—and occasionally explicitly—criticizing the SED while at the same time not provoking a crackdown similar to those the Church had experienced in the 1970s and 1980s. To complicate the Church’s

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 40-42.

<sup>43</sup> This position has led historians such as Mary Fulbrook to criticize the efficacy of the organization, but I argue that the KFH served a fundamentally different purpose and that we must acknowledge the variety of responses to the SED state within the Church and the opposition.



predicament, not all clergy and bishops were equally devoted to environmental concerns. In some ways, the KFH was itself an environmental outpost within the Church.

### **The Rise of Environmental Groups in the Parishes**

Concurrently, interest in environmental degradation in “groups” on the parish level rose. Peace groups had taken root in the late 1970s as a response to heightened tensions of the “second Cold War,” but their momentum and relevance waned once it became clear they could not deter the stationing of nuclear missiles in Western Europe. Although connections between peace and environmental movements, especially over the nuclear issue, helped environmental groups gain popularity, the concrete and local nature of environmental problems played a significant role, too. By focusing on small-scale issues, newly formed environmental groups appeared less subversive than the peace movement. Still, the rise of environmental groups between 1982 and 1984 was no coincidence. The impulse for a grassroots environmental movement in the Churches corresponded with the restriction to environmental data in 1982, the peace movement’s major setback in 1983, and the Church’s apparent approval of environmentalism in the KFH. Therefore, the rise of environmental groups was a response to ever more obvious failures on the part of the party-state as well as a catalyst for change in the Church.

Many of the first environmental groups were either in Berlin, the epicenter of the peace movement, or in places most affected by the pollution. Groups, such as the “Peace and Environmental Circle in the Parish Berlin-Lichtenberg,” tied together the messages of peace and environment through the New Testament command to “love your neighbor as yourself.” The members of the Lichtenberg group argued that they were “in solidarity with ‘the least amongst us’ in creating a new human community in accord with Jesus and fulfilled through a new covenant with God.” By their definition, Jesus’ message to love another involved ecological justice, especially in light of the geopolitical challenges of the day. In their founding document,

the members argued that “Given the increasing number of environmental problems and growing danger of atomic self-destruction, a critical assessment of our attitude towards oppression, militarism and our relationship with nature is absolutely vital.”<sup>44</sup> Once peace, or peace and environment groups, connected threats to peace as threats to nature, then they could also tie local problems to larger issues facing the GDR, and especially to themselves as conscientious Christians. Because only those with “a base...desire for power” would “destroy God’s world piece by piece,” it was essential for Christians to fight against “God’s enemies.”<sup>45</sup>

With this mindset, groups such as the Christian Environmental Seminar Rötha (*Christliches Umweltseminar Rötha*, CUR) began to take action for themselves in 1981. With a desire to “improve the living conditions in our region,” the members began with a tree planting campaign in November 1981, in which seventy-five participants between the ages of one and eighty five took part. Rötha lay in the coalmining area south of Leipzig and suffered from very low air quality thanks to the nearby beneficiation plants and briquette factories that prepared the coal for widespread distribution. Under the leadership of local minister Christian Steinbach, CUR sought to raise attention to their plight. Originally, they stated their goals as the following: to write petitions, organize tree planting campaigns, shock people with information, to raise people’s sensibilities of hope, and ecological education.<sup>46</sup> In the years to come, they would garner not only local support, but the notice of Church leadership and environmental groups from across the GDR.

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<sup>44</sup> RGH/RG/B 08, “Protokoll der Gründungssitzung des Friedens- und Umweltkreises in der Evangelischen Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Lichtenberg: in der Glaubenskirche am 28. 6. 83,” Friedens- und Umweltkreis der Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Berlin-Lichtenberg, Region Berlin, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> RGH/TH 02/03, “Eine Mark für Espenhain oder ein Protest bekommt Flügel,” 1988, Kohle- und Bergbau, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

Between 1981 and roughly 1984, Steinbach's group focused its efforts on working with local authorities on environmental issues. Citing "noticeably more open and constructive relations" with local authorities since the mid-1970s, CUR's members took part in National Front and GNU activities, even serving on the GNU's executive board for the county level. Their efforts led to the organization of a Landscape Day, but "admittedly without much of an impulse to improve living conditions in our area."<sup>47</sup> These attempts at collaboration suggested the Christian groups' willingness to work with the party-state along with their call for individual action, which suggested that the nascent groups recognized the limits of their ability to effect change without official cooperation. In order to meet publically and to carry out activities, such as tree planting campaigns, at least tacit permission from the local authorities.

Other early groups, such as the Environmental Working Group in Magdeburg and the Eco-Seminar in Schwerin, similarly acknowledged the benefits of working with the GNU and other party-state organizations. In Magdeburg, founder Antje Wilde justified her group's commitment to environmental issues through "the growing number of public events relating to environmental questions, the increasing interest for this problematic among fellow humans, and the growing number of GNU members."<sup>48</sup> In 1982, the Eco-Seminar in Schwerin emphasized the importance of communication and cooperation between Church and party-state as a means of achieving its real goal: better environmental protection. One of the working groups at the Seminar even argued that "collaboration [between the GNU] and individual Christians or Christian groups is possible, often even asked for." The working group further suggested attending public lectures on environmental topics and "seeking out points of constructive

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. For more on Landscape Days, see Chapter Two.

<sup>48</sup> RHG/Wi 06, Personal Notes of Antje Wilde, undated, Personalbestand Antje Wilde, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

collaboration, such as...practical projects (cleaning up trash, 'greening' neighborhoods,' and nature walks."<sup>49</sup> In a practical sense, attempting to work with the party-state offered more opportunities to achieve small-scale goals without intentionally provoking local officials.

Not only was cooperation a gesture of goodwill for Christian environmental groups, it was a matter of necessity. Working with the GNU and other official venues was essential to acquiring environmental information. Especially after 1982 when the Council of Ministers restricted access to data, official channels were the only way to even hope for accurate (though it rarely was) assessments of local and national conditions. The 1982 Schwerin Eco-Seminar nodded to this state of affairs in its efforts to brainstorm on sources of information. While also suggesting personal observation, Church, and western media sources, the majority of the list cited a variety of official sources, such as GNU pamphlets, public lectures, the academic publisher Urania, and literature from the Academy of Sciences. In a grayer space, the participants also added "personal contacts and discussions with teachers, forest rangers, conservation agents from Urania and other specialists."<sup>50</sup> These connections might provide more concrete information than the pro forma responses found in the daily news.

Naturally, newly founded groups also relied heavily on Church networks to orient themselves on environmental issues and activities. Antje Wilde's environmental group based at the cathedral in Magdeburg openly cited the KFH's literature, such as "The Earth is to be Saved," as a major impetus for forming and an important basis for its work.<sup>51</sup> Based on information from the KFH and western news sources, Wilde and her co-founder, Johannes

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<sup>49</sup> RHG/SWV 02/02, "Ergebnisse der Gruppe 2," Schwerines Öko-seminar, February 19-21, 1982, Ökologieseminare, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> RHG/Wi 06, "Präambel, Juni 1983," Personalbestand Antje Wilde, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, Archiv der Opposition.

Drenger, held their first informational stand at the 1983 Church Congress taking place at the cathedral. They offered alternative recipes and environmental cartoons and literature. That Magdeburg cathedral became an early host for an environmental group was not entirely surprising. After all, the KFH lay in the same diocese and it had already been encouraged to move in an environmental direction a decade before. As the case of Magdeburg suggests, interest in forming environmental groups took on in the early 1980s, venues such as Church Congresses became vital nodes for networking and sharing information.

The success of early environmental groups must be understood in a relative sense, because discontent and wariness were widespread. Although she later made peace with many of her former colleagues, Antje Wilde represented the challenges any independent movement in the GDR faced. Having lost her father at a young age and having difficulties with her mother, the Stasi recruited her to be an unofficial informant with the pseudonym “Simone Pietsch” when she was just sixteen years old. The Stasi directed her to remain active in the organization, even taking positions in it, while informing on her friends and colleagues for over three years. Wilde later explained that she felt like she had a “split personality: on the one hand participating in the eco-group and on the other uncritically doing as the Stasi asked.”<sup>52</sup> Wilde’s example highlights the measures the Stasi took to sow distrust between individuals and groups in the movement in order to limit its effectiveness and reach.

Although KFH and the development of environmental groups in the parishes approached environmental concerns from different perspectives, they relied on one another for information and a critical mass of interested individuals. By combining theological considerations with grassroots responses to local problems, the movement appeared simultaneously abstract but yet

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<sup>52</sup> *Die ZEIT TV-Magazin*, Ausgabe 17, April 18, 1996, accessed July 19, 2015, <http://www.zeit.de/1996/17/tv17.19960419.xml/seite-3>.

locally specific, initially making it seem less threatening to the party-state. Importantly, though, these impulses grew together within the Protestant Church and provided a foundation on which to build a larger movement.

### **Environment and the West**

While the Christian environmentalists were responding to the visible degradation in the GDR, mounting concerns about growth and waste internationally also inspired them. Western critiques of consumption, material production, and waste fit especially well with Christian theology and motivated religious leaders in the West and the East to take on similar concerns. A series of works published in the West and conferences led to increasing awareness of environmental problems as well as their international and transnational implications. The Club of Rome's 1972 report on *The Limits to Growth* and the ecclesiastical conferences stemming from them (in the West) shaped the East German Church leadership's position on the environment. After members of the East German clergy attended conferences in Boston in 1979 and Vancouver in 1983, the Church recommitted itself to environmental concerns. Moreover, the waxing popularity of the green movement in West Germany, and the subsequent creation of a green party, garnered much interest in the East. Western environmental thought and movements became an intellectual and practical inspiration for East Germans concerned with pollution at home.

In the 1970s, the World Council of Churches held a number of conferences on science, technology, and the future, all of which touched on environmental problems from technology and industry. Because green movements in the West were generally secular, the fact that environmental concerns from the West made their way to independent movements in Eastern Europe through ecumenical and church conferences reflects the avenues open to protest in the East. It was easier for East Germans traveling on Church business to receive visas to leave the

GDR. Second, religious understandings of environmental concerns, growth, and materialism fit closely with Christian tropes that resonated on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Thus, while the spirit of the green movement in West Germany, for example, inspired many East Germans, Church networks became a crucial node in sharing theological justifications and practical information.

Meetings in 1974 and 1975, in Bucharest and Nairobi, respectively, made these topics relevant to Church leadership in the GDR as they prepared for the meetings and exposed them to new ideas. In Bucharest, the conference began to connect fears about technology's ability to damage humanity with its ability to destroy the physical environment. By 1975, in Nairobi, the World Council of Churches was arguing to "live without the protection of weapons," referring to the threat posed by nuclear weapons. Accordingly, a peace group in Rostock cited the Nairobi conference as a part of the basis for its "personal peace treaties" in the early 1980s. The final pledge of the treaty promised "to show the connections between the war and armament problems through our engagement in ecology, third world, and women's groups."<sup>53</sup> The emphasis on peace in the early to mid-1970s served as a starting point for Christian environmental concerns in the West, and in the GDR, too.

The transition from peace to environment was reflected by the 1979 World Council of Churches conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts.<sup>54</sup> Visits to the West such as Falcke's were incredibly important to the development of independent environmental consciousness in the GDR. For those involved in the Church, attaining travel permits to the West was less complicated than for average East Germans. Because opportunities were so rare, they became all

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<sup>53</sup> RHG/RG MV 01, "Elemente für einen persönlichen Friedensvertrag," undated, Arbeitsgruppe Frieden (AGF), Rostock, Region Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>54</sup> Neubert, *Die Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR*, 273.

the more important to those who had them. While abroad, East Germans—at least the few who could get permission—were exposed to new ideas and ways of approaching problems they had faced for decades. Given the SED’s propaganda and its efforts to strictly control public information, learning alternative narratives and critiques was essential for the budding environmental movement. Church contacts to West Germany and the West in general became important conduits for sharing environmental information and ideas.

The 1979 World Council of Churches conference in Boston focused on “Faith, Science, and the Future,” a topic which greatly influenced the six East German scientists and two theologians who attended. Most prominent was Thuringian Provost Dr. Heino Falcke, who upon his return, sought to implement what he had learned in the West in the GDR.<sup>55</sup> In 1977, two years before the conference, Falcke pushed the Conference of the Church Leadership’s committee on “Church and Society” to look into ecological questions and to reconsider the Church’s position on the environment. After the 1979 visit to Boston, Falcke further convinced the Church to establish four subcommittees: “Agriculture and Environment,” “Forest, Forestry, and Environment,” “Lifestyle,” and “Ethics of Science.” Each of these four groups prepared extensive reports on the state of the environment over the next decade, being republished and broadly distributed for consumption in the Church.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> DO 4/801, “Konzeption zum Informationsgespräch mit der Konferenz der ev. Kirchenleitungen in der DDR (KKL) zu Fragen: ,Wissenschaftlich-technischen Fortschritt und die Aufgaben auf dem Gebiet der Ökologie“ January 24, 1980, Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>56</sup> Because works like these were only published for Church audiences and not broadly distributed their circulation numbers were likely quite small. In my time in the archives, however, I came across multiple editions and partial copies, especially of “Agriculture and Environment,” in Berlin, Leipzig and Großhennersdorf. Given their semilegal status, it is safe to assume that many individuals shared and passed on a single copy, making readership significantly higher than publication numbers. For more on reading illegal materials in the GDR, see Siegfried Lokatis and Ingrid Sonntag, eds, *Heimliche Leser in der DDR: Kontrolle und Verbreitung unerlaubter Literatur* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2007).



At a Conference of the Church Leadership in October 1979, Falcke analyzed the relationship between the East German economy and ecology, challenging the SED's approach based on his experiences in the West. Considering the main takeaway from *The Limits to Growth*, he began by arguing that "indeed, our state desires economic growth and rejects the thesis of zero growth." Although the book was primarily written as response to capitalism, Falcke believed that the message applied to communism, too. He acknowledged the different premises on which the East and West were based, saying: "It is not a growth that gains momentum from capital ... but should be a growth that serves to satisfy humans' material and cultural needs." Nevertheless, Falcke contended that humans' needs included "a clean environment."<sup>57</sup> The prioritization of the economy in the GDR and the obsession with "western standards of consumption" resulted in ecological compromises. Falcke's speech reinforced the similarities between East and West and illustrated how critical Western approaches could be applied to the communist system.

Jürgen Morgenstern, theologian and member of the KFH's Earth, also used western literature like the *Limits to Growth* to critique the SED's propaganda in the daily and weekly press. He highlighted how the party ignored its own problems while calling the "grim warnings" about growth to be "complete nonsense."<sup>58</sup> He further criticized the SED for its refusal to acknowledge its role as a polluter and its use of linguistic distinctions to gloss over the GDR's problems. The official argument went that because the means of production were different under socialism, there was no "ecological crisis" like in the West, only "environmental dangers," and

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<sup>57</sup> DO 4/801, "Konzeption zum Informationsgespräch mit der Konferenz der ev. Kirchenleitungen in der DDR (KKL) zu Fragen: „Wissenschaftlich-technischen Fortschritt und die Aufgaben auf dem Gebiet der Ökologie“ January 24, 1980, Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>58</sup> RHG/KFH 01, Jürgen Morgenstern, "Die Verarbeitung des ökologischen Problems, speziell der Ergebnisse und Schlußfolgerungen des Clubs of Rome, in unserer sozialistischen Fachliteratur," undated, Arbeitskreis "Erde," Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

threats.<sup>59</sup> Even more intriguing was Morgenstern's invocation of W. Harich's book, *Communism without Growth?* Harich was a reformed communist East German author whose work could only be published in the West, meaning that it was not cited in any East German literature. By engaging with western conceptions of environmentalism and "zero-growth," Harich and Morgenstern highlighted the limits of the East German system to accommodate alternative opinions, as well as the importance of the West as an outlet for expressing criticism.

By the time the World Council of Churches met in Vancouver in 1983, the East German Church was thoroughly committed to environmentalism on some level. In 1978, the Erfurt Church Congress included an exhibit on environmental issues organized by a "large and active environmental group."<sup>60</sup> Two years later, and just one year after the Boston conference, Church and state officials met to discuss environmental problems, especially those surrounding atomic energy.<sup>61</sup> By 1983, the topic of environmentalism was regularly included at Church Congresses and grassroots activities were on the rise. At the conference in Vancouver, Falcke confirmed this commitment by presenting a lecture on "Survival Threats encounter Theological Aspects". In it, he argued that "life and the future of the world as we know it are vitally and radically threatened." He then contended that the solution to these dangers was to live a Christian and ethical life.<sup>62</sup> In Falcke's speech and participation in the conference, not only was the East learning from the West, but it was also sharing its interpretation of environmental threats.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Neubert, *Die Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR*, 273.

<sup>61</sup> RHG/Ki 18/02, Untitled copy of a BStU report, undated, Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>62</sup> DO 4/802, Dr. Heino Falcke, "Die Bedrohungen des Überlebens Begegnen Theologische Aspekte," Sechste Versammlung der Ökumenischer Rat der Kirchen, July 24 – August 10, 1983, Vancouver, Canada, Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.

Church connections between East and West were hugely influential in shaping the East German Church's stance on the environment. Not only did it provide Christian understandings of the natural environment, but it also provided a crucial means of distributing ideas from Western literature to the East. Personal contacts and participation strengthened this bond and offered support over the next decade. At the center of this network stood Dr. Heino Falcke, who himself was a product of both the East and the West.

#### *Green movements in the West*

While conferences like the World Council of Churches offered a theological perspective on the environment, budding green movement in the West, especially the Federal Republic, provided inspiration for many East Germans, too. The surprising success of the green movement, its protests, and its ability to influence policy gave many East Germans a hope for change. More broadly, the greening of West German society and the information that the West German media provided on environmental topics was crucial to developing not just environmental critiques, but ideas about activism. Within the context of the GDR, the green movements exemplified a way to engage with the environment that did not require theologically rigorous debate. While environmental activism in the GDR was clearly conscribed to specific spaces, such as the GNU and the Church, a secular green movement in the West illustrated for East Germans how such a movement could function while being neither socialist nor religious. For many, this understanding of environmentalism would become more and more appealing.

The green movement in the West, particularly West Germany, experienced numerous successes in the 1970s, as a result of the so-called "citizens' initiatives" (*Bürgerinitiative*).<sup>63</sup> These locally organized petitions protested against any number of local construction projects or

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<sup>63</sup> Dieter Rucht, "Einleitung" in *Die sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945: Ein Handbuch* (Frankfurt/M: Campus Verlag, 2008), 16-18.

sources of pollution. Their local nature, especially initially, led to a grassroots organizational structure and united unlikely bedfellows. As Stephen Milder describes in his study of protests against a proposed nuclear power plant in Wyhl, it was not common for students and local winegrowers to agree on much of anything. Yet, out of concern for local living conditions, they overcame differences to address the perceived common threat, establishing organizations and creating citizens' initiatives to challenge the plans. Their concrete and local character contributed to their accomplishments and offered a model for what successful protest could look like.<sup>64</sup>

The West German green movement's protest, with its local character and focus on citizens' initiatives, became beacons for what East German activists might accomplish, too. One member of the KFH's working group Earth found inspiration in the rise of environmental consciousness and citizens' movements in the West. In a letter to the director of the KFH, Peter Gensichen, he wrote:

In the last issue of *Bild der Wissenschaft*...there was an article about the growth of environmental consciousness in the FRG: since the founding of the citizens' initiatives it has grown; today, roughly 30% of all West Germans are will to forego up to 50-100 DM monthly for appreciable progress in environmental protection.

With this evidence of broad support for the environment, East German activists found a little “encouragement” for their own efforts.<sup>65</sup> If West Germans were willing to give up 50-100 DM per month—a sizeable sum—just think what might be possible in the East with more environmental awareness projects!

The citizens' initiatives became a part of the West German movement that East Germans sought to reapply to their own political context. As their frustrations with the handling—or non-

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<sup>64</sup> Stephen Milder, “Today the Fish, Tomorrow Us: Anti-Nuclear Activism in the Rhine Valley and Beyond, 1970-1979,” (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012), 31.

<sup>65</sup> RHG/KFH 01, Letter from Eberhard Brecht to Peter Gensichen, undated, Arbeitskreis “Erde” 1977-1983, Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

handling—of *Eingaben* grew in the 1980s, they began to call for citizens’ initiatives, too, using the language of the West. They even began to demand “real” citizens’ initiatives instead of petitions (*Eingaben*). The *Christliches Umweltseminar Rötha* returned to these ideas later in the 1980s, demanding democratic citizens’ initiatives and electoral mandates for change as opposed to the SED’s official channels, which were rigid and unresponsive.<sup>66</sup> The West German green movement set an example East Germans sought to implement in their own political system while at the same time frustrating officials by using the “imperialist” language of the West.<sup>67</sup>

These ideas about grassroots democracy, citizens’ initiatives, and protest were transmitted to East Germans not only through personal contacts and travel abroad, but through West German media. As the Federal Republic became more environmentally conscious, its journalists began to pick up on East German environmental issues and publish them about them, not least because pollution from the East often found its way across the death strip into the West. Numerous articles in major newspapers decried the murky water and acid rain from the GDR’s antiquated industries. Chief among these was Professor Martin Jänicke, a political scientist based in West Berlin. Articles like his 1984, “Death by Smokestack: Air Pollution reaches Catastrophic Levels in the GDR” in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* were multi-page spreads on the damaging effects of the GDR’s pollution on East and West Germany.<sup>68</sup> Also, though it appeared in a

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<sup>66</sup> RGH/TH 02/03, “Eine Mark für Espenhain oder ein Protest bekommt Flügel,” 1988, Kohle- und Bergbau, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>67</sup> DY 27/6177, “Entwurf: Vorschlag für die Gründung einer Gesellschaft im Kulturbund der DDR,” November 4, 1974, Überlegungen zur weitem Entwicklung der Arbeit des Kulturbundes auf den Gebiet Natur und Heimat, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>68</sup> Copy found in A. Kelly 333, Martin Jänicke, “Der Tod aus dem Schornstein: In der DDR nimmt die Luftverschmutzung allmählich katastrophale Formen an,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Samstag, January 28, 1984, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Berlin. Jänicke was an environmental policy adviser for the Alternative List in West Berlin (a party that would later join with the Green Party) from 1981 to 1983 before receiving his chair at the Free University.

western newspaper, articles like these were easily discussed with East Germans or carried back and forth across the border.

Western information about East German problems became even simpler to access when journalists and activists took to the airwaves. Because most of East Germany received western television and radio signals, news often spread across the Iron Curtain thanks to hidden antennae. Peter Wensierski, for example, was a West German author and journalist who published numerous books on social and environmental problems in the GDR.<sup>69</sup> By 1982, he was giving interviews on the radio, especially for West Berlin's "Radio in the American Sector," and becoming popular enough that the SED cited him by name in the report that justified classifying environmental data. The report further complained that Western media was trying to "sow unrest and distrust among East Germans, because they "have seen ... on Western television, the widespread movement, for example, against nuclear power plants."<sup>70</sup> Western media, thus, informed East Germans about their own environmental problems while at the same time offering examples for how to protest.

Western successes, such as the Green Party passing the electoral threshold to enter West German parliament in 1983, drew attention in the GDR and fed into independent movement's rising support. Direct contacts with West German Greens, such as parliamentarian and ecologist, Dr. Wilhelm Knabe, provided information and aid to independent environmentalists. In October of 1983, for example, Knabe met with Gensichen and members of the KFH, and eventually more

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<sup>69</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, Wensierski published numerous books on the GDR, including *Beton ist Beton: Zivilisationskritik aus der DDR* (Hattingen: Scandica-Verlag, 1981), *Null Bock auf DDR: Aussteigerjugend im anderen Deutschland* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1984), and *Von oben nach unten wächst gar nichts: Umweltzerstörung und Protest in der DDR* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986).

<sup>70</sup> DK 5/1982, "Bericht über Probleme des Geheimnisschutzes beim Informationen zum Umweltschutz," October 25, 1982, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

oppositional activists, too.<sup>71</sup> Another Green delegation had already visited the GDR in June of that year and held a meeting in an SED “Club of Intelligence” in Leipzig in which they discussed “How green are the Greens?” In attendance were a number of students active in Protestant youth groups, who were keen to ask about the possibility “establishing a green party in the GDR.” Official visits, such as Knabe’s and the delegation in June’s, offered yet another opportunity for East Germans to see alternative perspectives on environmental activism and to gather information about what it meant. Despite the political difficulties involved in getting visas to enter the GDR, West German Greens were instrumental in helping the development of the independent movement housed in the Protestant Church.

### **Poland and the Pull of Solidarność**

While the SED debated how exactly to relate to the green movement in the West (was it good that there was protest against the imperialist, fascist system or not?), it was very clear about its concern for the Eastern neighbor, Poland. Poland’s poor economic performance and seemingly constant struggle to keep its population under control gave the SED leadership reason to pause. By the summer of 1980, however, with the rise of the Solidarność movement in Gdańsk, the East German leadership had reason to be unnerved. Circles within the Protestant Church, however, were excited to see their neighbors win the right to organize independently. For environmental activists, the founding of the Polish Ecological Club in 1980 (*Polski Klub Ekologiczny*, PKE), was reason to celebrate; the PKE was the first independent environmental

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<sup>71</sup> Wilhelm Knabe had fled the East with his family in the 1950s, and thus has more direct connections and more interest in the GDR than many of his West German colleagues. His son, Hubertus Knabe, wrote his dissertation on socio-ethical movements in the GDR, with a focus on environmental protection in the GDR and Hungary. For a time, Hubertus had a girlfriend in the East and traveled back and forth regularly to see her. Eventually, his visa was denied and his father had to step in and ask for it to be reinstated. A 56, Correspondence between Wilhelm Knabe and Erich Honecker, October 10, 1984, Personalbestand Wilhelm Knabe, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

organization in the communist bloc.<sup>72</sup> While the SED viewed the events of 1980-1981 in Poland with apprehension, the independent movements in the GDR found another source of inspiration.

In 1976, after the last series of protests over wages, a group of workers at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk had formed underground groups like the Workers' Defense Committee (*Komitet Ochrony Robotników*, KOR) to monitor government abuses and to aid strikers who had been banned from working.<sup>73</sup> Publishing an underground newspaper, *Robotnik*, or *The Worker*, which had been the interwar president Jozef Piłsudski's pen name, KOR developed a widespread network of informants, writers, and readers. Moreover, KOR successfully collaborated with university students, bringing together blue and white collar workers. This task laid the groundwork for the later *Solidarność* movement and forged a broad social consensus where protest movements in other Eastern European countries had failed.

After a series of strikes and a struggling economy had plagued Poland's Communist Party for the better part of a decade, the crisis came to a head in the summer of 1980. This network of individuals came up against the establishment in August 1980, when KOR member Anna Walentynowicz was fired from her position at the dockyards in Gdańsk. The resulting protests brought together workers from across different professions in solidarity and a nationwide strike ensued. The Polish government under Gomułka relented on a number of fronts, including the right to organize independently. From the summer of 1980 until December of 1981, when Martial Law was declared, Poles were permitted to establish organizations and associations outside the purview of the party-state. The largest was obviously *Solidarność* itself.

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<sup>72</sup> Polski Klub Ekologiczny Homepage, accessed November 11, 2014, <http://www.pke-zg.home.pl/>.

<sup>73</sup> KOR was renamed *Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej* KOR, or the Committee of Social Self-Defense KOR, in 1977 when it took on the duties of giving financial relief to banned workers. Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 154-155.



Many other interest groups, however, also took the initiative to organize independently, including the Polish Ecological Club based in Kraków (*Polski Klub Ekologiczny*, PKE). Founded on September 23, 1980, this club revolved around scientists and interested individuals at the Jagiellonian University and sought to blend scientific expertise with grassroots concern.<sup>74</sup> Within months, the club counted three thousand members, seven hundred of whom were based in Kraków.<sup>75</sup> In the period between its founding and Martial Law being declared, the PKE pressured the regime into shutting down a major source of pollution in the Małopolska region, an aluminum smelter as part of the Skawina works, not far outside of the city. Although complaints about the pollution had surfaced well before the founding of the PKE, it was during this period of liberalization that activists were able to push for its closure.<sup>76</sup> Despite Poland's relative lower standard of living and major economic issues, the push for—and success in forcing—the closure of the plant suggested quality of life issues mattered, even in situations where economic priorities might rank more highly.

Environmental issues, while not at the center of *Solidarność*, continued to play a role throughout the period, and were even included in the program for *Solidarność*'s First National Congress in September and October 1981. In it, proposals were made to regulate and modernize enterprises, to have environmental inspections on the regional level, and to have unions present opinions on government plans and bills.<sup>77</sup> Through these suggestions, it is clear that

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<sup>74</sup> Barbara Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland: A Social Movement between Regime and Opposition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 105, 173.

<sup>75</sup> Sabine Rosenblatt, *Der Osten ist grün? Öko-raportage aus der DDR, Sowietunion, Tschechoslowakei, Polen, Ungarn* (Hamburg, Rasch und Röhring Verlag, 1988), 14-15. The numbers would reach as high as six thousand by 1989. Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland*, 99.

<sup>76</sup> Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland*, 123-24.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

environmental concerns were a part of workers' lives and that even Solidarność had an interest in developing environmentally-aware criticisms of the Communist party-state. Unfortunately, these proposals were never implemented and Solidarność's focus remained on other forms of political rights. But on some level, pollution and workers' safety fit into its larger critique of the system and helped to raise awareness about environmental issues, even if they were not its top priority.

A month and half after the First National Congress, however, Solidarność's hard-won rights came to an end. General Jaruzelski declared Martial Law on December 13, 1981, eliminating liberties of the last fifteen months, arresting thousands of individuals, killing as many as 100, and implementing a national curfew.<sup>78</sup> The optimism of Solidarność was dampened and the movement's networks systematically broken down. The Communist Party in Poland and in other countries across the Soviet bloc breathed a sigh of relief as it reasserted its authority without Soviet tanks rolling into Warsaw, Gdańsk, or other major cities. Because the military crackdown on Polish society came from within, it thereby avoided the international uproar of Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring in 1968 and restored order in the Soviet bloc.

Under Martial Law, Solidarność and other oppositional groups struggled to maintain their networks and influence as they were forced underground. Oppositional newspapers were taken over by women who were less likely to be considered subversive and avoided the scrutiny assigned to well-known male leaders.<sup>79</sup> In their publications, articles focused on arrests and protests, while those banned from studying formed so-called "Flying Universities."<sup>80</sup> Individuals

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<sup>78</sup> Piotr Lipiński, "Ofiary stanu wojennego i lat następnych do 1989," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, December 12, 2006, accessed December 18, 2014, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,77062,3787704.html#ixzz3MHX6YE55>.

<sup>79</sup> For more information on women's networks and involvement in Solidarity during Martial Law, see Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: the women who defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 100-147.

<sup>80</sup> "Flying universities" date back to the nineteenth century as a way of keeping Polish intellectual traditions alive under during the partition, accessed December 9, 2014, <http://www.jugendopposition.de/index.php?id=3180>.

who had been banned from studying or expelled from university for their background or their protests found their way into underground universities to discuss topics forbidden at official universities. Typically, these informal, underground institutions attracted people who had been denied admission to universities for political reasons. Together, these underground networks maintained the oppositional ideas until the repression lessened and they were able to function more publically again in the mid-1980s.

For the East German government, *Solidarność* posed a serious challenge to the stability of its neighbor to the East and to the Communist bloc more generally. For example, environmental concerns raised during *Solidarność* questioned the functioning of bloc economies as well as the loyalties of the populations in those countries. The joint Soviet-East German-Polish exploration for oil in the Baltic Sea reflected these issues between Polish and East German interests at the GO Petrobaltic (*Gründorgansation* Petrobaltic). MfS reports reflected frustration over criticism of the project in the Polish independent press as well as the presence of *Solidarność* members working on the oil platform. These concerns were heightened when numerous articles accused the GO Petrobaltic of “endangering the safety [of the workers] and Poland’s coast, and presented threats to shipping on the Baltic and the neighboring countries’ environment.”<sup>81</sup> Here, at sea in the Baltic and among trained engineers, environmental concerns and working conditions challenged East Germany’s drive to further its economic goals.

Up to May 1981, the report suggested that *Solidarność* had only had a “passive and conspiratorial character” in the project. As a result, East German managers were dismayed to learn that sixty of the Polish workers (those working on the platforms and ships were almost

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<sup>81</sup> MfS/HA XVIII 19276, “Information zur Erdölfündigkeit auf dem Ostseeschelf der VRP,” May 11, 1981, Hauptabteilung XVIII Absicherung der Volkswirtschaft, BStU.

exclusively Polish) were members of Solidarność and that the drilling depended on them.<sup>82</sup> In the context of the early 1980s, when Soviet oil deliveries to the Eastern bloc were being cut, difficulties from workers were the last thing the SED state wanted to deal with. The interconnectedness of the Communist economies meant potential problems when one of the countries faced domestic social unrest. Uncooperative Polish workers struck fear in the SED's relatively smooth functioning economy, which was just one factor in the East Germans' pressure for Soviet intervention in Solidarność.

The rise of an organized opposition in Poland also had ramifications for the SED's rule and presented a challenge to communist authority in Eastern Europe. Specifically, as the small but popular peace movement in the GDR grew between 1980 and 1982, the success of peaceful protest to the east presented a challenge to the authorities while simultaneously providing inspiration for oppositional figures in the GDR. Roland Jahn, a member of the peace movement who later fled to West Germany, was notoriously arrested for displaying a Solidarność flag and imprisoned for twenty two months.<sup>83</sup> Jahn's treatment instigated an international uproar, especially from members of the West German Green Party who were sympathetic to the East German peace movement. The connection between the peace movement and Solidarność was not lost to West German Greens, such as Dr. Wilhelm Knabe, who outlined the party's internal division regarding policy on the Soviet bloc. He situated himself with those who believed "the [western] peace movement's credibility...will only be guaranteed, if [we] protect democratic structures, solidarity with the grassroots movement Solidarity in Poland, and the peace

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Sarina Pfauth, "Unverwüstlich für die Freiheit," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 30, 2010, accessed December 17, 2014, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/roland-jahn-soll-auf-marianne-birthler-folgen-liebhaber-der-gerechtigkeit-1.1017087>.

movement in the GDR.”<sup>84</sup> Solidarność presented both an abstract challenge and a real threat to the SED’s legitimacy.

Solidarność and the PKE’s existence and success at connecting environmentally-minded individuals also became an inspiration for independent environmental groups in the GDR. The PKE as a first regionally, and then nationally, networked organization presented an example which East German activists emulated. Its focus on value change, raising consciousness about the environment, and education were also goals activists in the GDR embraced on a general level.<sup>85</sup> More specifically, though, the “Flying Universities” of the Martial Law era became an inspiration for later environmental organizations, such as the Environmental Libraries (*Umweltbibliotheken*), the first of which was established in Berlin in 1986.<sup>86</sup> The idea behind the Environmental Libraries was to share information and hold events or seminars where people could learn about forbidden topics, such as environmental pollution.<sup>87</sup> These practical and philosophical inspirations from the East reflected diversity within the communist Eastern Europe as well as the connections between communist countries and the West in the early 1980s.

## **Conclusion**

The rise of an independent environmental movement in the GDR initially came from top-down influences within the Church, on the one hand, and grassroots concerns on the other. It first came from individuals such as Heino Falcke and Hans-Peter Gensichen, who were invested in

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<sup>84</sup> RHG/OWK 01, “Um Glaubwürdigkeit und Perspektive der Friedensbewegung: Beitrag zur BHA-Sitzung am 24.4.1982 in Bonn von Wilhelm Knabe, Mülheim an der Ruhr,” Ost-West Kontakte, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft. I use the English “Solidarity” here, because Knabe uses the German “Solidarität” rather than the Polish.

<sup>85</sup> Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland*, 96.

<sup>86</sup> “Fliegende Universitäten,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung und Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft e.V., accessed December 17, 2014, <http://www.jugendopposition.de/index.php?id=3180>.

<sup>87</sup> For more on the rise of the Environmental Libraries in the GDR, see Chapter 5.

Christian, theological debates about human interaction with the natural world. These impulses were the reason behind the KFH's transition to ecological debates in the early to mid-1970s. Somewhat later, environmental groups formed in the parishes in conjunction with the peace movement and in response to local conditions. These groups took off after the peace movement lost momentum in 1983.

The independent environmental movement not only had a handful of interested individuals, but it also resonated with certain segments of East German society. In the context of the SED's efforts to develop a "socialist environmentalism," Christian-inspired environmental concern offered an alternative interpretation of human engagement with the environment. It defied the SED's rational, progressivist outlook and grounded itself in religious language, thereby undermining the totalizing claims of the socialist vision. It questioned the SED's use of natural resources and exposed flaws in its internal logic, especially in how the SED could both increase material standards of living on limited resources while at the same time blame the West for its exploitation of the natural world.

The evolving green movement in the West influenced these criticisms, helping Christian environmentalists to articulate their concerns theologically and politically. For the well-connected, visits to the West and to international conferences, like the World Council of Churches', were essential for sharing ideas and gleaning new information. Most, however, were dependent on those who could travel and on western media, such as radio, television, and newspapers for the latest information. These outlets became important as East Germans listened and heard about the popularity of antinuclear protests and the founding of an organized Green Party.

Finally, social protest under Solidarność—and then Martial Law—in Poland offered the budding environmental movement a source of inspiration, while striking fear into the heart of the SED. On broad scale, this was the first successful, widespread protest in the Soviet bloc since the Prague Spring and brought about renewed hope for change and loosened restrictions on speech and organization. More specifically, environmental organizations like the PKE suggested that organized protest against environmental polluters could result in concrete change.

Thanks to these impulses, the independent environmental movement in the GDR was poised to expand, take on new issues, and exert pressure on the SED system.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Rocky Ground: The Intertwining of Official and Independent Environmentalisms' Relations, 1982-1986**

In September 1984, the Protestant Church in the GDR's (BEK) synod met in Greifswald, where leaders passed a resolution formally announcing the Church's commitment to its "Christian responsibility for creation." The resolution acknowledged that "Christians and the Church have contributed to a world order that has eased human suffering, but also led to the irresponsible exploitation of nature."<sup>1</sup> It further declared that "the entire Church's permanent task is to support the environmental activists in the parishes and to take up the state's offer" to become involved in official groups, like the GNU.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of this declaration, regional church organizations, such as Saxony and Brandenburg, followed with similar commitments to environmental problems within their respective jurisdictions. These statements formalized the Church's commitment to the environment on all levels, even as it encouraged activists under its protection to continue participating in official channels, too.

In the period between 1982 when access to environmental data was restricted and the nuclear explosion at Chernobyl in 1986, environmental concerns remained simmering beneath the surface. These four years were an important transition period in which independent groups increasingly distinguished themselves from the peace movement and became more organized.

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<sup>1</sup> RHG/KFH 07, "Beschuß der Synode des Bundes zum Thema 'Christliche Verantwortung für die Schöpfung' vom 25. September 1984," Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>2</sup> DO 4/801, "Zu den staatlichen, gesellschaftlichen und kirchlichen Aktivitäten zur Realisierung einer sachlichen und sachbezogenen Zusammenarbeit beim Schutz und der Erhaltung von Natur und Umwelt seit dem 20.8.84," April 24, 1985, Kirchliches Umweltengagement, Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.



But it would be a mistake to draw a direct line from the 1982 resolution to the collapse of communism in 1989 in a teleological manner. Environmental groups were not fully oppositional, often working within and with the system to find potential points of cooperation and compromise. From the perspective of the party-state, too, environmental activities were expanded and new institutions created. Scientists and politicians worked to improve local conditions, even if they had little sway over the larger structural sources of pollution. Given the many impulses that informed official and independent environmental activism in the GDR, how did they interact?

This chapter explores the overlap and ultimate divergence of these two visions of environmentalism in the 1980s by examining the trajectory of three regions of the GDR: Berlin, Leipzig/Halle, and Lusatia. These three examples highlight the variation in how independent movements coalesced, functioned, and conceived of themselves, challenging the traditional narrative of a Berlin-dominated opposition movement and illustrating regional variation in discussing environmental concerns.<sup>3</sup> These three regions all faced mounting pollution problems in the mid-1980s, especially revolving around air quality from power and manufacturing plants. In each case, however, the local concerns and histories shaped the groups' priorities and interactions with the party-state. In Lusatia, for example, the question arises about why there was not a larger and better organized movement in light of serious degradation. These different locations illustrate how environmental protest began to coalesce, but remained regionally defined in many ways.

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<sup>3</sup> Since the collapse of communism in Eastern Germany, former oppositional leaders around the Environmental Library and the Zion Church in Berlin-Mitte have furiously—and in many ways successfully—defended their contribution to the collapse of the SED system. Carlo Jordan's *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR, Das "Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche"*, 1988-90, Wolfgang Rüdtenklau's *Störenfried: DDR-Opposition, 1986-1989* are perhaps two the best-known examples of these efforts. While telling an important story, however, they sometimes lack perspective on movements and protests in other parts of the country.

Although the party-state had tacitly acknowledged the extent of the problems in 1982, it had not entirely retreated on all environmental fronts. In the mid-1980s, it expanded its GNU activities and established new bodies, such as the Center for Environmental Development (*Zentrum für Umweltgestaltung, ZUG*) in 1982, and the “State Environmental Inspection” (*Staatliche Umweltinspektion, SU*) in 1985. ZUG was to serve as the MfUW’s “central scientific-technical institution” in order to implement “environmental policy as a central component of the SED’s all-encompassing policy.”<sup>4</sup> Founded three years later, the SU’s task was to bring together trained scientists and volunteers to actively monitor and improve environmental conditions.<sup>5</sup> New centers and institutions highlighted the complexity of the relationship between different factions within the party-state as well as where they coincided with different trends within the broader East German society.

Indeed, incidious suspicion within and between party-state organizations, and especially the Stasi’s expanding purview over official and independent efforts, kept a larger movement in check. After roughly 1982, the Stasi devoted more resources to the environment and the groups in the Church. The role of the environment and independent groups became the subjects of master’s theses at the central police academy in Potsdam as the Stasi sought to undermine the movement.<sup>6</sup> As part of this new attention, they also systematically recruited unofficial informants

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<sup>4</sup> DK 5/4595, “Stellung, Aufgaben und Struktur des Zentrums für Umweltgestaltung,” 1985, Hans Reichelt, Zentrum für Umweltgestaltung, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>5</sup> Uwe Zuppke, “Aus der Tätigkeit des Zentrums für Umweltgestaltung,” in *Umweltschutz in der DDR: Analysen und Zeitzeugenberichte – Band 3: Beruflicher, ehrenamtlicher und freiwilliger Umweltschutz*, eds. Hermann Behrens and Jens Hoffmann (Munich: Oekom, 2008), 73.

<sup>6</sup> See MfS/JHS 2025, “Diplomarbeit: Die Organisierung der politisch-operativen Arbeit zur Verhinderung des Mißbrauchs von Umweltschutzproblemen für politische Untergrundtätigkeit,” October 31, 1984, Juristische Hochschule Potsdam, BStU; MfS/JHS 20355, “Politisch-operative Erkenntnisse aus der politisch-operativen Arbeit zur vorbeugenden Verhinderung und Aufdeckung von Versuchen feindlich-negativer Kräfte zur Organisierung politischer Untergrundtätigkeit unter Mißbrauch von Umweltschutzproblemen, December 6, 1985, Juristische Hochschule Potsdam, BStU; and MfS/JHS 21675, “Die vorbeugende Verhinderung und Bekämpfung des

and planted their own people in the groups. While surveillance is not the only story to be told about the opposition, it was a defining characteristic of how the environmental movement developed, of where it succeeded and struggled. It highlights the complexity of state-society relations in the SED's final decade. Ultimately, however, these renewed mass social efforts demonstrated continued engagement on a social and policy level and challenge a teleological narrative that would draw a straight line from 1982 to 1989 and the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

While these developments were taking place in the GDR, the political landscape was changing beyond its borders and the way people viewed environmental concerns and communist control in Eastern Europe. In neighboring West Germany, the electoral success of the Green Party on a federal level, as well as a general acceptance of environmental issues, pressured the SED directly and indirectly from the outside. Also, up to this point, I have primarily considered the influence of West Germany on the GDR's reactions to pollution in terms of a green movement and environmental consciousness. But just how aware of the East were West Germans and how did they engage with pollution flowing across their Eastern borders?

Finally, this chapter explores the transformation of political power in Eastern Europe with the end of Martial Law in Poland in 1983 and the Gorbachev's introduction of reforms in 1985. As the political climate in Eastern Europe changed, the environment has often been lumped together with other socio-ethical or oppositional movements gaining traction there. But do environmental concerns belong explicitly to either the state or the opposition? In garnering support from a variety of social strata, environmental issues were more diverse, and less clearly pro- or anti-regime than some have suggested. Even in pious Poland, groups possessed a range of

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Mißbrauchs des Umweltschutzes durch den Gegner in der Klassenauseinandersetzung zwischen Sozialismus und Imperialismus," June 19, 1986, Juristische Hochschule Potsdam, BStU.

attitudes towards the communist party-state, and the exemplified the complicated relationship between state, society, and environment.

Ultimately, in the years between 1982 and 1986, change took place under the surface. The networks and ideas that would become more public after Chernobyl in 1986 were established and elaborated on, but did not yet come to a head. In part, this circumscription of more overtly political opposition lay in the success of the party-state's efforts to do just that. Its "carrot and stick" approach offered new policies and forms of engagement, on the one hand, and surveillance and repression on the other. These interconnected domestic and international trends reveal a more complex understanding of East German society than simple dichotomies of "state" and "opposition."<sup>7</sup>

### **The Independent Movement Grows**

With the peace movement at a loggerhead and the Church's official embrace of environmental concerns in 1984, groups across the GDR began to take up the cause. Groups formed in response to local conditions. Some, like Berlin, already had a reputation for developing politically radical or oppositional groups. For many here, the environment was a combination of concern for urban ecology (how city and natural environment influence and change one another) and a means to a more provocative political end. In other areas, such as Leipzig and Halle, groups focused on regional industrial issues, such as air quality and the chemical industry. Finally, the geographically and politically marginalized groups in Lusatia (the most populous city in the area being Cottbus) banded together around questions of open-pit mining, air pollution, and *Waldsterben*. Seen together, these three instances illustrate discontent

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<sup>7</sup> Recent works, such as Andrew Port and Mary Fulbrook's *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), have improved our understanding of East German society, but have not explicitly explored the complexity of relationship between state, society, and opposition.

with local conditions, but also different perspectives on how to respond to them within the existing state structure.

### *Berlin*

In East Berlin, the environmental movement took on a different tone than other places in the country. Because it was so explicitly political and the connections to self-declared opposition are clear, the scholarship on environmental activism in the GDR has often focused on these groups. It is true that they played a large role in connecting groups from different parts of the GDR and speaking out against the SED. Nevertheless, at times, their relationship to environmental issues has been overlooked. While the direct attack on the party-state is undeniably important, it is also crucial to examine how these groups began and how they changed over time. For many groups in Berlin, such as the one at the Parish and Faith Congregation in Berlin-Lichtenberg, direct connections to the peace movement were obvious. Because the party-state had viewed the peace movement itself as oppositional, it is not unsurprising that the environmental groups also adopted that mentality.

On June 28, 1983, the Berlin-Lichtenberg congregation held the inaugural meeting of the “Peace and Environmental Circle.” The founding members clearly stated their platform at this first session, contending that they must take action in “solidarity with the least among us.” They argued that destruction of the environment through militarism and oppression were two sources of tension in God’s command to love your neighbor as yourself. Therefore, they were called to take action: “As Jesus drove the money lenders out of his father’s temple 2000 years ago we find it has become vitally necessary cast out those who would kill God’s world piece by piece in order to satisfy their base business instincts and hunger for power.”<sup>8</sup> In its founding document,

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<sup>8</sup> RHG/RG/B 08, “Plattform des Friedens- und Umweltkreises,“June 28, 1983, Friedens- und Umweltkreis der Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Berlin-Lichtenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

the group criticized the “industrial society” that created so many of these problems.

Unsurprisingly, the members framed their concern in a similar way to the KFH working group “Earth.” They used theological and anti-worldly (anti-consumption) arguments to expose what they viewed as broken in the system.

For the Peace and Environmental Circle, environment, peace, and social justice were intrinsically interconnected, but in a more overtly political way than the KFH. These problems were united by the “growing danger of atomic self-destruction.”<sup>9</sup> The specific referencing of the nuclear threat stood in contrast to the more theologically-minded KFH groups and highlighted the connections between the two movements, especially in Berlin milieus. Even before the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in April 1986, the Berlin-Lichtenberg group held seminars “to remember the victims of the atom bombs attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki” and to question the peace and environmental impact of nuclear weapons and energy.<sup>10</sup> They drew a line between the nuclear question and problems of overconsumption in modern, industrial society, by connecting expanding energy use to the production of “unnecessary” material goods.<sup>11</sup> From the group’s very beginning, it criticized the worldly consumption that the SED increasingly relied on to appease its citizens, and connected it to peace and environmental issues.

The Peace and Environmental Circle also focused on more local issues that affected its members on a daily basis. Active participants in the group, such as Wolfgang Rüdtenklau and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> RHG/RG/B 08, “Das Friedensseminar zum Gedenken an die Opfer des Atombombenabwurf auf Hiroshima und Nagasaki, 11. und 12. August,” undated but presumably 1983, Friedens- und Umweltkreis der Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Berlin-Lichtenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>11</sup> RHG/RG/B 08, “Plattform des Friedens- und Umweltkreises,” June 28, 1983, Friedens- und Umweltkreis der Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Berlin-Lichtenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft. These types of concerns can be understood as echoes of the “life reform” movements from the early twentieth century, and which questioned the first wave of consumerism.

Christian Halbrock, authored numerous petitions in the years between 1983 and 1986 on a number of Berlin-related issues, such as the development of urban ecology in the city. They requested, for example, more bike paths and higher quality replacement bicycle parts, so they could be “mobile without a car.”<sup>12</sup> Naturally, local authorities emphasized the forty-eight kilometers of bicycle paths that already existed as well as the plan to build sixty-five more kilometers by 1990.<sup>13</sup>

Halbrock took the lead on writing petitions about the air quality in Berlin-Lichtenberg, which was especially bad in Lichtenberg thanks to the coal-powered energy plant, VEB Elektrokohle.<sup>14</sup> Specific to Berlin’s unique position as a divided city, Halbrock questioned why the West-Berlin districts of Wedding, Kreuzberg, and Neukölln received “Smog-Alarm” warnings, but eastern parts of the city did not. The response to the petition came from the “Technical Aspects of City Logistics” division of the Department of Environmental Protection and Water Management, which suggested Halbrock watch Minister Reichelt’s upcoming interview on the matter. The official contended that “concrete steps had been taken to lower the concentration of pollutants” on the referenced day.<sup>15</sup> In Berlin, the proximity of western-style

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<sup>12</sup> RHG/RG/B 08, “Eingabe an das Ministerium für Handel und Versorgung,” October 30, 1985, Friedens- und Umweltkreis der Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Berlin-Lichtenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>13</sup> RHG/RG/B 08, „Gesprächszusammenfassung von der Beantwortung der Eingabe von 30.10.1983 zur Situation der Radfahrer in Berlin, beim Magistrat von Berlin,“ Friedens- und Umweltkreis der Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Berlin-Lichtenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>14</sup> DK 5/5155, “Schwerpunktprobleme auf dem Gebiet des Umweltschutzes in der Hauptstadt Berlin,“ 1976, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>15</sup> RHG/RG/B 08, “Eingabe vom 11.1.1985” and response on February 22, 1985, Friedens- und Umweltkreis der Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Berlin-Lichtenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

environmental protection gave activists concrete alternatives—over the same issues—that were harder to obtain in other parts of the GDR and led to more confrontational approaches at times.<sup>16</sup>

A second group at the heart of the independent movement in Berlin was the Friedrichsfelde Ecology Working Group within the Peace Circle. Beginning in 1984, the group began to host “Ecology Seminars” that attracted interested individuals from around the country. The first seminar, in September 1984, boasted between 200 and 250 participants and focused on “Life in the City.”<sup>17</sup> Similar to the group in Lichtenberg, the Friedrichsfelder focused the weekend on how to improve the quality of life amid the pollution and the stress of urban life.<sup>18</sup> They cited their “discomfort” as stemming from a variety of sources, including “increasing traffic,” “the death of flowers on major streets,” the “worsening of air conditions,” and “the destruction of buildings and monuments from air pollution,” among other frustrations.<sup>19</sup> They also compared the problem of “worsening air quality” to what was called “smog” in West Berlin, suggesting frustration with the SED’s ambiguous language and stance toward the problem.

More interestingly, however, was their connection of these fairly mundane issues to larger ones about their sense of wellbeing. They complained of the cityscape’s “hectic and stressful lifestyle on the one hand, and the monotony and lack of communication on the other.” Finally, they contended that their largest unease with life in the city had to do with “difficult to

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<sup>16</sup> Groups tended to have a core of ten to twenty members with more attending for larger events. See RHG/Ki 18/02, “Die Karteibroschüre der kirchlichen Umweltgruppen in der DDR: Stand vom November 1988,” Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>17</sup> The Stasi report on the event suggested there were only about 180, though it noted that sixty (or roughly one third) came from outside of Berlin. See MfS/BV Bln AKG 3275, “Information, Nr. 28/84. Über den Ablauf des sogenannten ‚Ökologie-Seminars‘ vom 28. Bis 30. 9. 1984 in der Kirchgemeinde Berlin-Friedrichsfelde-Ost,” October 5, 1984, Bezirksverband Berlin Auswertungs- und Kontrollgruppe, BStU.

<sup>18</sup> RHG/RG/B 02/5, “Bericht über das Ökologie-Seminar ‚Leben in der Stadt,‘” Öko-Kreis Berlin-Friedrichsfelde, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



identify implications on [their] health and quality of life.” Though they argued that “it is perhaps prejudiced to reduce all psychological illnesses to the [new construction styles],” but they saw the lack of greenspace in them as a serious problem.<sup>20</sup> Their vision of a more environmentally friendly future involved decreasing pollution, but also greening neighborhoods, streets and interior courtyards. That the participants identified such issues as being part of an *environmental* critique of life in East Berlin highlighted the intersection of city and environment, not strictly delineating between natural and built surroundings. The group concluded that the Eco-Seminars embraced a broad definition of ecology, such that “everything is related to everything else, so that we establish a sense of responsibility and creativity that does not end at our doorstep.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, the participant connected local projects to a wider sense of responsibility for the world.

The first seminar was deemed a success, and a little over a year later, the Friedrichsfelde group held its second one. This time, the participants continued their discussion of urban ecology, but rather than inviting all interested individuals, as they had the first year, they limited it to one or two representatives per group.” The point of limiting the number of participants was to “make the organization simpler and to guarantee a high degree of efficiency.”<sup>22</sup> With fewer participants, but still representing different groups, the seminar settled on five ways to further environmental causes in the GDR: practical work such as maintaining conservation areas and trees; to attempt to trust state authorities and institutions and enter into dialogue with them; to work together with the Cultural League, the GNU, the State Environmental Inspections with new

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. This report also reflects the expanding number of newly built communities in places like Hellersdorf, Hohenschönhausen, and Marzahn that efficiently housed thousands of people but lacked green spaces. Tropes of alienation in the Europe environment, of course, dated back to the late nineteenth century and tied into the *Lebensreform* movement. For a brief description, see Chapter One.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> RHG/SWV 02/1, “Liebe Umweltfreunde, ” 1984, Berliner Ökologie Seminar, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

enthusiasm and to bring their way of thinking to these organizations; to talk about and inform people about problems not just in the Church, but in the youth club, National Front, and in neighborhoods; finally, to continue their own education on the literature and observation of nature in order to debate competently.<sup>23</sup> These conclusions highlighted at once the participants' suspicion of the party-state and their desire to improve the environment through whatever means.

The Berlin Lichtenberg and Friedrichsfelde groups later joined forces to establish a larger, more effective institution in the movement, the *Umweltbibliothek* (Environmental Library, UB). But in the mid-1980s, they clearly illustrated trends of the early environmental movement in Berlin. The groups were strongly rooted in the peace movement, but with an emphasis on practical responses to life in a large, polluted city. A library permitted visitors to gain access to information while also appearing nonthreatening, because it did not attract large crowds or demonstrations. Additionally, while still hoping to improve conditions from within, there was a deep-seated distrust of the party-state. In turn, this stance made them more explicitly oppositional than other groups outside of the capital, where there the legacy of repression from the peace movement was not as strong.

#### *Leipzig/ Halle*

In Leipzig-Halle area, the movement took on a different form than in Berlin. The groups, especially the Working Group on Environmental Protection (AGU) in Leipzig and the Christian Environmental Seminar Rötha (CUR), exemplify the tenor of the movement in that region. While the groups in Berlin were at times more antagonistic toward the party-state, and even the parishes that housed them, these two groups collaborated more closely with local officials and maintained a better relationship with the Church. In part, this cooperation was related to the

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<sup>23</sup> RHG/ SWV 02/01, "Aufruf! Aufruf!!!" undated, Berliner Ökologie Seminar, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

groups' emphasis on the severity of local problems stemming from open-pit mining and being a major industrial center for the country. Secondly, especially the AGU was more theologically minded and less directly oppositional than its counterparts in Berlin.

The AGU, hosted at the Youth Pastoral Office in Leipzig, was founded in 1981 in close collaboration with the KFH and sought to work within the existing political structures to improve local conditions.<sup>24</sup> Like other groups, the AGU hosted small events, such as tree planting campaigns and informational evenings, and participated in the newly founded GNU.<sup>25</sup> But, at the same time, they began "searching for new ways and methods," because they believed that "demands for an intact environment will only lead to meaningful reforms if it becomes a domestic security issue."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, given the party-state's restrictions on environmental data and censorship of the press, the group's goal was to raise environmental consciousness through the Church. They hoped to ultimately move beyond the confines of the Church, but not as explicitly as the groups in Berlin.

Interestingly, in a letter to a Greenpeace activist in Hamburg in 1984, two of the group's members enlightened western activists on limitations with which they were unfamiliar. The East Germans explained that if the Greenpeace activists sent a letter with their logo on it, it could "be immediately opened [by the authorities]."<sup>27</sup> In the letter, they further described the difficulties of raising public awareness about environmental issues, when they were not permitted to hang up public bulletins [*Wandzeitungen*] or photos of polluted rivers or dying forest in public, nor could

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<sup>24</sup> "Christliches Umweltseminar Rötha," accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/sammlung/Zusatz.php?w=w00174>.

<sup>25</sup> 22.14, Letter to Wolfgang Lohbeck, Hamburg (Greenpeace member), December 18, 1984, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

they publish materials openly to inform citizens about the conditions.<sup>28</sup> These complications limited their ability to effect change, but also led them to work within the system, such as participating in the GNU, rather than fighting against the system. In explaining these challenges, the letter's authors illustrated some of the differences in the evolution of an environmental movement in a dictatorship versus a liberal democracy, even as they sought information and materials from the other system.

This mentality of working within—or parallel to—the system paired well with the KFH, with whom AGU had close contact. Although this position has led some scholars, such as historian Mary Fulbrook, to disregard the effectiveness of the KFH and related groups, it actually shows the many avenues activists pursued in order to improve conditions.<sup>29</sup> By activists firmly planted within the Church, the AGU's members pushed leadership to be more proactive in addressing environmental issues, and not just in specific circles. In a 1984 letter to members of the Protestant Church's synod, members of the AGU expressed gratitude that the synod would pass a formal resolution to support environmental protection, as it did on September 25, 1984. The AGU, along with a number of other groups, had convened at the KFH in Wittenberg over a year before to prepare materials for the synod's review. The “young Christians” of the AGU, through the KFH, not only attempted to gain more members at the grassroots level, but also by expanding institutional support for their efforts.<sup>30</sup> Although they worked within the system, they pushed the status quo in multiple ways, such as engaging with a Church structure that was at times old-fashioned and slow to embrace new causes.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 162.

<sup>30</sup> DO 4/802, Letter from AGU to Herr Krause of the Bundessynod, September 1984, Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.

Yet the AGU also stated it was “disappointed that our offers to introduce and explain the topic [at the synod] had not been accepted.”<sup>31</sup> When it came time to present that information to the Church more broadly, the synod marginalized the groups, reducing them to send politely frustrated letters explaining their own goals. In laying out seven practical and theological “hopes and wishes,” the AGU illustrated how it viewed the intersection of Christianity and environmentalism. The members requested the synod’s “support of our engagement,” “similar to [it] and the KKL’s support of the “Peace Decade” movement.<sup>32</sup> The AGU members then concluded by saying that they would be “available for conversations on edges of the synod.”<sup>33</sup> In the end, synod’s resolution reflected many of the AGU’s sentiments, but in more general and diplomatic terms. The AGU pushed for “alterative suggestions that are practical for every person in our country” to change attitudes toward consumption, while the synod called for “a simpler lifestyle, and a careful management of material goods.”<sup>34</sup> These differences highlight both the opportunities and limitations of working within the Church and not directly challenging the system.

In Rötha, under the leadership of Pastor Christian Steinbach, the CUR concentrated its efforts on the obvious problems stemming from the coal mining and refining that enveloped it. The group’s first annual environmental church service took place in 1983 in the nearby village of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. The “Peace Decade,” or *Friedensdekade*, was an integral part of the peace movement in the GDR in the early 1980s and was connected to the larger European peace movement, especially in West Germany. Initially, it had been seen as a single event or series of events, but became an integral part of the peace movement. For more on the “Peace Decade,” see Anke Silomon, “*Schwerter zu Pflugscharen*” und die DDR: *Die Friedensarbeit der evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR im Rahmen der Friedensdekaden 1980 bis 1982* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. RHG/KFH 07, “Beschuß der Synode des Bundes zum Thema ‘Christliche Verantwortung für die Schöpfung’ vom 25. September 1984,” Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

Mölbis, in the long shadow of the Espenhain beneficiation plant. The motto for that year's event was "Our Future has already begun in Mölbis," referring to the "filth, stench, alcoholism, and deep and debilitating resignation" that they believed characterized life in—and the future of—that village.<sup>35</sup> With an emphasis on information sharing during an exhibition before the service, the organizers even invited members of the county council, including from the interior department.<sup>36</sup> Their message to the local authorities, and population more generally, was that "We are living off of an antiquated fuel, at the cost of the future."<sup>37</sup> While working within the Church, the CUR's emphasis was less on the theological dimension of the environmental degradation, but on the physical and psychological toll it took on the people most affected by it.

For the CUR and East Germans living in this region, there were two significant outcomes from this first environmental service. The first was that they developed a critique of the existing social order, wondering if socialism in the GDR and other socialist countries would be able to "meet the global question of human survival." They argued that ultimately the SED would either have to restructure itself or that economic pressures would force transformation.<sup>38</sup> The SED's inability to end its dependence on a low-grade coal that poisoned its own people exemplified what was broken within the larger system. The CUR's message challenged the SED's ability to improve local conditions, much less take on international environmental questions.

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<sup>35</sup> RGH/TH 02/03, "Eine Mark für Espenhain oder Ein Protest bekommt Flügel," Kohle- und Bergbau, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>36</sup> "Mölbis wird zum Thema," CUR Kulturbüro, accessed February 25, 2015, [http://www.cur-kulturbuero.de/start.php?content=ges\\_01](http://www.cur-kulturbuero.de/start.php?content=ges_01).

<sup>37</sup> RGH/TH 02/03, "Eine Mark für Espenhain oder Ein Protest bekommt Flügel," Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

On a practical level, the CUR began to spread information about their living conditions, inspiring others to help them in whatever way they could. In December 1983, members from the group attended a church conference in Dresden. Their stories so moved other attendees that they organized a new initiative. According to one participant, after hearing how many children suffered from respiratory illnesses, a number of women “spontaneously invited the children from Mölbis” to spend their school vacations with them.<sup>39</sup> Hosted by the Dresden Ecological Working Group, for the next several years, children from Mölbis were sent to the mountainous Erzgebirge to enjoy fresh air and a respite from their lives at home. The organizers argued that children from the area south of Leipzig had to “grow up surrounded by the damaging effects of a polluted environment and were particularly endangered, because these influences could be detrimental to their development.”<sup>40</sup> In the first year of the program, thirty children from the Leipzig area were sent to the Erzgebirge, and by 1985, they had arranged for one hundred such exchanges.<sup>41</sup>

These connections between the CUR and Dresden’s Ecological Working Group illustrated the grassroots support for those who lived in devastated areas and the networking of groups within the GDR. Through relationships established at the Dresden Church Conference, two groups were able to help each other. Moreover, Church publications, such as the KFH’s *Briefe*, drummed up further interest and financial support for these undertakings.<sup>42</sup> The frustration was not unlike what those in Berlin were expressing, but working through the Church

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<sup>39</sup> “Mölbis wird zum Thema,” CUR Kulturbüro, accessed February 25, 2015, [http://www.cur-kulturbuero.de/start.php?content=ges\\_01](http://www.cur-kulturbuero.de/start.php?content=ges_01).

<sup>40</sup> RHG/AB 07, “Saubere Luft für Ferienkinder: Aktion der ökologischen Arbeitskreises der Dresdner Kirchenbezirke,” undated, Personalbestand Annette Beleites, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

set a more restrained tone and a different means of expressing that discontent with the party-state.

*Cottbus and Lusatia: The Region that Did Not Fight Back*

It might seem at first glance, that wherever pollution was worst that was where environmental groups appeared first. Berlin and Leipzig/Halle were both major industrial centers with high levels of pollution. Yet this was not entirely the case. The region surrounding Cottbus and stretching down to the corner of the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Poland, known as Lusatia, was also terribly polluted thanks to open pit mining and coal refining. Here, however, an organized movement struggled to get off the ground. With the uneasy presence of an ethnic minority, the absence of a major metropolitan center, and close ties to the mining industry, the Lusatian case illustrates how environmental devastation did not necessarily equate with social protest. Only slowly in the late 1980s did a movement, now appropriated by the Sorbian minority, garner much local support.

As one of the GDR's district capitals and a center of the coal-mining industry, Cottbus took on new regional meaning in the postwar years. A fairly small city of only about 38,000 residents in 1945, it grew to 138,000 in 1989. In large part this expansion was because of the SED's emphasis on open-pit coal mining in the region.<sup>43</sup> After the oil crises of the 1970s when the Soviet Union curbed energy exports to the GDR, the SED redoubled its lignite mining efforts. Multiple reports from the MfUW acknowledged Cottbus, along with Leipzig, Halle, and Berlin, was among the most polluted districts in the country. In 1979, a report concluded that "Berlin, and the highly industrialized districts of Halle, Leipzig, Cottbus, Dresden, and Karl-Marx-Stadt made up 32 percent of the GDR's area, but fifty-four percent of the population, and

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<sup>43</sup> Volkszählungsergebnis, Cottbus im 35. Jahr der DDR - Zahlen & Fakten, Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik.



two thirds of the industrial production.”<sup>44</sup> While smaller in terms of population, Cottbus’s production (and pollution) was on par with some of the most industrialized parts of the country.

The SED and MfUW leaders treated Lusatia, and its regional city, Cottbus, similarly to the Leipzig-Halle region, planning ways to lower air pollution levels as well as repurposing former open-pit mines. Like in the other two districts, air pollution—laden with heavy metals and sulfur-dioxide—was a major source of concern for officials.<sup>45</sup> Although coal seams in Lusatia tend to contain lower levels of sulfur, and produced lower sulfur-dioxide emissions when burned, the levels released into the air were still problematic.<sup>46</sup> Central officials at the MfUW planned for new electro-filters for the three regions, in order to “improve the air quality conditions.”<sup>47</sup> At the same time, they intended to convert abandoned open-pit mines into reservoirs and lakes for swimming, thereby improving local conditions and quality of life. What officials were more hesitant to admit was that by 1981 over twenty percent of the district’s area (some 666 square miles) was either already devoted to mining or held in reserve for that purpose.<sup>48</sup>

In order to accommodate the expansion of lignite mining, especially in the wake of the oil crises, Lusatian villages were forced off of land that could be used for coal mining. Between

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<sup>44</sup> DK 5/5219, “Bericht über Entwicklung des Umweltschutzes,” Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, Entwicklung des Umweltschutzes, 1978-79, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>45</sup> DK 5/5111, “Ergebnisse und Probleme im Umweltschutz in der DDR,” Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, Ergebnisse und Probleme der Umweltschutz, 1984, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>46</sup> RHG/Th 02/08, “Aus: „Umwelt“, 4/83, Dr. Cord Schwartau, Umweltschutz in der DDR. Zunehmende Luftverschmutzung durch Renaissance der Braunkohle? Fassung des DIW Wochenberichte 4/1983,” Luftverschmutzung, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>47</sup> DK 5/5219, “Bericht über Entwicklung des Umweltschutzes,” Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, Entwicklung des Umweltschutzes, 1978-79, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>48</sup> RHG/Ki 18/01, “Fakten und Zahlen zur DDR-Braunkohlenpolitik,” undated, Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

1945 and 1989, some 13,000 villagers were evacuated from the area, with most of the “resettlements” occurring after 1974.<sup>49</sup> The most affected areas tended to be in Lower Lusatia, where the coal seams were easier to access, but by the 1980s, officials were looking to expand even further. The drive to fuel the highly industrialized economy led engineers and politicians to look for ever less convenient seams. One particularly rich but problematic seam—the so-called *Neißepfeiler*—ran directly under Zittau in Upper Lusatia, stretching from the large open-pit mine in Bogatynia, Poland, into the GDR and even a small section of Czechoslovakia. By the mid-1980s, engineers were planning to remove the entire town of Zittau, and its roughly forty thousand residents, in order to access it.<sup>50</sup> Open pit mining, the removal—or potential removal—of local residents, and the air pollution from local power plants all resulted in serious environmental issues in Lusatia.

Yet despite dire conditions in Lusatia, a movement was slow to take root.<sup>51</sup> Removed from major urban centers with an opposition, like Berlin, Lusatia was largely rural and geographically isolated. Notably, Upper Lusatia, which ranges from Cottbus south and east towards the Polish and Czech borders, fell into the area known as the “Valley of the Clueless” (*Tal der Ahnungslosen*), which did not receive western radio or television signals. Nor were there any universities (just one technical college), which often brought together the younger generation

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<sup>49</sup> Cora Granata, “The Cold War Politics of Cultural Minorities: Jews and Sorbs in the German Democratic Republic, 1976-1989,” *German History*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 75.

<sup>50</sup> Dieter Liebig, “Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung: Anspruch und Wirklichkeit: Die Energie- und Umweltpolitik in der DDR am Beispiel des Energieträgers Braunkohle” (Großhennersdorf: Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf, e.V., 2009), 98. Protests against these plans became a major rallying point in the fall of 1989 as the SED-system was collapsing.

<sup>51</sup> In fact, tensions between working class miners and environmental activists, primarily from Berlin and the West, are still prevalent today. As recently as last summer, when the government of Brandenburg decided to continue mining in the Cottbus area, locals were in favor of it while outsiders with “green” interests protested the decision. See, for example, “Brandenburg entscheidet heute über Tagebau Welzow-Süd” and “‘Unsere Kohle reicht noch für ein paar Jahrzehnte’: Vattenfall-Vorstand Uwe Grosser über kurze Fahrzeiten, lange Leitungen und einen Bunsch an die nächste Generation,” *Sächsische Zeitung*, June 3, 2014.

who had been involved in the peace movement, were discontented with the political situation, and were looking for policy if not system change. In contrast to Leipzig, the Church did not take an especially active role in environmental protest. Without high concentrations of students, the legacy of the peace movement, or an active Church leadership, the movement gained little ground.

When environmental concerns did become more vocalized in the 1980s, Lusatia's unique history and demographics shaped the character of the movement. The Sorbian minority living there, which totals about sixty thousand individuals today, had been viewed as a privileged minority since the GDR's early years, but it still remained on the edges. Many Sorbs, who were typically bilingual, had lost interest in their minority identity and moved away from the region.<sup>52</sup> For those who stayed, however, they began to invoke their Sorbian minority status as a critique against the regime. For example, well-known authors from Lusatia criticized the regime for not protecting the community's needs and destroying the landscape with open pit mines. Thus, they charged that the SED's policies had been carried out at the expense of this supposedly protected cultural minority.<sup>53</sup>

Prominent Sorbian author, Jurij Koch highlighted these problems at the Tenth Writers' Congress in 1987, when he criticized the GDR's expansion of open pit mining in Lusatia. He expressed the concern saying, "With every bit of warmth we take from the earth, in order to thoughtlessly waste it, it becomes colder around us." He further criticized how the SED attempted to sell its system and hide its shortcomings: "We displace our uncomfortable, quiet

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<sup>52</sup> Cora Granata, "The Cold War Politics of Cultural Minorities: Jews and Sorbs in the German Democratic Republic, 1976-1989," *German History*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 74.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 75. John Andrew Reaves, "The Development of an Ecologically Critical Sorbian Literature as a Consequence of the German Democratic Republic's Dependence on Soft Coal as an Energy Source," Dissertation, University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1996.

fears with the usual, comfortable optimism, because under socialist conditions the losses must be held at bay. But they can't be ignored."<sup>54</sup> Koch then called for "alternative solutions," such as solar energy, in order to reduce burden that fossil fuels' pollution placed on the population. While not specifically citing Lusatia here, his graphic descriptions of "gigantic machines" digging into the earth were clearly recognizable to anyone who had spent time in the GDR's coal mining region.

Despite high levels of pollution, not everywhere developed an environmental critique or movement at the same pace. Often overlooked in the literature as being backward or not acting in their own best interest, residents' expression of concerns in this region was shaped by the region's social and political makeup. Coalmining and textiles had been two of the area's largest industries since the nineteenth century, but under the SED, coalmining became much more prominent, and lucrative.<sup>55</sup> To this day, despite continued open pit mining, an indigenous green movement in Lusatia remains limited and support for mining high. But the movement's lack of resonance illustrates the variety of responses—or non-responses—to challenges of lignite mining in the GDR. It took not only serious pollution, but also a specific socio-political constellation for an environmental movement to gain traction.

### **Renewed Party-State Efforts and their Limits**

Even as protest housed in the Protestant Church grew in the 1980s, the party-state continued to pursue environmental policies on a rhetorical, and to a lesser extent practical, level. The SED acknowledged the seriousness of the situation through its classification of data, but that

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<sup>54</sup> RHG/TH 02/01, cited in "Lassen sich Umweltprobleme in der DDR noch abwenden?" 1988, Umweltbewegung Allgemein, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Münzel, Conference report: "Die beiden Lausitzen. Wirtschaft, Geschichte und Industriekultur in Brandenburg und Sachsen," October 6-7, 2014, Koordinierungsstelle Sächsische Industriekultur; Berlin-Brandenburg Wirtschaftsarchiv, accessed July 21, 2015, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=5720&view=pdf>.

did not prevent the establishment and further development of related institutions and programs. Most significantly, the MfUW created a new Center for Environmental Development in 1982, and in collaboration with the Cultural League, a voluntary State Environmental Inspection in 1985. These organizations reflect the conflicted character of the SED's policies, especially as concerned scientists found it difficult to reconcile economic and political decisions with the eroding environmental conditions.

*Center for Environmental Development (ZUG)*

In 1982, the MfUW created a new, autonomous institution, the Center for Environmental Development (ZUG) to solve environmental issues in the GDR. With Comrade Hans Lütke as director, the center collected and analyzed data from five different entities within the MfUW: the meteorological service, the state hygiene inspection, the state water control, and later the state environmental inspection. According to former employee of ZUG, Uwe Zuppke, the center's tasks were to monitor pollution levels, evaluate the potential dangers for the population and the economy, and alleviate them where possible.<sup>56</sup> The highly trained scientists in this institute perennially complained of the "minimal funds for investment," but still carried out their duties to the best of their abilities, even developing new technologies for the improvement of their tasks.<sup>57</sup>

Conceived of as the scientific-technical arm of the MfUW, the center's focus was to provide expertise in order for the party leadership and Council of Ministers to make informed decisions. On paper, the purpose was spelled out as the "preparation of high level decision for the implementation of ... specific tasks regarding environmental policy as a component of the

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<sup>56</sup> Uwe Zuppke, "Aus der Tätigkeit des Zentrums für Umweltgestaltung," in *Umweltschutz in der DDR: Analysen und Zeitzeugenberichte – Band 3: Beruflicher, ehrenamtlicher und freiwilliger Umweltschutz*, eds. Hermann Behrens and Jens Hoffmann (Munich: Oekom, 2008), 73.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

SED's overarching policy."<sup>58</sup> ZUG was specifically to look at conditions and policy with a long-range perspective and to cooperate with international organizations within the Soviet bloc and beyond. These were the scientists who had been trained since the SED's investment in the environment began in the late 1960s and were in many cases, devoted to both the party-state and the environment, which at times created a conflict of interest.

One of ZUG's focuses, the development of microelectronics for the improvement of environmental conditions, illustrates how these men and women were among the SED state's technological avant-garde. Despite not investing in it heavily, the SED did develop some new technology in the mid-1980s. One priority was to build better measuring and data gathering devices.<sup>59</sup> These new tools were to be used to compile an annual report, and then, members of ZUG could recommend the best path forward for party-state leaders. These reports would naturally examine the efficacy of earlier proposals and adapt them as necessary.<sup>60</sup> ZUG officials worked most closely with the Meteorological Service and the State Hygiene Inspection, which monitored air pollution levels as well as the impact of that pollution on humans. They also set up state monitoring stations to record other data.

As a scientific center, ZUG took a leading role in the development of technological innovations to lessen the burden of pollution. ZUG particularly focused on furthering "low waste production" processes in industry, increasing reapplication of "secondary raw materials," and

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<sup>58</sup> DK 5/4595, "Stellung, Aufgaben und Struktur des Zentrums für Umweltgestaltung," 1986, Zentrum für Umweltgestaltung, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>59</sup> Zuppke, "Aus der Tätigkeit des Zentrums für Umweltgestaltung," 76.

<sup>60</sup> DK 5/5111, "Sachstandsbericht: Über die staatliche Verantwortung bei der Leitung und Planung von Aufgaben zur Reinhaltung der Luft und Vorschläge für die weitere Entwicklung," May 11, 1984, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

even “using more renewable natural resources, especially air, water, soil, and eco-systems.”<sup>61</sup> Under Lütke’s leadership, ZUG presented its recommendations to the Council of Ministers’ Advisory Committee for Environmental Protection, even offering pointed commentary on the need to have “an absolute reduction in energy consumption,” and to “more efficiently use areas of production, prioritizing landfills and waste heaps.”<sup>62</sup> They further highlighted the importance of finishing the development of economical and effective desulfurization processes for lignite. While stated in analytical and detached language, ZUG’s reports to the Council of Ministers suggested serious concerns within the center about the balance between economic and environmental consideration. Yet even explanations of how improvements could have also benefited the economy seemingly fell on deaf ears.

ZUG’s experts were also tapped to meet with independent groups, address petitions about environmental conditions, and deflect complaints in the interim. Naturally, their offices in Berlin became a site of negotiation and confrontation.<sup>63</sup> Frustrated activist Wolfgang Rüdtenklau from the Berlin-Lichtenberg group was among those invited to discuss a petition he had submitted in January 1984. Based on earlier petitions and meetings with the same officials at ZUG, Rüdtenklau and his co-signers articulated their concerns about the coal industry and its multiple repercussions on the Cottbus and Leipzig areas. Lütke and his colleagues responded to complaints with standard answers about the “application of new technology” for desulfurization. Rüdtenklau responded that “we had reported ... to our acquaintances and stumbled upon various

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<sup>61</sup> DK 500/22, “Ausgewählte Aufgaben des Planes Wissenschaft und Technik auf dem Gebiet des Umweltschutzes und der rationellen Wasserverwendung im Zeitraum 1986 bis 1990 und darüber hinaus,” November 20, 1984, H. Lütke, Beirat für Umweltschutz im Ministerrat der DDR, 1984-1986, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> RHG/B 08, Letter to Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, Lütke, January 1984, Friedens- und Umweltkreis der Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Berlin-Lichtenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

contradictions” between what ZUG officials told them and what they personally observed.<sup>64</sup>

After highlighting them, the petitioners requested another audience with ZUG officials, which was set for March of that year. These meetings often left both sides unsatisfied, as ZUG officials offered party-line answers.

Over time, the MfS questioned the loyalty of scientists in ZUG, which became a cause for concern within the leadership and the Stasi, and was, apparently, not entirely unjustified. In December 1987, a ZUG staff member in the Environmental Planning department wrote a letter to the attorney general of the GDR about the “illegal” opening and running of a heating and power plant in Berlin-Rummelsburg. Klaus-Joachim Koven, a trained lawyer and long-time member of the SED, cited recent news articles as well as the National Cultivation Law to unlawful functioning of the plant without proper desulfurization filters.<sup>65</sup> Koven voluntarily told his supervisor, Dr. Norbert Franke, about the letter, though only after he had mailed it. This chain of events forced the internal inspection to investigate the matter. Although the leader of the inspection initially determined that Koven had not betrayed classified information, he and a co-worker, Hans-Peter Becker, the MfS suspected that they undermined the “credibility of environmental policy in the GDR.”<sup>66</sup> Both came under suspicion.

Becker, in fact, had already proved questionable in his loyalty to ZUG and the SED by leaving the Party in December 1987, the same month that Koven submitted his letter to the secretary general. Becker explained his withdrawal by saying that he did not have time to fulfill

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<sup>64</sup> RHG/Th 02/06, “Eingabe: Betr.: die Waldschäden im Erzgebirge. Ihre me l. Antwort auf unsere frühere Eingabe, gegeben am 2.12.83 in Ihrem Institut,“ January 27, 1984, Waldsterben, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>65</sup> DK 5/5624, “Hausmitteilung von Inspektion an Genossen Minister Dr. Reichelt,“ January 12, 1988, Zentrum für Umweltgestaltung, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



his party responsibilities and obligations. In fact, he had been considering leaving the SED for two years. The internal investigation of Becker revealed that he “had already been critical for years and had a tendency to be one-sided and subjective in his opinions.”<sup>67</sup> More problematic for ZUG still was that he openly doubted the MfUW’s “ability to implement the SED’s environmental policy and its success.” The internal inspection revealed that “he had come to believe that the work was mostly senseless, and the GDR’s environmental policy all formalities and whitewashing.” Moreover, his frequent visits to West Berlin made him even more suspect.<sup>68</sup> Together, Koven and Becker presented a real problem for ZUG and its credibility, demonstrating that commitment to the environment was a higher priority for them than party creed.

Their actions prompted an investigation of their entire Center, not just by internal people but in cooperation with the Stasi. At the end of 1988, a report evaluated the “political-ideological situation and behavioral patterns of selected personnel at ZUG.”<sup>69</sup> Investigating personnel in Berlin, Wittenberg, and Cottbus, the assessment regarded the workers as “focused on specific tasks requiring technical expertise, but lacking a foundational knowledge of political-ideological...properties.” Additionally, the majority of co-workers were found to be prone to “rumors, conjecture, speculation, and unrealistic ideas, which were partially propagated in ZUG itself.” The report then analyzed the contributions of fourteen co-workers, including secretaries and language interpreters. Even the department head, Dr. Egon Seidel, who “because of his important and strictly party-line mentality is demonized in Church circles,” was subject to this

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> DK 5/5624, “Einschätzung zur aktuellen politisch-ideologischen Lage und zu Verhaltensweisen ausgewählter Kader des ZUG,” November 28, 1988, Zentrum für Umweltgestaltung, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

investigation.<sup>70</sup> The paranoia regarding the scientists was so widespread that it ignored the expertise and understanding of structural issues they were trained to research.

Though the report concluded that any security threats had been avoided, it was concerned with how many of these specialists had international contacts. The colleague in charge of international relations was deemed to be “ready to compromise on ideology” and was “very influenced by ideological developments in the Soviet Union and the successes of western environmentalism.”<sup>71</sup> Another problematic colleague worked on planning and had participated in the United Nations Environment Program in 1986-7. He had become involved with a Mexican woman and only broke off contact with her when pressured to do so.<sup>72</sup> Apparently, his disillusionment reached a breaking point in April 1989, when he did just what security forces feared. After attending an international fair on environmental technology in Düsseldorf in April 1989, he simply decided not to return to the GDR. All efforts to convince him otherwise were met with “Sometimes you just have to make a decision.”<sup>73</sup> The Stasi then proceeded to see if they could win him back, or at the very least minimize any negative effects, though they did not rule out the question of treason.

The internal and external investigations of ZUG and its personnel highlight the tension between scientists who wished to improve environmental conditions and the repressive political system in which they functioned. The ZUG scientists were trained and deeply engaged in developing new regulation and technology, yet given the SED’s consistent prioritization of the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> MfS/HA XVIII 27513, “HINWEIS über die Nichtrückkehr eines Abteilungsleiters des MUW von einer Dienstreise in die BRD,” April 1989, Hauptabteilung XVIII, Absicherung der Volkswirtschaft, BStU.

economy over the environment, they became the malcontents that the Stasi feared they had been from the beginning. In turn, these scientists used what opportunities they had to either illegally leave the GDR or to express their discontent with the existing political structures. Much of the data they collected would later constitute the bulk of the condemnatory 1990 “Environmental Report of the GDR.”<sup>74</sup>

### *Staatliche Umweltinspektion*

The MfUW also created the *Staatliche Umweltinspektion* (state environmental inspection, SU). It offered a bottom-up way for the ministry to collect information about local conditions and specific problems without creating more jobs or expanding the MfUW’s budget. The inspection was professionalized on the national level, but relied on approved volunteers at the district level and below.<sup>75</sup> In recruiting inspectors, however, the ministry discovered challenges in determining who was loyal enough to have access to the data. By examining the ideal inspector as well as those who were rejected, a contestation over access to participation and knowledge illuminates the intersection of party, scientist, and popular discontent.

The MfUW envisioned its volunteer inspectors to be loyal scientists with a passion for nature, who willingly participated in organizations like the GNU in their free time but highly trained at the same time. To tap voluntary inspectors, in fact, the MfUW coordinated with district-level GNU chapters to select members for the task, but had very specific guidelines for what an inspector should look like. He or she must “be eighteen years of ages and of qualified personality and training.” Specifically, the inspector must be “educated in a technical or scientific field and have knowledge of economics.” Finally, the GNU was to recommend

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<sup>74</sup> *Umweltbericht der DDR: Information zur Analyse der Umweltbedingungen in der DDR und zu weiteren Maßnahmen* (West Berlin, Germany: Institut für Umweltschutz, 1990).

<sup>75</sup> DY 27/6113, “Entwurf: Anordnung: Über die Zulassung und Tätigkeit ehrenamtlicher Inspektoren der Staatlichen Umweltinspektion bei den Räten der Bezirke vom \_\_\_\_\_,” February 1987, Abteilung Natur und Umwelt, Kulturbund, BArch-SAPMO.

volunteers from their ranks, so that it could control who had access to the information.<sup>76</sup> Even while being dependent on not-so-voluntary volunteers, the sensitive character of the data required specific guidelines about who could become one. Naturally, the district council could revoke an inspector's badge, if he or she became a "liability to the proper measuring of data" or "unsatisfactorily fulfilled the assigned tasks."<sup>77</sup> The district level government and the GNU coordinated with one another to collect the information they sought without revealing it to the general public.

The GNU's chore of finding and vetting volunteers became even more critical when environmental activists like doctor and GNU member Christian Hönemann became involved. With his technical knowledge and standing in the community, he passed muster to become an inspector.<sup>78</sup> Yet Hönemann was also an active participant in the *Christliche Umweltseminar Rötha* (CUR), which was known for being critical of the party-state and the main organizer of the campaign, "A Mark for Espenhain." Additionally, he was well-versed in the complications surrounding open-pit mining, the combustion of lignite, and their health complications.<sup>79</sup> In cases like Hönemann's, traditional dichotomies of "state" and "opposition" broke down, because not only was there communication between them, but in fact could be represented in the same person. Much to the Stasi's chagrin, concerned individuals could not simply be written off as dangerous elements, but neither were they unthinkingly in step with the SED as they pushed for reforms.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> 39.6.01, "Ehrenamtlicher Inspekteur der Staatlichen Umweltinspektion, 7.3.1988," Personalbestand Christian Hönemann, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

<sup>79</sup> 39.6.16, "Informationsmaterial," and "Braunkohlenverarbeitung und Umweltschutz," 1988, Personalbestand Christian Hönemann, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

In nearby Halle, local bureaucrat, Dr. Neuhofer, discovered that young people and students caused confusion for the party-state and tested its tolerance when they joined both official and independent efforts. When a professional member of the State Environmental Inspection met with student in 1989, they criticized the lack of information, called for better waste disposal, and reduction of noise pollution. While Dr. Neuhofer tried to emphasize successes, such as a reduction in chlorine emissions in Bitterfeld between 1971 and 1987, the continuing problems could not be overlooked.<sup>80</sup> He tried to emphasize the need for involvement, too, and tried to recruit new environmental inspectors, even conceding his “willingness to work with all Church environmental circles as long as their work was ‘clean,’” meaning it was not threatening to the regime.<sup>81</sup> Tensions between the state, including the state inspection, and Christian environmental groups, but these interactions reflected the numerous and complicated ways East Germans found ways of engaging with environmental problems.

Official environmental protection remained crucial in terms of monitoring pollution levels for the functioning of the economy, even though it was not always prioritized at the central level. Through the founding of new institutions and centers after 1982, the MfUW tried collect data and improve the situation where it could, even as its scientists came under suspicion from other party-state organs. In part, this suspiciousness became further ingrained in the SED system, because it could not clearly distinguish between the “good” and the “bad” environmentalists. The social and political constellation around environmental protection and protest did not always lend itself to strict dichotomies, making the system insecure and the surveillance apparatus ever more paranoid.

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<sup>80</sup> A 3.18 Nr. 148, Memo “Staatliche Umweltschutzinspektion Halle,” Stadtarchiv Halle.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

## **The World Beyond**

As politics in the GDR staled, changes in neighboring countries created a shift in the world around it that increased pressure on the GDR. To the West, the Green Party in West Germany was staking its territory as a player on the federal level, systematically developing domestic and foreign policy in a way it had not previously. To the East, two major and interrelated changes transformed the Soviet bloc. First, Polish protest movements reemerged after Martial Law stronger and more organized. Second, and relatedly, protest in Poland and other parts of the Eastern bloc could reemerge with the installation of a new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. With these transformations afoot, environmental protest in the GDR had new sources of inspiration, even as the domestic situation appeared to have stagnated.

### *West Germany and the Greens*

In March 1983, the Green Party claimed 5.6 percent of the vote, and accordingly entered the federal parliament. Historian Frank Uekötter has described the success looking more like an accident than anything else, calling the new party an “assembly point for divergent political currents.”<sup>82</sup> As such, the party had no clear stance on the GDR, much less on environmental activities in the GDR. A few figures, such as Petra Kelly, had extensive dealing with the East, but they did not necessarily focus on environmental concerns. Only a handful, such as Wilhelm Knabe, truly became engaged with them, connecting with independent, East German environmental circles and official organizations. Thus, while in some ways serving as a model for East Germany, the Green Party did not provide unified or coherent aid to its eastern neighbors. Ultimately, though, its very existence and intermittent support changed how the SED had to engage with environmental concerns.

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<sup>82</sup> Frank Uekötter, *The Greenest Nation? A New History of German Environmentalism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), 116.

Established as a party in 1980, the Greens faced a difficult transition from protest movement to structured organization, amidst much media attention. The green movement had already splintered once around the time the party was founded, with the conservative wing divorcing itself from the more leftist faction. But even after that, it was little more than an amalgamation of ideas and groups. Even the four basic tenets of the Green Party—social justice, ecological wisdom, grassroots democracy, and nonviolence—left a lot of room for contention and disagreement. Among the most divisive issues of the 1980s was whether or not the Green Party, now in parliament, would become part of or even seek out coalitions with other parties. This divide between *Realos* (realists) and *Fundis* (fundamentalists) left marks on the party well into the 2000s.<sup>83</sup> As the Greens transitioned from protestors to politicians, the way forward on a variety of policy issues, including the GDR, remained unclear.

For many Green politicians, the GDR—much less semi-independent social movements within it—was unfamiliar and perhaps unimportant. Domestic issues dominated the Greens’ discussions on the federal level and the party, not unlike the green movement itself, was firmly westward-looking.<sup>84</sup> For others, leftist political positions made them perhaps sympathetic to the SED project and were therefore hesitant to openly criticize the GDR. Party members like Lothar Probst and Jürgen Schnappertz pushed for a transformation from “Germany policy” to “German-German relations,” in an attempt to acknowledge the political stability of the East-West divide. They also viewed Green policies towards the GDR as an effort to democratize it through foreign

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 116-117. Horst Mewes, “A Brief History of the German Green Party,” in *The German Greens: Paradox between Movement & Party*, eds. Margit Mayer and John Ely (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 30.

<sup>84</sup> In reading documents from the Green Party Archive, there is a dearth of information about the GDR in general, but specifically regarding environmental questions.

policy.<sup>85</sup> On the whole, though, these efforts were not at the heart of the Greens' agenda, and were often marginalized.

Interestingly, some of the Greens most outspoken leaders, such as Petra Kelly, were very engaged in East German issues, but did not especially prioritize the environment. Becoming active in the early 1980s peace movement, she became a hub of contact between East German dissidents and the Greens. She became involved in the signing of "personal peace treaties," in which East and West Germans individually swore not to fight each other. In 1983, on a visit to the GDR, Kelly and a delegation of Greens even tried to commit GDR leader, Erich Honecker, to signing such a treaty.<sup>86</sup> He declined. Regardless, Kelly's efforts reflected the tone of the Greens' relationship to the GDR. On the one hand, it reflected the playful and unconventional methods learned in the movement, but on the other hand, also lacked a clear direction or goal. Kelly herself continued to use the contacts established in this period and remained a supporter of peace and dissident circles in the GDR throughout the 1980s. Despite this engagement with feminist and peace groups and personal friendship with many of their members, she did not as obviously engage with the environmental movement.

The West German Green Party the most openly interested and involved in environmental issues in East Germany was parliamentarian and trained ecologist, Wilhelm Knabe. Born in 1923 in Saxony, Knabe received his higher education in the East German system. He completed a doctorate in agriculture at the Humboldt University in 1957 before fleeing with his family to West Germany in 1959.<sup>87</sup> Before becoming involved in Green Party politics, he worked at a

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<sup>85</sup> B II 1/1766, "Entwurf eines Grundsatzpapiers: Ansätze und Perspektiven Grüner Politik in den deutsch-deutschen Beziehungen," 1983-1984, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>86</sup> A 077, "Presse Berichte und Zeitungs-/Zeitschriftenartikel zu DDR und Besuch der Grünen 31.10/1.11.1983," Petra-Kelly-Archiv, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>87</sup> Hermann Behrens and Jens Hoffmann, eds, *Umweltschutz in der DDR, Band 2* (Munich: Oekom, 2008), 369.



variety of ecological and forestry institutes, such as the Institute for World Forestry in Reinbek bei Hamburg and the Provincial Institute for Ecology in Essen. In the late 1970s, he became involved in green politics before the party was established, participating in local and provincial green lists, despite being roughly a generation older than many of his fellow Greens. Over the course of the 1980s, as a spokesperson for the party and later a member parliament, Knabe had not only the scientific training but the political clout to tackle official and independent East German environmental concerns.<sup>88</sup>

In the 1980s, he made numerous trips back to the country he had fled, visiting independent and official environmentalists. The first of these visits came in October 1983, when Knabe and two others visited for two days. In official meetings, Knabe and Reichelt sparred over the role of the environment in modern society. Whereas Reichelt emphasized the “rational use of water, of which the GDR has too little,” Knabe explained that the Greens “view humans as being in a partnership with nature, not as an exploitative resource.”<sup>89</sup> Knabe’s report from the visit noted their surprise over “great efforts to reclaim used materials,” which contrasted with Reichelt’s refusal to recognize the issue of acid rain. As the report noted, the GDR’s warning to “not dramatize” the situation, “sounded like a statement from West German industries,” and that the GDR was not “fighting the causes [of the acid rain] energetically or quickly enough.” The Greens also expressed frustration over the official East German press release following the meeting, because “the content of the Greens’ positions were not described [and] the call for more

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> B II 1/1766, “Kontaktaufnahme zu Umweltfragen, von Wilhelm Knabe, Sprecher im Bundestagsfraktion der GRÜNEN,” undated, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

citizen participation was interpreted as a provocation.”<sup>90</sup> This meeting set the tone for future ones between Greens and GDR environmental policymakers.

For Knabe and other Greens, the only reasonable solution was to exhibit more interest in the independent movement. Already on that October 1983 visit, Knabe and his delegation met with Gensichen from the KFH in Wittenberg, too. Although the Greens were not as familiar with the “theological foundations of Christian environmental engagement,” they found numerous points of agreement, such as the seriousness of the pollution levels, and “the need to change [our] lifestyles.”<sup>91</sup> These less formal discussions proved more productive, and Knabe took the lead in developing contacts with a growing number of Church and independent environmentalists, including Hans Gensichen at the KFH, Heino Falcke in Erfurt, the AGU in Leipzig, and others.<sup>92</sup> In preparing these lists of potential contacts, Wilhelm Knabe worked closely with his son, Hubertus, who also became involved in environmental politics in the GDR. Later, both of them came to support the openly oppositional Environmental Library in Berlin, and even provided them with an illegal printing press for their samizdat publication, *Umweltblätter*.<sup>93</sup>

To East Germans involved in these circles, the Green Party’s entrance into the West German Bundestag was a crucial and symbolic moment of triumph to a larger movement. Upon

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> A 56, “Besuch von den Grünen,” *Der Sonntag: Gemeindeblatt der Evangelisch-Lutheranisch Landeskirche Sachsens*, November 18, 1983, Personalbestand: Wilhelm Knabe, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>92</sup> A 56, “Vorschläge für Gespräche der „GRÜNEN“ mit und in der DDR,” Undated, Personalbestand: Wilhelm Knabe, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>93</sup> Numerous other Green Party members also visited the GDR officially and unofficially during the 1980s, though few with as much stature as Knabe and Kelly. Some of those deeply involved in “Deutschlandpolitik” included Elisabeth Weber, Jürgen Schnappertz, and Dirk Schneider. Schneider was later discovered to have been an unofficial collaborator for the Stasi for over ten years. See “Fürst von Kreuzberg: Agenten des DDR-Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit steuerten Grüne und westdeutsche Friedensfreunde,” *Spiegel*, November 11, 1991, Ausgabe 46, 80.

their electoral success, numerous East German dissident figures expressed their solidarity with the Greens' opposition to "militarization, [...] the poisoning of the environment, and human rights violations."<sup>94</sup> The East German letter-writers, including Ulrike Poppe and Bärbel Bohley, would become prominent oppositional figures in the coming years. They further proclaimed, "We see ourselves as being united in our methods and goals, [and] see ourselves as a growing, green tree that even begins to take root in our own country."<sup>95</sup> Therefore, the Green Party in the West served as a model and offered inspiration to a nascent green and oppositional movement in the GDR.

In the next few years, it also lent more practical support, applying pressure to the SED when environmental or oppositional figures were harassed. For example, when Udo Zeitz was imprisoned for "denigration of the German Democratic Republic" in April 1985, parliamentary spokesperson, Hannegret Hönes, released an open appeal to Erich Honecker. Proclaiming him only be concerned with "improving the quality of life in his ecologically endangered hometown," Hönes expressed dismay that such actions could be interpreted negatively by the state.<sup>96</sup> She further argued that such personal engagement with an important cause was exemplary, not punishable, and called for his release. Actions such as these provided organized and external pressure on the SED regime. While it did not necessarily change environmental conditions on the ground, Green support for East German activists changed how international networks influenced the movement in the GDR.

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<sup>94</sup> OWK 01, "An die Bundesversammlung der GRÜNEN der BRD in Hamburg," undated, Ost-West-Kontakte, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> OWK 01, "Pressemitteilung Nr. 314/85," Die GRÜNEN im Bundestag, May 30, 1985, Ost-West-Kontakte, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

More generally, the West German government—run by the center-right Christian Democrats at this point—had acknowledged the importance of environmental issues and integrated related policies. They demonstrated this new concern by exerting new pressure on Eastern bloc countries 1984 with a landmark multilateral environmental conference in Munich. Among the thirty-four countries invited were the GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. At the conference, the participants, including environmental and interior ministers, committed themselves to working on the “causes and prevention of forest and water damage from air pollution in Europe.”<sup>97</sup> The West German delegation prioritized the centrality of ecological issues for securing peace and for “maintaining an intact environment for the coming generations.” At the same time, though, the resulting resolution made concessions to communist language, leading off with the importance of the “rational use of resources in the interest of current and future generations.”<sup>98</sup> This collaboration was the first and most extensive of its kind, symbolizing recognition of the seriousness of the pollution problems.

At the conference the GDR pledged to reduce sulfur dioxide levels 30 percent by 1993, thereby committing itself to a concrete objective on an international level. In the short term, East German newspapers lauded the progressive step.<sup>99</sup> Officials viewed it as “responsible environmental policy” and as a logical extension of the 1975 Helsinki Accords.<sup>100</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>97</sup> B II 3 1172, “Multilaterale Umweltkonferenz in München, vom 24. bis 27. Juni 1984,“ Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, Nr. 79/S.697, Bonn, June 30, 1984, Bundestagsfraktion, Ökologie in Osteuropa, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung. Local weather patterns often carried pollution from industries in the southern GDR and western Czechoslovakia resulting in acid rain, or *Waldsterben*, over northern Bavaria.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> B/II/3/1172, “Hauptziele der DDR-Umweltpolitik,“ veröffentlicht in *Der Morgen (LDPD)*, Ost-Berlin, Nr. 150, June 27, 1984, Bundestagsfraktion, Ökologie in Osteuropa, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>100</sup> DO 4/803, “Deutsche Demokratische Republik: Länderbericht, vorgelegt zur Multilaterale Konferenz über Ursache und Verhinderung von Wald- und Gewässerschäden durch Luftverschmutzung in Europa, München, 24.-27. Juni 1984,“ Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.

they explained that the ability to achieve that goal depended on whether or not “other countries decisively implemented measures to lower sulfur dioxide pollution, especially neighboring countries.”<sup>101</sup> Even though the SED attempted to deflect blame for the air quality not improving, this concrete commitment became problematic for the SED, when West German and independent activists began to highlight the pledge as a sign of the party’s failed promises.<sup>102</sup>

These various but uncoordinated efforts by the West German government, Green Party members, and unaffiliated environmental activists, placed pressure on Eastern European governments. At the same time, these limited but blossoming interactions with people on the other side of the Iron Curtain exposed engaged West Germans to environmental problems in the East and coming from the East. Increased interest and connections from the West toward the East became another part of the larger, shifting framework in communism’s final years before 1989.

*Poland after Martial Law and Eastern Europe under Gorbachev*

When Martial Law was declared over on July 22, 1983, oppositional operations in Poland were functioning almost exclusively underground. Solidarity was being run covertly by a circle of women as the men were slowly released from prison.<sup>103</sup> The environmental movement, on the other hand, was not explicitly oppositional, and despite limitations, continued to function on a local and regional level. As the Communist Party in Poland loosened the reigns in that country, the Soviet system was about to change on a larger scale. In 1985, the new general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, began to enact reforms that

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<sup>101</sup> DK 5/3386, “Information über das Protokoll zur Reduzierung des Schwefeldioxidausstoßes um 30 Prozent,” undated, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>102</sup> RHG/Ki 18/02, “Auszüge aus Aufsatz von Ludwig Hoffmann: Rauchgasentschwefelung,” *Briefe*, Nr. 11, April 1985, Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>103</sup> Shana Penn, *Solidarity’s Secret: the women who defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 100-147. Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe, 1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 26.

would have wide-ranging effects on Eastern Europe. In endeavoring to “open up” the Soviet system and ease censorship, Gorbachev inadvertently released a wave that could not be contained again. In Poland, these reforms were quickly and enthusiastically implemented, much to the dismay of the hardline SED, which was suddenly more hardline than its “big brother” in the Soviet Union.

In Poland, groups such as the PKE in Kraków were able to hold national conferences again and to take on larger projects, avoiding being targeted explicitly by the communist regime and permitting it to become more effective after the end of Martial Law. As leader of the group Zygmunt Fura clearly stated, the PKE was not an explicitly oppositional group. Instead he viewed it as a group of doctors, scientists, journalists, and members of workers’ councils who all viewed environmental issues as part of Poland’s larger social and economic issues, but were always willing to cooperate with local officials. Although this created some tension between them and some Solidarność members who called PKE activists “regime-loyal,” Fura and the PKE simply viewed their task as different from the trade union’s explicitly oppositional one.<sup>104</sup> While benefitting from Solidarność in the early 1980s, the PKE avoided being targeted during and after Martial Law. Its willingness to compromise served the club well as it sought to implement environmental change in the second half of the 1980s. By the late 1980s, Fura estimated that the PKE had 3000 members across Poland, roughly 700 of who belonged to the regional branch based in Kraków.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Sabine Rosenblatt, *Der Osten ist grün? Öko-raportage aus der DDR, Sowietunion, Tschechoslowakei, Polen, Ungarn* (Hamburg, Rasch und Röhring Verlag, 1988), 14-15.

<sup>105</sup> RHG/Th 12/03, “Polski Klub Ekologiczny (PKE) – wer wir sind...,” undated, Osteuropa: Polen, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

Beginning in 1984, an explicitly environmental youth group, *Wolę być* (“I’d prefer to be”), gained popularity. Structurally, it was a semi-independent with ties to a state-sponsored scouting organization.<sup>106</sup> Like the PKE, *Wolę być* straddled the line between official and unofficial, dedicating itself to ecological issues. Unlike PKE, though, its focus on was younger generation, who may or may not have been technical experts. Through its associated publication, *Na Przełaj (Cross-Country)*, *Wolę być* declared its mission to be “a return to a balanced state and a struggle against committing new harm.” Not unlike many of the Christian groups in the GDR, it was concerned with consumption levels and desire only for “material incentives.”<sup>107</sup> With the relaxation of censorship after Martial Law’s end, a younger generation found ways to criticize the materialist mentality of the communist state, even using its own organs and organizations to do so.

A third strand of the movement, however, rejected any collaboration with the state at all. As a younger generation, not explicitly connected to *Solidarność*, the new groups escaped the political pressure and police surveillance of the better known opposition leaders like Lech Wałęsa and Adam Michnik. The most prominent example, *Wolność i Pokój (Freedom and Peace, WiP)*, was established in 1985 in Kraków and Warsaw, and later developed a strong presence in Wrocław, too. Where *Wolę być* was explicitly ecologically-minded and an offshoot of official organizations, *WiP* was only partially environmental and fully oppositional. Its main focus was conscientious objection to military service, *WiP* also wove together military concerns with questions environment over the issues of nuclear energy and waste.<sup>108</sup> Criticism for the planned

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<sup>106</sup> Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 84-87.

<sup>107</sup> “Odezwa Programowa,” 1984, quoted in Barbara Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland: A Social Movement between Regime and Opposition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 79-80.

<sup>108</sup> Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland*, 79-80.

nuclear power plant at Żarnowiec, not far from Gdańsk, dominated discussions. Nevertheless, unlike Solidarność and the PKE, WiP never sought to negotiate with the communist authorities at all, and represented generational shift from older workers and professionals.<sup>109</sup>

These groups had already gained a foothold when Gorbachev introduced the reform-minded policies in 1985, which officially permitted criticism and eased a variety of restrictions. Under the motto of perestroika (economic restructuring), glasnost (openness in the media), and democratization, restrictions were lifted across the Eastern bloc, and in Poland, they were applied with alacrity. WiP wrote openly provocative and critical publications, such as *A-Capella*, in which the members embraced the slogan of “Live and Let Live.”<sup>110</sup> They also challenged the state with openly anarchistic tendencies, and even opened an “anarchists’ library,” so people could inform themselves on the topic. Since, however, they did not have much to go on, they asked people to donate books and materials, and naturally, would not be able to compensate donors for them.<sup>111</sup> While WiP was a more radical response to the communist system than most environmentally minded groups, its protests and publications revealed the limits of the state and its willingness to suppress oppositional material.

With Gorbachev’s reforms, travel between East and West became easier, too, allowing environmental groups to come into closer contact with those in the West. In 1985, a few activists from Poland and Hungary were able to attend a Friends of the Earth (FOE) conference on acid rain in Eerbeek in the Netherlands. While there, the Eastern Europeans found it to be an “excellent opportunity, not only for meeting other participants, but for also starting contacts

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<sup>109</sup> Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 59-60.

<sup>110</sup> The "A" in *A-Capella* is the anarchist symbol.

<sup>111</sup> A Kelly 461, *A-Capella*, undated, Petra Kelly Archiv, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.



between both countries.”<sup>112</sup> At this conference, and with the aid of FOE and a handful of other western groups, the Polish and Hungarian representatives developed the idea of networking between environmental groups in Eastern Europe. Along with a few interested individuals from Czechoslovakia, activists took advantage of the eased travel regulations to meet in Hungary later in the year to found Greenway, English-language collaboration between activists in Eastern Europe. By permitting citizens of the Eastern bloc to travel abroad, new impulses from East and West transformed the possibilities for coordination and environmental action in the last years’ communist rule.<sup>113</sup>

Gorbachev’s loosening of the reins was felt across Eastern Europe and must be viewed in conjunction with a domestic crisis of confidence on the part of the ruling communist parties. As Stephen Kotkin has argued, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe was not just a matter of protest, but also of officialdom losing faith in its own system.<sup>114</sup> Not only in Poland did communist parties retreat from a hard line with alacrity, but so did Hungary, and more gradually, Czechoslovakia. Even the staunchest supporters of the system could not deny the pollution that surrounded them daily, in the air, soil, and water. Thus, the varied approach that Eastern European activists used to address degradation, using official, unofficial, and oppositional means reflected a growing consensus about the problem. More broadly, too, the environmental situation reflected the multifaceted challenges that the Soviet bloc faced in the mid-1980s, posing related questions about how to proceed.

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<sup>112</sup> B II 3/1101, “Greenway: The Youth Environmental Network in Eastern Europe,” 1985, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), xiv-xv.

## Conclusion

In the period between the classification of environment data and the explosion at Chernobyl, one could argue that the opposition remained “in a bell jar,” as historian Gareth Dale has.<sup>115</sup> Certainly, the political situation in the GDR appeared stable if uninspired in the mid-1980s. This description, however, does not encapsulate the complicated relationship between environment, society, and party-state. Environmental issues were not inherently controversial, from the state’s perspective since it claimed to promote certain protections. At the same time, security organs did not fully trust the scientists the state itself trained to protect the environment, and independent circles were becoming bolder in their demands for substantial improvements. Domestic pressure for change and paranoia about keeping it under control created an ever more unstable situation.

The larger world was changing, both in Eastern and Western Europe, such that the SED was pressured not just domestically but also internationally. International interest and pressure from West German, and more generally Western European, groups like Green Parties, Greenpeace, and Friends of the Earth raised awareness about Eastern European environmental degradation. Yet committing itself to international agreements, like reducing sulfur dioxide by 30 percent by 1990, led the SED to a public relations dilemma where East Germans could point to concrete failures. As other Eastern European countries embraced glasnost and perestroika after 1985, travel and flow of information increased across borders. Although Honecker openly rejected Gorbachev’s reforms, the SED could not stem the transformations happening outside and around the GDR.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Gareth Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945-1989* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 98.

<sup>116</sup> Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 17.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**Coming out from behind the Cloud:**  
**Independent Environmental Movements after Chernobyl, 1986-1988**

On April 26, 1986, a failure at the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, Ukraine, unleashed the largest nuclear disaster ever. Shortly after midnight, a routine test of emergency shutdown procedure in reactor number four set off an accidental explosion that ignited an uncontrollable fire. In just a five-hour period, before the worst of the fire could be contained, twenty thousand roentgens per hour were released, about roughly two hundred times standard lethal dose over the same amount of time. Levels near the reactor core reached thirty thousand roentgens, enough to kill a person in just forty-eight seconds.<sup>1</sup> In subsequent days, thirty-one people died as a direct result of burns and radiation poisoning. In the months and years that followed, four thousand deaths were directly connected to radiation poisoning, while up to three hundred fifty thousand residents removed from their homes and resettled farther from the site.<sup>2</sup>

Reactions across Western Europe were quick and fierce. In West Germany, the strong antinuclear movement whipped up a media frenzy. Images of gas-masked people with subtitles like “Fear! Flight from Kiev, Fear of Exposure across Europe” and “Death Cloud already over Denmark: Are we next?” instigated panic.<sup>3</sup> In the GDR, the SED’s continued silence only fed a

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Higginbotham, “Chernobyl 20 Years On,” *The Guardian*, March 26, 2006, accessed July 6, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/26/nuclear.russia>.

<sup>2</sup> Melanie Arndt, “Tschernobyl: Auswirkungen des Reaktorunfallas auf die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und die DDR,” (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen: Erfurt, 2006), 43. “Chernobyl: The True Scale of the Accident,” September 5, 2005, Joint News Release WHO/IAEA/UNDP.

<sup>3</sup> See *Der Spiegel* cover page from May 12, 1986, and *Bild* cover page from April 29, 1986 for examples of such titles.

crisis mentality as East Germans learned of the accident from western news sources. In the Soviet Union, the easing of press censorship under glasnost permitted official newspapers like *Pravda* to report on the disaster within a day or two and Gorbachev permitted journalists full access to the site within a week.<sup>4</sup> Yet frustration over limited information and plans to expand nuclear power across Eastern Europe catapulted discontent to a new level, as concrete charges against Soviet power offered a rallying point. How did a single disaster such as Chernobyl transform relatively marginalized environmental issues across Eastern Europe into system-threatening movements?

Immediate outrage over the attempted suppression or belittling of the event tapped into concerns about the nuclear question on a national level. These newly strengthened impulses also dovetailed with the already existing peace movement, which expanded the protest base, providing a more united front. In Poland, hitherto popular plans to build the country's first nuclear power plant outside of Gdańsk at Żarnowiec faced newfound opposition.<sup>5</sup> In the GDR, environmental groups were founded in an effort to better understand what had happened in Ukraine, such as the Environmental Library in Berlin and subsequently in other cities like Leipzig, Erfurt, and Großhennersdorf. The demand for western news sources in these libraries drove the desire for more contact. Although the GDR already had two functioning nuclear power plants, it was the construction of a third in Stendal (outside of Magdeburg) that generated renewed protest.

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<sup>4</sup> Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe, 1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 71.

<sup>55</sup> Until then, nuclear power had seemed like a cleaner alternative to the heavily sulfur infused lignite from Silesia. See Padraic Kenny, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 73.

The outrage over Chernobyl was a powerful rallying point, but it built on longer standing concern about the environment, and the redoubled efforts reflected that. In the GDR and Poland alike, the effects of heavy industry and antiquated factories drew attention. Public demonstrations over air and water pollution grew in size and frequency, highlighting the continued frustration with these problems. In the GDR, at least, expanded police surveillance and infiltration of the groups illustrated the SED's fear of them. Chernobyl provided the impetus for an internationally connected movement that was both oppositional and environmental, but long-standing systemic environmental problems provided staying power for the surge of protest.

In the GDR, though, the SED's refusal to embrace glasnost became clear in the continued difficulties the environmental movement faced. While Polish censorship was a myth by the late 1980s and officials and activists worked hand-in-hand to solve problems, the groups in the GDR remained marginalized and hounded by the Stasi. Sharing environmental concerns, groups harbored factions driven by distinct visions of activism, complicating efforts to find common goals. Uncomfortably housed under the roof of the Protestant Church, some activists had no time for religion, even though they wielded Christian rhetoric effectively when needed. Some of the Church leadership embraced environmentalism, while avoiding oppositional political views. On some level, the Stasi successfully amplified these tensions by sowing discord among the uneasily allied and limiting the potential influence of the movement. This contrast to the Polish case he activists cast the SED's more repressive character into even harsher light.

In the era of glasnost, Western Europeans were able to aid and even participate in discontent in Eastern Europe in ways they had not been able to before. After 1986, Eastern and Western Europeans communicated and visited one another on an unprecedented scale. Co-organized and Western sponsored conferences in Poland and other Eastern European countries

defied the impermeability of the Iron Curtain, weaving a new network of Eastern and Western environmental activists. Did they learn from successful green protestors in the West, or was the movement more indigenous? Moreover, Western journalists returned to Western Europe to publish books and articles on their impressions of the “unknown East.” In an era of easing censorship and growing communication, these factors undoubtedly shaped the movement, as Eastern Europeans came in greater contact with new ideas. Nevertheless, it was not a one-way transmission of knowledge. Western Greens, and the general public, had to learn about the pollution, but also the limits of political freedom and protest in the East.

The relatively lax regime in Poland threw the SED’s hardline policies into even starker relief. Its bungled handling of the accident at Chernobyl fed into larger concerns about environmental protection in the GDR. By attempting to hide the event itself, and later the extent of the damage, the SED inflamed already existing popular frustration over the classification of all data on environmental conditions in the GDR. The combination of latent frustration over local conditions with larger existential questions about Soviet style communism’s ability to provide for its citizens proved an insurmountable challenge for the SED. Although the SED seemingly remained stable and in control until the final months and weeks before the opening of the Berlin Wall, issues like these had become a strong undercurrent, eroding what was left of its legitimacy. Perhaps what remained strongest in the GDR—and in contrast to Poland—was the ruling party’s faith in its own capacity to maintain power.

As popular as environmental protest was becoming in Eastern Europe, by the end of 1988, it also faced new challenges. Demonstrations gained attention, and West Germany in particular, was listening. But, on some level, the movement had expanded as much as it could.

Without major structural change, the environmental movement could not achieve more, nor could it stop the pollution produced by the smokestack industrial complex.

### **“Żarnobyl”: Protest in Poland<sup>6</sup>**

Across Eastern Europe, developments immediately preceding Chernobyl combined with reactions to the disaster to constitute a political watershed, especially in Poland. While Gorbachev loosened the reins, Eastern European activists took full advantage of their newly established freedoms. Protests against nuclear power in Poland, which had existed before, took on a new fervor, bringing together people from across the political spectrum and tapping into other environmental discontent. As in the GDR, activists voiced concerns over coalmining. In Silesia, activists translated and shared information about air pollution and heavy metals in the drinking water to raise awareness internationally. Additionally, Greenway, the network stretching from Yugoslavia to Estonia, and conferences hosted by the PKE (*Polski Klub Ekologiczny*) in Kraków linked Eastern European protestors on an unprecedented level. Each Eastern European country’s national environmental issues slowly gained not only domestic but bloc and suprabloc attention. Combined with support from Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth International (FOE) in the West, the changes glasnost wrought swirled around the GDR and increasingly pulled it into the whirlwind. Poland’s protests grew in size and intensity after Chernobyl, bringing environmental problems into the public on an unprecedented scale.

#### *Anger over Chernobyl*

In Poland, concerns about Chernobyl sparked protests, magnifying local concerns by linking Polish dissatisfaction with parallel movements across the bloc. While Padraic Kenney has largely categorized environmental protests in communist Poland as local—which they were

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<sup>6</sup> Żarnobyl is a play on words that combines the proposed nuclear power plant in Poland, Żarnowiec, with Chernobyl.

in many ways—they were also part of a larger, shifting tectonic plate of frustration.<sup>7</sup> Initial outrage over the disaster led to numerous rallies in Wrocław, Kraków, and Warsaw, speaking to *Wolność i Pokój's* (Freedom and Peace, WiP) base, which united peace and environmental concerns into a single movement. In the first weeks of May 1986, WiP organizers staged demonstrations about Chernobyl. More concretely for Poland, though, the situation in Ukraine fed into concerns about the Communist Party's plan to build Poland's first nuclear power plant near Gdańsk at Żarnowiec. After April 26, 1986, resistance to Żarnowiec took on a new immediacy, sparking increasingly public demonstrations. It became a rallying cry for the end of communism in Poland, but Eastern Europe more generally. Chernobyl and its connection to Żarnowiec merged environmental and political concerns.

Responses to Chernobyl were immediate and firm in their conviction that communism was to blame. The Polish press did not officially make the events at Chernobyl known until after May Day celebrations, but the first vague reports were released late on April 28.<sup>8</sup> Of course, those paying attention to western media had already begun to hear about it and to raise the alarm. Although the Communist Party expressed “complete satisfaction with the way they handled Chernobyl,” (contemporary observers charged that) “the selective release of information [was] aimed at public acquiescence rather than safety.”<sup>9</sup> Protest and discontent with the regime were on the rise. In the week after Chernobyl, two new groups were formed: the Independent Ecological Commission in Lublin and the Working Group for Protection of the Environment in Wrocław. The Independent Ecological Commission declared in its founding statement that “this glaring

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<sup>7</sup> Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Radio Free Europe. 1986, *Research* 11:27 (June 27). Polish Situation Report 10/86, 13 [electronic source]. Accessed May 6, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



example of the manipulation of information and the subordination of the population's biological health to the regime's feeble aims forces us to energetic action."<sup>10</sup> At the same time the new group in Wrocław began to publish a bulletin, *Zagrożenie*, or *Threat*.

Although WiP started off as only partially environmental and fully oppositional, its focus shifted after Chernobyl in April 1986. Protests against Chernobyl built on already planned environmental initiatives, such as one on Children's Day (June 1) in Kraków. For the demonstration in Kraków, WiP became more active in planning and participating after Chernobyl. Women carried dead flowers as they left the Marian church in the center of Kraków to symbolize the death of nature. As they entered the market square, WiP posters greeted them and the group began to sing songs that had been part of the *Solidarność* movement.<sup>11</sup> The Radio Free Europe situation reports estimated that roughly 2000 Krakowians participated in the Children's Day protests. In the wake of Chernobyl, WiP began to engage more actively with the environmental aspects of its platform and more explicitly protest against pollution on many levels.

The disaster at Chernobyl especially resonated in Poland. Not only was it geographically close to Ukraine, but not a year earlier, the government had begun to build the country's first nuclear power plant, Żarnowiec, based on the same model just thirty-five miles northwest of Gdańsk. Questions about Chernobyl were immediately posed about a nuclear power plant under construction that relied on the same technology and safety systems. Although Radio Free Europe concluded, "Public opposition to Żarnowiec will probably be of little consequence, simply because construction is unlikely to make much headway soon," the question of nuclear energy

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<sup>10</sup> Cited in Radio Free Europe. 1986, *Research* 11:27 (June 27). Polish Situation Report 10/86, 17 [electronic source]. Accessed May 6, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 71-73.

remained contentious for environmental and opposition groups.<sup>12</sup> In the weeks after Chernobyl, however, three thousand Poles from the northern city of Białystok signed a petition to the Sejm demanding a stop to the construction of Żarnowiec. Frustration over the danger posed by Chernobyl fed into larger discontent with the regime, rather than dwindling away.

Groups from Wrocław, for example, continued to write to the Communist Party Presidium on the issue. In 1988, a WiP section there submitted a petition to the presidium, demanding a “move away from the use of this energy source.” Citing a variety of concerns, the letter highlighted the economic costs associated with the “construction and operation of nuclear power plants.” The petitioners also warned of the “social and environmental hazards” they posed, especially the storage of nuclear waste generated by power plants.<sup>13</sup> They were, of course, also concerned with the dangers of nuclear weapons, but even that seemed further removed in the months and years after Chernobyl. The letter concluded with a demand to “end the construction of nuclear power plants in Poland.” WiP’s transition to fully incorporating ecological—not just peace—issues became exemplified in petitions like this one.

The discussion surrounding disposing and storing nuclear waste was ever more controversial after Chernobyl. The small town of Międzyrzecz in western Poland was designated to be waste site, which somewhat unexpectedly sparked great protest in 1987 that made it a flashpoint for activism.<sup>14</sup> The government had planned to use a ten-kilometer system of bunkers and tunnels built by the Germans before World War II. Yet local farmers, scientists, and activists

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<sup>12</sup> Radio Free Europe. 1986, *Research* 11:27 (June 27). Polish Situation Report 10/86, 18 [electronic source], accessed May 6, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Różne, Letter to the Presidium on “Nuclear energy,” March 15, 1988, *Wolność i Pokój*, Oddział Życia Społecznego, Ossolineum Biblioteka.

<sup>14</sup> For a full description of the protest, see Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 74.

feared that the site was unsuitable for nuclear waste disposal. A letter from WiP to the West German Green Party explained the situation:

Basalt basement is the only place where radioactive waste can be stored at a depth of 600-1000 m. In Poland, there is no such place. The matter of carrying the radioactive waste to the USSR is under discussion (though the transport is a problem in itself). What is more, there are plans to build waste depots in Poland, in an old forest in the region of Miedzyrzecz. The danger is that the region and the ground-water may become much more polluted, especially because that region is a humid one.<sup>15</sup>

The protests highlighted the resentment of eroding environmental conditions, which were now intertwined with an immediate fear regarding the safety of nuclear power. As Padraic Kenney has argued, the mobilization in Międzyrzecz as “proportionate to population, [was] unmatched anywhere else in Poland between 1981 and 1989.”<sup>16</sup> This level of involvement reflected the depth of Poles’ concern for nuclear energy in the wake of Chernobyl.

#### *Chemists’ Scientific Club and Silesian Woes*

Protests over the nuclear question galvanized the peace and environmental movement, allowing other pressing issues to gain more public attention. Another Kraków-based group, the *Naukowe Koło Chemików* (Chemists’ Scientific Club, NKCh), coordinated with the PKE. Originally located at the Jagiellonian University but adding chapters in universities around the country, the NKCh devoted its efforts to measuring and understanding the impact of water and air pollution on the population. The group devoted special attention to Silesia and the ecological degradation there. In Lower Silesia, conditions were unbearable due to the metallurgical plant at Siechnice, upstream from Wrocław, and in Upper Silesia, coalmining and the leaching of heavy metals into the ground posed serious health concerns.<sup>17</sup> Making use of relaxed censorship and

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<sup>15</sup> B II 3 1101, “Do we need Zarnowiec?” *Greenway: An East European Environmental Newsletter*, 1987/3, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>16</sup> Kenny, *Carnival of Revolution*, 75.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 73. B II 3 1101, “Environmental Situation in Upper Silesia” *Greenway* 1987, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

travel restrictions, the NKCh and PKE, began to raise awareness about these conditions in Poland across borders. As the Polish information found its way into East German activists' hands, it highlighted the structural problems of Soviet style communism.

The NKCh used its members' scientific training to collect environmental data and to educate others on the topic. In 1987, the group began by measuring water quality in the Vistula River, which flows through Kraków. But it also ran a second-hand book store, organized "summer and winter scientific and ecological camps," and helped "club members to lead investigations within an area of chemistry in which they are interested and to take part in investigations of environmental contamination."<sup>18</sup> The members hosted camps and conferences in different parts of the country, but especially in the area around Kraków and in Silesia where there was significant mining and industry. They also shared the data they collected with the PKE and internationally, including the Netherlands-based English-language environmental newsletter, *Airplan*.

The NKCh focused on regional problems in Upper Silesia, measuring air pollution levels there. The data they collected indicated that of the three and a half million Poles living in that district, roughly 70 percent—or nearly two and a half million people—lived "in conditions which are harmful to health." Additionally, about one million inhabitants were "continually in the zone of strong influence of carcinogens," and there were 47 percent more respiratory illnesses in Upper Silesia than in other parts of Poland.<sup>19</sup> Reports from 1990 confirm the environmental devastation and its effects on the local population. One states that particle emissions were

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<sup>18</sup> B II 3 1101, "Chemists in Krakow," *Airplan: Air Pollution Action Network*, Number 11, December 1987, 12, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>19</sup> B II 3 1101, "Upper Silesia: From the information leaflet of Naukowe Kolo Chemikówe," *Airplan: Air Pollution Action Network*, Number 11, December 1987, 12 Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

between four and five times higher than normal conditions, “but for some areas ... this value is [significantly] higher.”<sup>20</sup> A second report from 1990, confirmed that pollution from heavy metals and other carcinogens in the town of Bytom led the worst health conditions in the country.<sup>21</sup> PKE, which had published information in *Airplan* for some time, helped introduce the NKCh to these western channels, bringing in support and raising interest in Eastern Europe for those well beyond the Soviet bloc.

Within Poland, obtaining information about pollution was a not always easy, spurring citizens to call for more transparency. This occurred not only in Kraków—the hub of environmental protest—but also in heavily polluted Upper Silesia and its capital, Katowice. The regional chapter of the PKE worked together with the NKCh to better understand the types and levels of pollution. Degradation stemmed from coalmining and water shortages, much like the SED’s complaints to the west. In Katowice, the water supply was on average six times less in volume than the national average. Because refining coal was a water intensive industry, further polluted the area, releasing “salts, heavy metals, and other chemical compounds” into the water.<sup>22</sup> In nearby Bytom, a 1990 report revealed that conditions had been this bad—and the data collected by local officials—for at least ten years. Lead, cadmium, sulfur compounds, and other hazardous chemicals leached into the soil and the groundwater, when not directly dumped into rivers. But it was only with the collapse of communism that these issues began to be actively

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<sup>20</sup> RHG/RR 10, “Katowice Province: The State of Environment in its essential elements and directions of activities for its improvement,” Silesian Regional Authority, Ecology Department, Katowice 1990. Personalbestand Rüdiger Rosenthal, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>21</sup> RHG/RR 10, “Bytom – Degradacja Środowiska, Raport, Bytom, IV. 1990,” Bytomski Komitet Obywatelski „Solidarność,” Personalbestand Rüdiger Rosenthal, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>22</sup> RHG/RR 10, “Katowice Province: The state of the environment in its essential elements and directions of activities for its improvement,” prepared by the Silesian Regional Authority, Ecology Department, 1990, Rüdiger Rosenthal – Osteuropa, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

addressed.<sup>23</sup> Although not all of the official data was released before 1989, the obvious health and environmental dangers led to more activism in Upper Silesia.

In Lower Silesia and its capital city, Wrocław, the metallurgy works at Siechnice became a major source of protest in the late 1980s, reflecting the local WiP's shifting orientation toward more environmental concerns. Protests against the plant in January 1987 led officials to promise to close the plant. Yet, in 1988, WiP activists were again protesting against the state and party's "subterfuge," referring to a recent report that concluded the plant was "not harmful to the environment."<sup>24</sup> The flier clearly focused on the degradation, but connected the factory's entire existence to the larger Soviet military-industrial complex. It argued, "The production of ferrochrome is necessary for the government and military to meet 'our' demands for guns and tanks. The military is the largest recipient of ferrous chrome from Huta Siechnice. Generals do not care about the irreversible effects of contamination by heavy metals, like chromium, or that city of Wrocław's water runs just 200 m from the slag heap and steelworks. The generals do not need clean water and air."<sup>25</sup> The movement became stronger for being able to unite two sources of frustration within the Polish population.

Thus, while Kraków was a major center for protest before and after Chernobyl, environmental concerns fed into larger political discontents across Poland. Especially in the band from Kraków to Katowice to Wrocław which was heavily influenced by coalmining and related industries, concerns about energy and pollution fed into a larger dissatisfaction with the regime.

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<sup>23</sup> RGH/RR 10, "Bytom – Degradacja Środowiska, Raport," Bytom, IV. 1990, Rüdiger Rosenthal – Osteuropa, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>24</sup> Materiały ogólne, "Uwaga: Huta Siechnice," undated, Wolność i Pokój, Oddział Życia Społecznego, Ossolineum Biblioteka, Wrocław.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Peace and environmental groups came together in this area to compare experiences and to disseminate the information as widely as possible, publishing in Western European newsletters.<sup>26</sup>

### *Political Leniency*

The Polish Communist Party's notorious leniency was a source of much consternation for its hardline comrades to the west, but proved a boon for the political organization of environmental groups. In addition to tolerating the PKE, it permitted the PKE to join western-based international organizations, and even allowed the creation of a green party in December 1988. These developments in Poland, where environmental activism remained subordinate to Solidarność's interests in terms of oppositional relevance, threw the challenges of the East German activists' into a harsh light.

In October 1987, the PKE became a full member of FOE, again breaking down the traditional boundaries between East and West. To formalize this new affiliation, a PKE representative from Warsaw, Andrzej Kassenberg, attended the executive committee meeting in Geneva. A professor at Warsaw's Central School of Planning and Statistics as well as a former vice-president of PKE, Kassenberg exemplified the ability to participate in both official and independent organizations.<sup>27</sup> While at the meeting, he aimed to make Western Europeans more aware of conditions in Poland, and Eastern Europe more generally. He contended, "The environment—and air pollution—do not care about boundaries, and environmental protection isn't defined by politics or profit factors." Kassenberg further pointed out that Poland was a large contributor of air pollution in Europe, as well as being in a "difficult economic situation, [owing]

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<sup>26</sup> The presence of English language literature on the problem and publications in *Airplan* and Solidarność publications abroad speak to how well connected the opposition in Poland was.

<sup>27</sup> Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland*, 87.

money to western countries.”<sup>28</sup> This obvious interconnection between East and West, as well as making Western Europeans aware of how they were affected by Eastern Europe’s pollution and economic situation, began to bridge the divide.

The next step toward unity happened on December 10, 1988, when the Polish Green Party was formally established, and in large part, inspired by the western green parties’ successes. Perhaps because the Communist Party in Poland did not view it as a threat, the party was permitted to exist. Indeed, it only claimed about four hundred members representing twenty-four locales.<sup>29</sup> Declaring its fundamental principles to be “ecological, social, grassroots, and nonviolent,” it echoed the values of western parties nearly word for word and even invited westerners to its inaugural meeting.<sup>30</sup> West German Green Party member Elisabeth Weber attended the events and related her impressions to her colleagues upon her return. Although she had not been optimistic about it, she concluded that “the whole founding of the party was more reputable than she had anticipated.” The new party hoped to be able to join the Round Table discussions, which were agreed upon in September 1988 and scheduled to begin on February 6, 1989. It argued, “We must make ecological themes better known. We must explain that they are political in nature.”<sup>31</sup> If Poland was to eventually have elections, the party wanted to be ready to participate.

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<sup>28</sup> B II 3 1101, “Perspective from the East,” *Airplan: Air Pollution Action Network*, Number 11, December 1987, 10, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung. While weather patterns in Europe typically move from west to east, Kassenberg means overall pollution levels. Moreover, the major Polish rivers empty into the Baltic Sea adding to water pollution that affected non-communist countries and radiation from Chernobyl did affect Western Europe.

<sup>29</sup> B II 1 5732, Elisabeth Weber, “Bericht über eine kurze Polen-Reise im Dezember 1988 anlässlich der Gründung einer Grünen Partei in Polen,” 6, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>30</sup> 80-114, “Die Polnische Partei von Grünen,” undated, Polen, Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf.

<sup>31</sup> B II 5732, Elisabeth Weber, “Bericht über eine kurze Polen-Reise im Dezember 1988 anlässlich der Gründung einer Grünen Partei in Polen,” Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung. After a series of strikes in September 1988, the Polish Communist Party agreed to the Round Table talks, which ultimately began the process of disassembling communism in Poland.



Still, Weber had some serious reservations about the new Green Party. She was disappointed about the lack of women participating in or elected to positions in the party, saying that from “our [the West German Green Party’s] perspective the entire milieu of the party was very traditional.” As if these observations were not condemnatory enough, she also found the atmosphere or working with and around secret police or Communist Party officials frustrating. She deemed all of it to be “a low quality of politics” and she would not be surprised if it “all flew apart.” Therefore, her recommendations to her own party included being friendly and providing as much support as the Polish Greens wanted, but also that “we do not have an exclusive relationship with them but will seek out contacts to all parts of Polish society.”<sup>32</sup> As much as Poland served as a liberalizing example for activists in the GDR, West German Greens viewed these proto-democratic efforts as feeble and not entirely promising.

#### *Poland as Site of International Exchange*

While protest was picking up in response to environmental degradation in Poland, the country also became integral to a larger Eastern European movement. Offering more freedom than virtually any other Eastern European country, Poland—and in particular Kraków—became a site of networking and cooperation. Under the leadership of Zygmunt Fura, the PKE hosted numerous international conferences, which brought together activists from the Soviet Union, Eastern bloc, and Western Europe. The debates and resolutions from these conferences and workshops were then published in *Greenway*, as well as in samizdat publications in other Eastern European countries. Due to those initiatives, East German activists traveling east actually made direct contact with the West. This indirect linkage to the West was yet another way to undermine the already eroding system.

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<sup>32</sup> B II 5732, Elisabeth Weber, “Bericht über eine kurze Polen-Reise im Dezember 1988 anlässlich der Gründung einer Grünen Partei in Polen,” Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

For East German environmental activists, looking to the East—especially Poland—was also crucial to discrediting SED rule. Gorbachev’s reform-minded policies, which were being taken more seriously in other Eastern European countries, illustrated how even Soviet style communism acknowledged the need for openness and restructuring. In Poland, for example, travel restrictions and censorship were eased, making it possible for activists to congregate in larger numbers. In the summers of 1987 and 1988, for example, the PKE hosted multiday events that brought together participants from all over Eastern Europe, including Poles, Czechoslovaks, Hungarians, East Germans, and Soviets. The participants concluded that the “environmental situation in socialist countries is bad and it seems to become worse, although our governments have programs and activities,” they were not sufficient. They argued that they should “play a larger role” in pushing for solutions to “ecological problems.”<sup>33</sup> This banding-together of Eastern bloc countries, with Poland at the center, created a new sense of purpose and unity among Eastern European activists.

Upon visiting Poland, East German activists gained a different perspective on how independent environmental groups could cooperate with the authorities. In fact, many were surprised by the level of support and cooperation the PKE received from local officials in Kraków. Not only did the PKE leader and lecturer at the university, Zygmunt Fura, appear to have a good working relationship with the head environmental inspector in Kraków, Bronisław Kaminski, but Kaminski actually led visitors on a tour of the famous local polluter, the Lenin Steelworks at Nowa Huta.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the government funded scientific projects, including measuring and publishing data, and even encouraged international collaboration. This more

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<sup>33</sup> B II 3 1101, Greenway Meeting, 17-20 September 1987, Kraków, “Eastern Europe,” Bündnis 90/Die Grünen Bundestagsfraktion, 1994, 1998, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

tolerant atmosphere signaled to East Germans that glasnost was taking effect in other countries and that they needed to demand for more change at home.

After such events, participants returned to their home countries to share the results and impressions from these meetings for those who could not attend. Reports on visits to Poland in 1987 and 1988 were written for multiple underground and Church affiliated publications in the GDR, such as the *Umweltblätter* published in Berlin and *Briefe*, the newsletter published in Wittenberg at the KFH.<sup>35</sup> A report from East German activists on the European Youth Forest Action conference in July 1988 discussed the relative acceptance of independent groups in different countries, helping to contextualize the East German efforts. As the author explained, “In Hungary, Poland, Estonia, and Ukraine, autonomous environmental groups can exist and register as independent organizations... [But] the situation is substantially more problematic in the GDR, CSSR [Czechoslovakia], and Romania, where these groups are only partially tolerated.”<sup>36</sup> The combination of in-person contact and written dissemination of knowledge provided a new impetus for the independent movements.

Despite easing travel restrictions within the Eastern bloc and between it and the West, cooperation continued to face political challenges. Coordination between GDR and Polish security apparatuses, albeit sometimes reluctantly on the Polish side, limited East German activists’ effectiveness. For known oppositional and environmental figures in the GDR, travel to Poland—much less West Germany—remained difficult. After having entered Poland with the intended destination of Katowice, one known activist was reported to have surfaced at the port of

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<sup>35</sup> RGH/HJT 14, Jörg Naumann, “3. Greenway-Treffen in Krakow,” *Briefe*, Nr. 17, April 1988, Personalbestand Hans Jürgen Tische, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft. “Europäische Waldaktion – Sommertreffen der EYFA in Krakow,” *Arche Nova II*, October 1988, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig. *Umweltblätter* is a play on words that can be translated either as “Environmental Pages” or “Environmental Leaves.”

<sup>36</sup> RHG/Th 02/06, “Europäische Waldaktion – Somertreffen der E.Y.F.A. in Krakow,” Waldsterben: DDR-Umweltbewegung, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

Gdańsk in an attempt to take the ferry to Finland for an international conference there.<sup>37</sup> The activist's visa was only permitted travel to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union, and Polish border authorities therefore denied him passage to Finland. Polish police even went so far as to confiscate a "note of protest" that the activist had planned to pass on to his Finnish companion, should he be detained. Ever thorough, the Stasi then requested that the note be handed over to them for safekeeping.<sup>38</sup>

In other cases, East Germans were not allowed out of the GDR to visit even other socialist countries. As one thesis written at the Stasi academy in Potsdam explained, for years, "nonsocialist representatives... [had used] meetings in socialist countries to come into contact with GDR-people, particularly those forbidden from travel to the non-socialist world."<sup>39</sup> The student then specifically listed Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary as the three most problematic countries. This tradition was maintained up to the GDR's final months when the Stasi forbade representatives from Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania, Russia, and Latvia from attending a Greenway meeting in Berlin in the summer of 1989. Fearing that "'Greens' from different capitalist countries wanted to participate," the conference was declared "not officially registered and not permitted" and participants from the Soviet Union banned from entering the

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<sup>37</sup> MfS Abt X 257, Correspondence between Ministry for State Security, Regional Department Berlin, and the Polish Foreign Ministry, June-August 1989, Abteilung X, Internationale Verbindungen, BStU.

<sup>38</sup> MfS Abt X 257, Correspondence between the Bezirksverwaltung für Staatssicherheit Berlin, Abteilung XX and the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, Abteilung X, Internationale Verbindungen, July 14, 1989, BStU. In his book, *Przyjaźń której nie było*, Tytus Jaskułowski explores the cooperation (or lack thereof) between the Stasi and the Polish Interior Ministry. He argues that they rarely worked together and that it was often counterproductive when they did, typically trying to use their partner ministries for their own purposes. While this does seem to generally hold true for environmental activists, in Jordan's case, they did cooperate. For a short summary of Jaskułowski's book, see [http://www.hait.tu-dresden.de/ext/fors\\_2.asp?ma=96](http://www.hait.tu-dresden.de/ext/fors_2.asp?ma=96), accessed July 6, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> MfS JHS MF VVS 681 76, Fachschulabschlußarbeit, "Die politisch-operative Aufgabenstellung bei der vorbeugenden Absicherung der zentralen staatlichen Leitung des Umweltschutzes unter besondere Berücksichtigung seiner zunehmenden Bedeutung in den internationalen Beziehungen," 4 January 1977, Juristische Hochschule Potsdam, BStU.

GDR.<sup>40</sup> Even as communication increased between the countries of the Soviet bloc, the continued vigilance of the security apparatuses held the expansion of a movement in check.

Language barriers and cultural chauvinism too, hindered the further collaboration of Eastern European activists. Although the *Umweltblätter* described a 1988 meeting in Krakow as “high point in European environmental activists’ work,” and a “building block in overcoming barriers,” at least one East German activist did not agree.<sup>41</sup> After the official work was done, some of the activists wanted to “try their luck at the local disco, Krak,” because “female participants were in the minority.” Despite the reasonable cost of drinks, the “eco-freaks” were unimpressed when they entered the

Opressive half-darkness where drunken men and young women with make-up—smearred faces slouched over the tables. After politely asking the waiter for a table, a table with two girls was made available. One of them spoke very poor German and English. After the second dance, they excused themselves saying that sexual intercourse [*Beischlaf*] would cost 150 DM, and if we were interested, we could follow them.

At the same time, the music went out and it took paying the disc jockey 1000 zloty to get it going again. Rather frustrated with the evening that had cost us about 12 000 zloty, we ended the evening with a deep conversation about life just among us men.<sup>42</sup>

The author reiterated longstanding German stereotypes about Polish women, Poles’ inability—or refusal—to speak German or English, and their general laziness. This disgruntled activist revealed real and perceived cultural differences about the treatment of “wealthy foreigners,” and

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<sup>40</sup> MfS HA XX 17175, “Information über eingeplantes ‚Greenway-Arbeitstreffen‘ vom 28.9. bis 1.10.1989 in der Kirchgemeinde Berlin-Friedrichsfelde,“ Hauptabteilung XX, Staatsapparat, Blockparteien, Kirchen, Kultur, “politischer Untergrund,” BStU.

<sup>41</sup> „Europäische Waldaktion – Sommertreffen der EYFA in Krakow,“ *Umweltblätter*, 27 September 1988, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

<sup>42</sup> RHG/TH 02/01, “Youth Forest Action in Cracow (Poland) 10.-14.7.1988,“ Umweltbewegung Allgemein, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft. 100 Złoty was about 1.40 DM at the time (as referenced in Sabine Rosenblatt, *Der Osten ist grün? Öko-raportage aus der DDR, Sovietunion, Tschechoslowakei, Polen, Ungarn* (Hamburg, Rasch und Röhring Verlag, 1988), 13).

how things—whether music at a club or a social movement—should be run. Reports such as these suggest constraints on the potential collaboration between Eastern European groups.

Thus Poland represented the most welcome space for Eastern European activists to congregate. Having a more lenient communist party and a better organized opposition in the reemerging Solidarność offered numerous benefits. After Chernobyl in April 1986, opposition to nuclear energy provided new impetus for a movement. Despite growing collaboration, political and cultural barriers nonetheless curbed its potential effectiveness.

### **The GDR after Chernobyl**

In the GDR, Chernobyl—and the SED’s bungled handling of it—sparked a new level of protest as well. In the weeks and months after April 1986, new groups formed not only in Berlin, but across the country. The SED’s silence fed East Germans’ desire for information, which had already been a problem. In the aftermath of Chernobyl, panicked reports from West Germany contributed to a heightened sense of betrayal by the government, transforming environmental issues from a critique of policy to one of the system. Existing groups’ membership rose and new groups formed in response to the disaster in Ukraine. A new, broader movement included many East Germans who were not otherwise involved in the Church. By 1988, the KHF received responses to its survey from fifty-eight environmental groups with an average of ten to thirty members, though the groups could mobilize much broader support for specific events.<sup>43</sup> This burgeoning movement united local environmental concerns, which only appealed to limited

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<sup>43</sup> Ki 18/02, “DIE KARTIEBROSCHÜRE der kirchlichen UMWELTGRUPPEN in der DDR: Stand vom November 1988,” Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft. Merrill Jones estimated one hundred groups of twenty to thirty members in her 1992 *German Studies Review*, “Origins of the East German Environmental Movement,” as did activist Henry Schramm in 1988. RHG/ÜG 03, “Erwiderung zur Veröffentlichung des arche Artikels in den Umweltblättern 6/88,” Arche, Grün-ökologisches Netzwerk in den Ev. Kirchen der DDR, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, Berlin. Schramm himself was later revealed to have been a Stasi IM. Christian Halbrock, “Die unabhängigen Umweltgruppen in der DDR: Forschungsstand und Überblick,” *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, December 15, 2011, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/61423/umweltgruppen?p=all>.

segments of the East German population, with larger existential questions about the SED's ability and desire to protect its citizens.

### *Initial Responses*

Among the new environmental groups springing up across the GDR after Chernobyl, the Environmental Library in Berlin was especially influential. The core of a group housed in a different parish, in September 1986 the founders completed their move to a new parish, the Zion Church in Berlin-Mitte. The Environmental Library was a physical library, as well as a group of activists.<sup>44</sup> Its purpose was to offer information and materials on topics to anyone interested in learning more about ecology and the natural environment. According to Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, one of the founders, the Environmental Library had about fifty members when it opened.<sup>45</sup> Over the next three years, the group's membership grew and functioned as a node in the nascent networks forming across the GDR. The Environmental Library therefore served as an important point of contact between groups isolated in parishes around the country, and even a model for others. By 1988, there were similarly named "Environmental Libraries" in other cities and towns, such as Leipzig, Erfurt, and Großhennersdorf in Upper Lusatia. Each provided much needed information about local as well as larger environmental problems. This demand for data as well as a change in the state's policies reflected the rising discontent on a number of local and global environmental issues after 1986.

At the heart of this networking function were the annual, GDR-wide Eco-Seminars. Hosted at the Zion Church over a long weekend, activists came together each year to discuss a pressing topic. In 1986, naturally, the seminar focused on the dangers of nuclear energy, the

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<sup>44</sup> The members of the Environmental Library had previously been associated with a different congregation in Lichtenberg, Berlin and had a different name, but moved to the Zion Church in September 1986.

<sup>45</sup> Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, *Störenfried: DDR Opposition, 1986-1989, Mit Texten Aus Den "Umweltblättern"* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1992), 69.

problems of using fossil fuels, and the possible use of alternative energy sources.<sup>46</sup> The flier announcing the weekend's events also requested that individuals and groups bring "materials, exhibits, petitions, and presentations" with them, so that everyone could share what they knew. The roughly 120 individuals in attendance (104 of whom the Stasi could identify) then divided their time between smaller working groups in order to discuss the topics advertised in the flier, and larger presentations on the "antinuclear movement in West Germany" and "the GDR's nuclear energy problem from the perspective of western media."<sup>47</sup> Using illegal and semilegal means, the Eco-Seminars brought people together from different parts of the country to discuss environmental issues and to spread information difficult to obtain from the West.

The Environmental Library was also important to the independent movement because it published an increasingly popular underground newsletter, the *Umweltblätter*. It provided a means of communication within independent networks, especially for those who could not travel to Berlin for seminars and similar events. Second, it sought to reach a broader audience beyond the already converted. The first edition was printed to spread information about Chernobyl and the general state of the peace and environmental movements in East Germany, but it eventually covered information on a number of dissident movements both in the GDR and in other Eastern European countries. In the period between 1986 and 1989, it became one of the most successful underground publications in the GDR. When the newsletter began in the fall of 1986, the Environmental Library printed between 150 and 200 copies. By 1989, circulation had

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<sup>46</sup> RHG/SWV 02/01, "Drittes Berliner Ökologieseminar," Berliner Ökologie Seminar, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, Berlin.

<sup>47</sup> BStU/BV/BIn/AG/XXII 275, "Erste Erkenntnisse zum sogenannten 3. „Berliner Ökologieseminar“ vom 28.11.1986 bis zum 30.11.1986 in der Evangelischen Kirchgemeinde Zion, Die Behörde für die Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, Berlin.



mushroomed to over two thousand; making it the most widely read underground publication in the GDR.<sup>48</sup>

*Umweltblätter* expanded on the concerns of many East Germans, while conveying information from Western news sources on topics prohibited by the SED. From the beginning it questioned the GDR's stance on nuclear energy and advocated for alternative sources. As the second issue of the newsletter commented, "Since the reactor failure at Chernobyl, the voices against the current energy policy have grown ever louder and are demanding the return to old ... forms of energy [water and wind]."<sup>49</sup> Later, the newsletter expanded its scope to express solidarity with imprisoned Prague dissidents, reporting on developments in the Soviet Union, as well as publicizing continued concerns about the broader effects of pollution. One 1989 article explored the presence of pesticides and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in breast milk. According to the article, an observant East Berlin woman found a way to have a West Berlin laboratory test a sample. The milk exceeded most of the accepted levels established in West Germany.<sup>50</sup> It retained the original impetus of the newsletter, but reported on many related and not so related issues.

### *Stendal*

As in Poland, fears of nuclear disaster from civilian sources such as power stations skyrocketed after Chernobyl. Although the GDR already had three functioning nuclear power

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<sup>48</sup> German History in Documents and Images, Robert-Havemann Gesellschaft, accessed February 6, 2015, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=2836](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=2836). Given the illicit nature of the publication, we can assume significantly higher readership. Individuals would read the newsletter before passing it on to likeminded acquaintances. One letter to the editors explained how the author had come across the *Umweltblätter* at an Ecumenical Assembly and asked if it was possible to obtain a subscription. RHG/RG/B 19/08, Letter to the editor, May 12, 1989, *Umweltblätter* Redaktion, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>49</sup> "Möglichkeiten alternativer Energieanwendung (zur Eröffnungsveranstaltung am 2.9.1986)," *Umweltblätter*, Fall 1986, 1.

<sup>50</sup> "Pflanzenschutzmittel und polychlorierte Biphenyl in der Muttermilch?" *Umweltblätter*, June 1989, 25.

plants, it was the new one being built near the town of Stendal, outside Magdeburg, that drew the most attention after the April 26 disaster. Two local doctors, a married couple named Erika and Ludwig Drees, sparked opposition to what would have become the largest installation in the GDR. Active in Christian peace and environmental circles, the doctors linked fears about Chernobyl to the local situation, and thence to larger health and environmental questions. As doctors, their criticisms gained a level of credibility that might otherwise have been lacking, which pushed the GDR to reexamine its nuclear power policy. Although the GDR continued with the project, it remained incomplete at the time of the collapse and was scrapped after reunification.

Just weeks after the disaster at Chernobyl, the Dreeses spearheaded a two-pronged protest against the Stendal plant, attempting to gain support within the Church and to petition the state. In the first letter, addressed to the bishop of Saxony in Magdeburg, Christoph Demke, Erika Drees asked for “our Church to take up the topic of the responsible use of nuclear energy with the government of the GDR.” Signed by twenty-five local concerned Christians, she explained that “in light of the Chernobyl catastrophe and radioactivity’s known dangers to life on earth, we believe the continued construction of the nuclear power plant near Stendal is a grave violation of our duty to be stewards of creation.” She concluded that the Church could no longer be silent on the matter, because “Christians and the Church have a prophetic duty here.”<sup>51</sup> In using vivid language about the dangers of radiation to human and nature’s health, Erika Drees pushed within Church structures for a more active response to Chernobyl and Stendal.

At the same time, local residents and supporters in Magdeburg demanded that the party-state cease construction. Pointing to the nuclear disaster at Three Mile Island in the United States

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<sup>51</sup> RHG/Th 02/05a, Eingabe von Erika Drees an die Kirchenleitung der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen, 21. Mai 1986, DDR-Umweltbewegung: Atomenergie, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

and to Chernobyl, one petition argued that the “consequences of an accident would be unforeseeable and evacuation impossible in an areas as densely populated as Stendal.”<sup>52</sup> Another petition sent directly to Erich Honecker outlined the dangers of a nuclear disaster for Stendal, but also emphasized the importance of energy to economic growth and consumption. Therefore, the larger solution was to “transform people’s consciousness to have a more responsible relationship between energy and affluence.”<sup>53</sup> In both petitions, concern about potential nuclear disaster went hand-in-hand with demands for more information about what had happened at Chernobyl and specific plans for emergency evacuation plans for Stendal. Petitions to the state wove together local concerns with broader ones about the use of nuclear energy in general and related the problems back to the party-state’s censorship.

To activists, Stendal became a symbol of both nuclear dangers and the shortcomings of the regime. In 1988, they held a gathering there to remember Chernobyl and to call attention to environmental concerns. Members of the Working Group on Environmental Protection in Leipzig attended the event, later submitting a petition to the Protestant Church in the GDR, the Parliament of the GDR, and the Council of Ministers. In it, the petitioners argued that the risk of nuclear energy was just too great and that the most developed countries were already exploring how to end their reliance on it. As an alternative, they argued for renewable energy sources, even contending that phasing out nuclear power in the GDR was possible. Based on this line of reasoning, they concluded that they must “demand the immediate suspension of construction at

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<sup>52</sup> RHG/RG/SA 01, Eingabe vom Friedenskreis der ev. Martinsgemeinde an den Rat des Bezirkes Magdeburg, 4. Februar 1987, Region Sachsen-Anhalt, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>53</sup> RHG/Th 02/05a, Eingabe von Ludwig und Erika Drees an Erich Honecker, 20. Oktober 1986, DDR-Umweltbewegung: Atomenergie, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

Stendal.”<sup>54</sup> Although officials from the local level on up to Berlin held meetings with activists and Church leaders—going so far as to give the bishop of Magdeburg, Christoph Demke, a tour of the construction site—the work on Stendal continued.<sup>55</sup> The SED’s unwillingness to change course highlighted the limited effectiveness of protest against the regime. Nevertheless, it suggested a building frustration on a larger scale, one that was set in motion after Chernobyl in 1986.

*Fracturing of the Environmental Library and the Founding of Arche*

Despite a rising sense of frustration about a number of issues after April 1986, the movement’s influence remained narrow. The Stasi’s surveillance, interference, and intermittent raids strained trust and curbed productivity. Among the more explicitly oppositional groups based in Berlin, these tensions became apparent because the Stasi actively attempted to sabotage them. Difficulties within the Environmental Library arose as its members contested the library’s purpose and functioning. Ultimately, in 1988, a second group split off from the Environmental Library, forming the more explicitly environmentally-minded *Grün-Ökologisches Netzwerk Arche in der Evangelischen Kirche* (*Arche*, Green-ecological Network, Ark, in the Protestant Church). The Stasi’s attempts to sow distrust among the members successfully kept the movement fractured and circumscribed its reach both within the GDR and beyond.

According to former member Frank Ebert, “The Environmental Library had nothing to do with ecology.”<sup>56</sup> Although intentionally provocative, his statement also indicates larger

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<sup>54</sup> DO 4/805, Eingabe an die Volkskammer der DDR, den Ministerrat der DDR und die Landessynode des Bundes der Evangelischen Kirchen der DDR von der Arbeitsgruppe Umweltschutz Leipzig, 11. Juni 1988, Abteilung Evangelische Kirche, Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>55</sup> DO 4/801, “Auszug aus dem Gästebuch des VEB KKW Stendal über den Besuch des Bischofs zu Magdeburg,” March 21, 1988, Staatssekretär für Kirchenfragen, BArch-SAPMO. Bishop Demke signed the guestbook, writing “I hope this difficult task finds a solution...that respects humans, their peaceful development, and the preservation of nature.”

<sup>56</sup> Conversation with Frank Ebert in the Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, November 12, 2012.

challenges in the group. For some, the Environmental Library was explicitly about opposing the state and carrying out self-described anarchist goals.<sup>57</sup> As the ever more comprehensive issues of *Umweltblätter* suggested, the Environmental Library dedicated itself to a number of antiregime causes, not just the environment. By 1987 and 1988, the newsletter had expanded to discussing topics including glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union, skinheads, and the march organized in protest of the assassination of Swedish politician Olof Palme.<sup>58</sup> For some, then, the environment was more a weapon to be wielded against the corrupt regime rather than a cause for its own sake. For those who saw themselves as specifically dedicated to protecting the environment, this tension only heightened the sense of frustration within the group.

Those activists in the Berlin scene constantly felt the Stasi's presence, and therefore concentrated increasingly on explicitly political issues. While the inner circle remained more or less free of infiltration, numerous members of the Environmental Library were, such as Falk Zimmermann, later revealed to have been unofficial informants (*inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, IM).<sup>59</sup> Moreover, Stasi reports suggest the degree of surveillance by accounting for attendance at events, the extent of information available in the library, samizdat publications produced, and conferences held.<sup>60</sup> One report on the third Eco-Seminar in 1986 explained the importance of IMs to the Stasi's work: "It is only through the use of unofficial informants that an objective

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<sup>57</sup> Christian Halbrock, "Die unabhängigen Umweltgruppen in der DDR: Forschungsstand und Überblick," *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, December 15, 2011, accessed May 18, 2015, <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/61423/umweltgruppen?p=all>.

<sup>58</sup> *Umweltblätter*, Issues from February 1987 and July 1987, for example. Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

<sup>59</sup> Ulrich Neumann, "Was war, war wenig und viel: die Anfänge der Arche," in *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR, Das ,Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche, ' 1988-90, mit den Texten der ARCHE NOVA*, eds. Carlo Jordan and Hans Michael Kloth (Berlin: Basis Druck, 1995), 90-91.

<sup>60</sup> MfS/BV/BIn/AKG 371, "Information über die Tätigkeit der sogenannten ,Umweltbibliothek' des ,Öko- und Friedenskreises' der Evangelischen Kirchengemeinde Zion in Berlin-Mitte," November 23, 1986, Hähnel, Bezirksverwaltung Berlin, Auswertungs/ und Kontrollgruppe, BStU.

analysis of the discussion and a differentiation between organizers can be reached.” It went on to say that one IM had failed in his goal to take a more prominent position in the group, because “all of his suggestions relating to this task had been rejected.”<sup>61</sup> Although the inner circle proved difficult to infiltrate, the constant surveillance added tension and a sense of distrust between members.

The constant threat from officials was perhaps never more apparent than on the night of November 24-25, 1987, when the Stasi raided the Environmental Library’s rooms in the basement of the Zion Church in Berlin-Mitte. They arrested seven members, and confiscated the illegal printing press.<sup>62</sup> Those arrested were released within days, but the outcry took on an international dimension. Not only did the KFH in Wittenberg express solidarity with those arrested, but support also came from some Green Party members in the West and newly discovered contacts in the Netherlands.<sup>63</sup> The English-language *Airplan* described how “the recent arrests of Environmental Library activists in East Berlin certainly overshadowed discussions at the Eco-Seminar, held in the city’s Elizabeth Church on November 28 and 29.”<sup>64</sup> Though the Stasi raid added to the Environmental Library’s publicity, the atmosphere within it worsened as distrust between members grew.

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<sup>61</sup> MfS BV Bln AG XXII 275, “Erste Erkenntnisse zum sogenannten 3. „Berliner Ökologieseminar“ vom 28.11.1986 bis zum 30.11.1986 in der Evangelischen Kirchgemeinde Zion, Bezirksverwaltung Berlin, Arbeitsgruppe Terrorabwehr, BStU.

<sup>62</sup> Those arrested were Till Böttcher, Bert Schlegel, Andreas Kalk, Bodo Wolff, Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, Uta Ihlow, and Tim Eisenlohr. See “MfS-Aktion gegen die Umwelt-Bibliothek“, hrsg. v. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung und Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft e.V., letzte Änderung September 2008, accessed May 19, 2015, [www.jugendopposition.de/index.php?id=203](http://www.jugendopposition.de/index.php?id=203).

<sup>63</sup> OWK 01, “Abschrift der Tonbandprotokolle Der DDR-Veranstaltung in der Fraktion, DIE GRÜNEN IM BUNDESTAG, Am 12. April 1988,” Ost-West Kontakte, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>64</sup> B II 3 1101, “Arrests Shadow Seminar,” *Airplan: Air Pollution Action Network*, Number 11, December 1987, 12, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

Although the Stasi's presence was a major issue, further strife emerged in the form of conflict about the focus of the Environmental Library and the *Umweltblätter*. Relations soured after a failed proposal to create a new kind of network at the third Eco-Seminar in the fall of 1987. In the 1990s, former member Ulrich Neumann recounted: "By the beginning of 1988 there was no longer any substantive discussion between oppositionists in the Berlin Environmental Library. Discussions were ruthless, peppered with personal animosities and prejudices."<sup>65</sup> Therefore, in January 1988, just a year and a half after the library opened, a group led by Carlo Jordan broke off and established the *Grün-Ökologisches Netzwerk Arche in der Evangelischen Kirche (Arche, Green-ecological Network, Ark, in the Protestant Church)*.<sup>66</sup>

After the split, it took nearly two years for the groups to work together again, according to Rüdtenklau, who remained with the Environmental Library.<sup>67</sup> Use of limited resources, such as the printer, sparked resentments anew. According to Jordan and the Leipzig-based Andreas Passarge:

On June 20, Rüdtenklau stormed into the Zion Church's office, trying to take off with an Arche computer. Custodian and activist, Matthias Voigt, attempted discuss the matter calmly: 'This one is ours; that is why it's labeled. The other one is for you [the Environmental Library].' But Rüdtenklau threw a punch at Voigt. After Voigt called for help, he forcefully took it from the office. Voigt locked the office from within, because Rüdtenklau stood violently outside the door. Sometime, later as Voigt walked through the churchyard, Rüdtenklau assaulted him again, yelling, 'If you didn't work here, you'd

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<sup>65</sup> Ulrich Neumann, "Was war, war wenig und viel: die Anfänge der Arche," in *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR, Das ,Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche, ' 1988-90, mit den Texten der ARCHE NOVA*, editors Carlo Jordan and Hans Michael Kloth (Berlin: Basis Druck, 1995), 81.

<sup>66</sup> Christian Halbrock, "Störfaktor Jugend: Die Anfänge der unabhängigen Umweltbewegung in der DDR," in *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR, Das ,Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche, ' 1988-90, mit den Texten der ARCHE NOVA*, editors Carlo Jordan and Hans Michael Kloth (Berlin: Basis Druck, 1995), 32. Other key founding members of Arche included Ulrich Neumann, Mathias Voigt, and Mario Hamel.

<sup>67</sup> For a competing narrative of the conflict between the Environmental Library and Arche, see Wolfgang Rüdtenklau's *Störenfried: DDR-Opposition, 1986-1989, mit Texten aus den Umweltblättern* (BasisDruck: Berlin, 1992), 178-180.

get one in the nose every day.’ and ‘That’s how we did it in prison.’ During the scuffle, Voigt fell to the ground and acquired some smaller injuries.<sup>68</sup>

While this accounting from Jordan and Passarge might have been exaggerated, the tensions between the two groups ran high. Cooperation between them was simply not possible for some time, until tempers cooled.

Individual antics aside, Arche’s goal was to change how environmental groups worked together in the GDR. In one of its publications, *Arche Info*, the members described their focus as “coordinating activities of single-minded environmental groups in the Protestant Church.” It rejected a “centralistic structure” and “supported local ecological activities,” specifically concerning issues of air quality, acid rain, clean water, waste disposal, lignite, urban ecology and human ecology.<sup>69</sup> The newly founded group argued that misinformation and accusations hindered greater contact between groups, which could at best be described as “regionally bounded.”<sup>70</sup> The other elements of the Environmental Library, such as those with anarchist tendencies, took a back seat in Arche. Until the fall of the GDR two years later, tensions between these two groups continued to run high, effectively dividing the movement just as the Stasi had intended.

### *Challenging the System Together*

*Arche* had regional contacts with groups in Halle, Leipzig, and even Großhennersdorf in Lusatia, organizing through the church administrative districts for Berlin-Brandenburg,

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<sup>68</sup> RHG ÜG 03, “Information an den GKR – Zion,” July 4, 1988, Carlo Jordan and Matthias Voigt, Arche, Grün-ökologisches Netzwerk in den Ev. Kirchen der DDR, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, Berlin. Rüdtenklau had been arrested for his activities in oppositional environmental circles as well as for anti-sodomy laws. MfS BV Bln AKG 371, “Information über die Tätigkeit der sogenannten ‚Umweltbibliothek‘ des ‚Öko- und Friedenskreises‘ der Evangelischen Kirchengemeinde Zion in Berlin-Mitte,” November 23, 1986, Hähnel, Bezirksverwaltung Berlin, Auswertungs- und Kontrollgruppe, BStU.

<sup>69</sup> “Arche: Das Grüne Netzwerk i. Der Ev. Kirche – (vorläufige) Gründungserklärung,” *Arche Info* I/88, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

<sup>70</sup> “Warum Arche? Warum ein Netzwerk in der ev. Kirche?,” *Arche Info* I/88, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.



Mecklenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Dresden, and Thuringia.<sup>71</sup> Transitioning from regional or local groups with a few contacts in Berlin and Leipzig to a better connected, GDR-wide movement meant better communication and more pressure on the SED, which seemed more and more paralyzed by the changes around it. More people turned out to events and engaged with underground publications, challenging the party's narrative about not only the environment but the system as a whole.

On June 12, 1988, many attended a widely publicized pilgrimage and environmental church service in Deutzen. Organized by the *Christliches Umweltseminar Rötha* (CUR), some 800 East Germans attended, listening to the podium discussion and hearing what Church and state authorities had to say about local conditions.<sup>72</sup> This was CUR's sixth annual environmental service, but unlike earlier ones, information about the day's events was disseminated to all corners of the GDR through *Briefe*, *Arche Info*, and the *Umweltblätter*. CUR further published multiple pamphlets about the campaign it announced on that day, "A Mark for Espenhain," which asked for a single mark from individuals to renovate a nearby coal refining plant. Gathering a "symbolic contribution" not for a "collection or donation," but an "act of solidarity," CUR sought to accrue the funds that state officials could not or would not spend on improving the air quality and living conditions in Espenhain.<sup>73</sup>

The level of networking involved in making this a truly GDR-wide campaign was unprecedented. Rather than being a local effort to clean up a park or plant trees, A Mark for Espenhain represented an assumption of responsibility. Fiscally and symbolically, the campaign

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<sup>71</sup> "Kontaktadressen," *Arche Info* I/88, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

<sup>72</sup> This is the same event with which I began the introduction of the dissertation.

<sup>73</sup> RHG/Th 02/03, "Erläuterung zum Aufruf," October 1988, Kohle- und Bergbau, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, Berlin.

challenged the SED's authority on the one thing it was supposedly doing well, mining coal to power the economy. What did it mean that the Church had to raise funds to improve the coal refining process that the centrally-planned economy could not find? This effrontery did not even come from Berlin, the hotbed of oppositional protest, but from a rural group with the help of another group in Dresden. The campaign also elicited help from groups at the "Ecumenical Air Seminar" in Erfurt in October of that year. Participants included their contribution, while highlighting the human health and environmental repercussions of the pollution.<sup>74</sup>

The Air Seminar further instituted its own operation to hold the SED for accountable to its promise to reduce sulfur dioxide levels by 30 percent of 1980 levels by 1993.<sup>75</sup> The working group "Air Pollution and Illnesses of the Respiratory Tract" prepared fliers that gave interested individuals guidelines on how to pressure the SED. It recommended they write to local authorities and to district level ones, too, asking how much progress had been made toward the new standards. The authors also encouraged individuals to demand the release of environmental data, especially sulfur dioxide levels and "what measures were being taken in light of increasing incidences of asthma and chronic bronchitis."<sup>76</sup> Finally, rather than just confronting local and district officials, the working group asked people to forward their correspondence with officials to activist Johannes Staemmler in Erfurt. By consolidating material, the group could provide a more comprehensive challenge to the state, district by district.

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<sup>74</sup> RHG/Th 02/03, "Aktion: Eine Mark für Espenhain," undated, Kohle- und Bergbau, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>75</sup> RHG/Th 02/03, "Aktion 30%," October 1988, Kohle- und Bergbau, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft. It had done so in a 1984 conference in Munich, see Chapter Four, as well as in 1985 to a United Nations Commission on international air pollution.

<sup>76</sup> RHG/Th 02/03, "Beteiligt Euch an der Aktion 30%," undated, Kohle- und Bergbau, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

In the remotest corners of the GDR, groups formed to protest local conditions in a way that would have been inconceivable before Chernobyl. In Großhennersdorf and Zittau in Upper Lusatia, concerns about open pit mining and acid rain in the Erzgebirge and Zittauer Gebirge inspired the creation of Environmental Libraries in both places. In Großhennersdorf, likeminded workers from the home for the disabled located in the village, such as Andreas Schönfelder and Thomas Pilz, founded the library. They began engaging with local problems and publishing about them in their *Lausitz Botin* [*Lusatian Messenger*], in collaboration with the group under Andreas Prescher's leadership in Zittau. Starting in 1988, the *Lausitz Botin* was published sporadically, but focused especially on air quality and the impact of acid rain on the forest. The first issue of the newsletter highlighted the fact that conditions affected local residents, but also that "ultimately we live in a recreation area," where people from all over East Germany came for health reasons.<sup>77</sup>

In Upper Lusatia, the high levels of air pollution led to more concern for the forest and demands for more public information about local conditions. One of the leaders of the Zittau Christian environmental groups was Andreas Prescher, a technologist at VEB Deutsche Piano-Union Leipzig in Olbersdorf. He repeatedly petitioned for the release of information on his own, but also frequently spoke to different parishes about "Living for a livable Earth," explaining "the burdens we put on the earth and our responsibilities as Christians."<sup>78</sup> Despite attracting Stasi attention for his activism, Prescher also received commendation from his employer for "changing the technical parameters of the centrifugal separator in order to reduce environmental

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<sup>77</sup> Original document reprinted in Arnaud Liszka and Thomas Pilz, editors, *Lausitz Botin: Das Jahr 1989 in der sächsischen Provinz im Spiegel einer Zittauer Oppositionszeitung* (Bautzen: Lusatia Verlag, 1999), 50.

<sup>78</sup> Andreas Prescher 27-8, "Herzliche Einladung zum Gesprächsabend," undated, Personalbestand Andreas Prescher, Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf.

pollution.”<sup>79</sup> He also worked together with state forestry officials for Christian and GNU participants to clean up the neighboring forest, so that the “individual activists, groups, friends of nature, and the ecologically affected have the opportunity to realize their growing sense of responsibility.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, Prescher attempted to improve the environment through all the means available to him: work, Christian groups, and official avenues, too.

In October 1988, activists convened the first “Meeting of the Lusatian Environmental Groups,” reflecting expanded connections even in a remote and largely rural region. Meeting in Görlitz, groups from Hoyerswerda, Weißwasser, and Forst also attended. The activists divided themselves into two working groups, not surprisingly working on the themes of lignite mining and urban ecology. These meetings, of course, did not slip by the Stasi unnoticed. Information about meetings was reported to district level authorities, especially when it became clear that Andreas Schönfelder of Großhennersdorf could “obtain Green Peace newspapers” and that someone else had “connections with a peace group in Czechoslovakia.”<sup>81</sup> One of the major players in this group, Dieter Goernert, was also known to have attended the founding meeting of Arche in Berlin. Goernert and Schönfelder’s connections to Arche, which then brought them into contact with Greenpeace and Greenway materials, caused the Stasi much concern.<sup>82</sup> More

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<sup>79</sup> Andreas Prescher 27-6, “Urkunde,” August 23, 1988, Personalbestand Andreas Prescher, Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf.

<sup>80</sup> Andreas Prescher 27-8, “Liebe Mitglieder des Kirchenvorstandes,” February 1, 1989, Personalbestand Andreas Prescher, Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf.

<sup>81</sup> MfS KD Görlitz Abteilung XX403-2 Nr. 13, “Information zum Ökologie- und Umweltschuttkreis in Görlitz am 15.12.88,” found in Personalbestand Andreas Schönfelder 35-7, Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf.

<sup>82</sup> MfS KD Görlitz Abteilung XX XIV 1431/81, AOP “Pfleger” 215/92 Bd. V, “Informationen zu Vernetzungsbestrebungen feindlich-negativer Kräfte innerhalb des Grün-Ökologisches Bundes/Arche,” June 17, 1988, found in Personalbestand Andreas Schönfelder 35-7, Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf.

broadly, though, it demonstrated that Arche's approach was working and that even in the "valley of the clueless," subversive Greenpeace and Greenway information was accessible.

### *Limitations on the Movement*

As the movement attracted a larger following and the diversity of the participants grew after Chernobyl, it also faced unforeseen challenges. Although the Church remained committed to the environment—even establishing a new ecumenical council in 1988—a growing number of activists wanted little or nothing to do with religion. For many new participants, the Church and the religious message on which the movement had initially based itself did not appeal. For the old guard, trusting new participants proved difficult, because they might be Stasi infiltrators. But more than anything, unless there was mass protest and structural change, the movement had reached the limits of its effectiveness by early 1989.

In 1988, the newly established Ecumenical Council brought together virtually all of the churches in the GDR to discuss "Justice, Peace and the Preservation of Creation."<sup>83</sup> This plenum was considered a huge success, drawing over a thousand participants for the opening service and 6,500 for the ecumenical peace service on Saturday evening.<sup>84</sup> The registered participants were divided into thirteen working groups, including ones on energy, education and information, ecology and economy in the current societal structures, and the changing of values. The way that these working groups treated the subject reflected a less oppositional stance than the Environmental Libraries or Arche. Instead they largely accepted the structure of East German society, explaining that as Christians they should also be ready to "work together with all societal

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<sup>83</sup> Two more were held within the next year and a half, one in Magdeburg in October 1988 and a third in Dresden again in April 1989.

<sup>84</sup> This council included not only members of the mainstream Lutheran and Catholic Churches, but also the Moravian Church, Methodists, the Old Catholic Church, Mennonites, the Russian Orthodox Church, Seventh Day Adventists, the Friends, and others. See RHG/Ki 21 01, "Ökumenische Versammlung: Informationsdienst, März 1988," Ökumenische Versammlung, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

forces” to reduce “the destruction of nature.”<sup>85</sup> Even as the movement it changed, one strand of it remained closely tied to religious considerations, focusing on earlier questions about responsibility to God’s creation rather than the political context.

The follow-up conference in October 1988 retained the same tone, further developing criticisms of consumption and production as causes for ecological destruction. The working group for “Ecology and Economy” argued that “fulfilling the annual plan, shortsighted successes in offering consumer goods and statistically successful reports do not suffice as definitions of societal effectiveness.”<sup>86</sup> It argued that because the economy was “primarily organized through central organs,” that change must come from them, too. The resolutions from the working group proposed modifications, such as developments in research and development or banning the buying of waste from West Germany, but it did not push beyond practical suggestions and tips.<sup>87</sup> While anticonsumerism had long been a rallying point for the Protestant life reform movement, it did not necessarily appeal to everyone in the 1920s, or the 1980s. The distance between this mindset and that of more oppositional figures created tension as the goals for different strains within the environmental movement became apparent.

The religious rhetoric and moralizing tone of the Christian ethic did not appeal to many of the movement’s new members, limiting the movement’s reach. Church attendance in the GDR had dramatically declined and religious lessons of abstaining were at odds with many East Germans’ desire for more and better goods, particularly ones from the West. One group’s position illustrates this tension:

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<sup>85</sup> RHG/Ki 21/2, “Ökumenische Vollversammlung, Arbeitsgruppe 11: Ökologie und Ökonomie,” February 12-15, 1988, Ökumenische Versammlung, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>86</sup> RHG/Ki 21/2, “Ökumenische Vollversammlung, Arbeitsgruppe 11: Ökologie und Ökonomie,” October 8-11, 1988, Ökumenische Versammlung, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

Man produces an enormous amount of consumer goods to make life more comfortable and to ward off boredom. He does not care that he squanders energy and resources for future generations, and to manufacture the products as cheaply as possible, he often poisons the air, water and earth.<sup>88</sup>

A focus on waste effectively critiqued the SED system's inefficiencies and shortcomings, inadvertently criticizing the population at the same time. Many could see that pollution was a serious problem, and may have even wanted it addressed, but did not want to be preached at to change their own lives while they protested the SED's policies.

From the perspective of the Church, too, growing environmental groups posed a series of complications. Leaders in the churches, especially the Protestant Church, faced a difficult balancing act between permitting groups to use their space and placating officials. Naturally, some such as the pastor of the Zion Church in Berlin, Hans Simon, supported even fairly oppositional groups like the Environmental Library. Others, such as Hans-Peter Gensichen of the KFH in Wittenberg and Heino Falcke, remained dedicated to environmental causes, though they were not explicitly oppositional. Gensichen and Falcke were both very involved in the organization of the Ecumenical Councils. But others were hesitant to unreservedly back environmental groups' activities. Prominent Church leader Manfred Stolpe was known for asking more radical activists to "keep it down."<sup>89</sup> As part of being "the Church in Socialism," the Protestant Church was obligated to maintain some kind of control over the people it housed as well as to remain in contact with the authorities.

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<sup>88</sup> TH 02/01, "Und ich will bei Euch wohnen," Die Evangelische Umweltgruppe Adlershof, 1987, DDR Umweltbewegung: allgemein, 1981-1989, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>89</sup> Conversation with Lothar Rochau cited in Nathan Stoltzfus, "Public Space and the Dynamics of Environmental Action: Green Protest in the German Democratic Republic," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, Vol. 43 (2003), 394. Stolpe was later accused of being an informer for the Stasi. Despite a somewhat tarnished reputation, he has remained active in provincial Brandenburg politics.

Despite—or even because of—the movement’s expansion, it faced challenges that kept it from becoming a real mass movement. Environmental issues had drawn together people from different backgrounds to protest local conditions or larger threats, such as Chernobyl, but without change from another source, the movement could not achieve any more practical goals. Larger, structural transformation, like what began to happen in Poland in March 1989 with the Round Table discussions, would have to happen for more substantial environmental goals to be realized.

### **The West learns about the East**

While environmental protest might have been reaching a saturation point in the GDR, change not only continued to emerge from the East, but also from the West. With new access to Eastern Europe, Western Europeans—and especially West Germans—could begin to take more concrete interest in events on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Journalists traveled there to report on conditions, while East German activists smuggled documentaries of conditions in the GDR to the West and began to collaborate with Greenpeace and Robin Wood about shared pollution. Official cooperation between East and West Germany, such as desalinizing the Werra and disposing of western waste in the East, only served to further alienate the population on both sides. Increased information in the West raised criticisms of the East, since television and radio reports also informed East Germans about their own situation.

#### *Western journalism and media*

Western journalists’ improved access to the East ultimately permitted the publication of damning exposés that shocked not only western readers and listeners, but also those in the East who illicitly tuned in to western media. Wolf Oschlies’ 1987 *Bald ist Polen doch Verloren: Umweltzerstörung hinter Oder und Neisse* [Poland is Indeed Nearly Lost: Environmental Devastation behind the Oder and Neisse Rivers] and Sabine Rosenblatt’s *Der Osten ist grün? Öko-Reportage aus der DDR, Sowjetunion, Tschechoslowakei, Polen, Ungarn* [Is the East



Green? Eco-Reporting from the GDR, Sovietu Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary] from 1988, reflected a western shock at the grayness of life behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>90</sup>

Additionally, Peter Wensierski had actively written about social and environmental ills in the GDR since the early 1980s—even earning a mention in the 1982 decision by the Council of Ministers to classify data—and became even more involved by helping smuggle out a samizdat film in 1988.<sup>91</sup> Together, these accounts created a sense of impending crisis in Eastern Europe.

Oschlies’s brief book—really more of a report—on conditions in Poland, spared nothing in its description of pollution and discontent. Already in the title, *Poland is indeed Nearly Lost*, Oschlies provocatively referenced the Polish national anthem, which begins, “Poland is not yet lost, so long as we still live.” As he further explained in the preface: “An observer of the ecological situation in this country might emphasize the words ‘not yet,’ but also feel the need to finish the statement with ‘but nearly.’” Given the more open character of the Polish government after 1985, Oschlies contended that “the causes, nature, and scope of the environmental degradation are unreservedly disclosed” and unabashedly blamed the socialist planned economy for extent of the pollution.<sup>92</sup> While this information was not necessarily surprising for those who lived in Poland, for West Germans, reports like these graphically illustrated unanticipated disparities between East and West, not just in the typical sense of consumer goods.

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<sup>90</sup> Wolf Oschlies was born in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) in 1941 and lived in the GDR until he fled to the West in 1959. He later became a professor of political science at the University of Gießen with a focus on Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

<sup>91</sup> DK 5/1982, “Bericht über Probleme des Geheimnisschutzes beim Informationen zum Umweltschutz,” October 25, 1982, Arbeitsgruppe für Organisation und Inspektion beim Ministerrat, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>92</sup> Wolf Oschlies, *Bald ist Polen doch Verloren: Umweltzerstörung hinter Oder und Neisse* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1987), vii.

Oschlies explained the environmental and political situations to western readers unfamiliar with them. He summarized, “Since the early 1980s, an open, honest and self-critical ecology debate has emerged across Eastern Europe.”<sup>93</sup> He further illustrated that the Polish situation was perhaps different from the slightly more familiar East German one. One professor and activist in the official Nature Conservation League (LOP) argued releasing potentially damaging information was not an attack on the Communist Party. Rather, Oschlies concluded: “The voices that seek to reduce the ecology debate to a ‘the enemy is listening’ argument are only a disappearing minority.”<sup>94</sup> In the 100-page report, the professor relayed shocking statistics, illustrations, and quotations from officials who all acknowledged the extent of the problem. Perhaps more alarming to westerners, though, was the conclusion that within the existing system nothing would dramatically change.

While scholars such as Oschlies provided analytical accounts of pollution in Eastern Europe, others, such as a journalist with ties to the green movement, Sabine Rosenblatt, adopted a more provocative tone. In her 1988 exposé, *Der Osten ist grün?* Rosenblatt described her impressions of Eastern bloc countries and discussions with activists and officials there. Her research revealed, for example, a professor from the Polish Academy of Sciences admitting that the Silesian region around Katowice as “probably one of the most polluted regions on the earth.”<sup>95</sup> In Czechoslovakia, however, Rosenblatt’s tale highlighted the fact that problems were being denied, and critical reports being disregarded. In this recounting, Northern Bohemia was a “horror scenario” and a “ticking time bomb” of ecological disaster thanks to heavy reliance on

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>95</sup> Sabine Rosenblatt, *Der Osten ist grün? Öko-raportage aus der DDR, Sowjetunion, Tschechoslowakei, Polen, Ungarn* (Hamburg, Rasch und Röhring Verlag, 1988), 19.

sulfur heavy lignite.<sup>96</sup> She also elucidated similar problems in the Soviet Union proper, the GDR, and Hungary.

Rosenblatt's use of language from the West German green movement put the pollution into terms that West Germans could understand and place their own actions in the broader changes. Major industrial polluters were *Umweltsünder* (literally "environmental sinners") and Eastern bloc terms, such as *Rauchschäden* (damage from smoke, often used to mean air pollution) were placed in quotation marks, challenging their credibility.<sup>97</sup> As prominent journalist and activist Robert Jungk noted in his introduction to the book, growing awareness in Eastern Europe "had been influenced by the western, and especially the German, environmental movement." "Eastern' partners, letters, and underground texts" explained the importance of the West, he claimed.<sup>98</sup> Without fully realizing their own power, western environmentalism had had an impact on the East.

Rosenblatt condemned the entire Soviet system, its centrally planned economies, and most especially the tendency to "displace concerns about its homemade ecological threats."<sup>99</sup> Though she thought environmental protest was on the rise, she also acknowledged that it was dependent on each country's political culture. In a *Spiegel* article, she criticized the lack of an "independent, critical green lobby" in Czechoslovakia, and argued that that "learning process is making headway, but too slowly." Finally, she wondered in the article, "What else has to

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 56, 62.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 188.

happen?”<sup>100</sup> While exposing West German readers to serious environmental issues in Eastern Europe, journalists and activists took credit for their inadvertent influence on the East, but also condescendingly criticized Eastern Europeans for not actively changing the conditions. Even as Western Europeans became more familiar with pollution on the other side of the Iron Curtain, they did not always grasp the political and social intricacies of life in the Soviet system.

*Official Joint Efforts: The Werra*

Not only was the West German public becoming more aware of the environmental problems in the East, but politicians, too, were involved in trying to address them. East German pollution that flowed west in the Elbe and the Werra rivers into the Federal Republic was a great source of frustration. Especially once the Green Party was elected into parliament in 1983, there was increased pressure to improve the water quality of these rivers. In the case of the Werra, it meant West German investment in desalinizing the water so that it was potable and could support life again. For the Elbe, efforts to generally improve water quality in the river that sustained most of the northern Bohemian and East German industry before it flowed into the North Sea were crucial. In both instances, purported East German commitment to the problems belied larger structural issues that even West German contributions could not fix.

The Werra, which flows primarily through Thuringia and across the border into Lower Saxony, was heavily salinized as a result of potash mining.<sup>101</sup> A longstanding issue between the Germanys, the environmental and German-German ministries in West Germany began to address it systematically in the mid-1980s. Both sides mined for potash in this border region, though the pollution disproportionately damaged West German waterways. What was perhaps different this

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<sup>100</sup> B II 3 1101, Sabine Rosenblatt, “Der Lernprozeß ist langsam – zu langsam” *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 7/1987, 100-102, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>101</sup> Potash generally refers to a variety of potassium-based salts used for various industrial processes.

time was that the SED seemed interested in working together to solve the problem (and in getting its hands on West German currency!). The West German government, along with the four affected provinces (North-Rhine Westphalia, Lower Saxony, Hessen, and Bremen) promised to provide two hundred million marks to the process. With Green Joschka Fischer as the environmental minister in Hessen, it looked as if discussions would move forward with greater urgency.<sup>102</sup>

The process faltered, however, when East German officials, such as environmental minister Hans Reichelt, proved difficult to pin down. In October 1987, the two countries had agreed for West German Greens to visit the East German mining operation, but on the day before the visit, Reichelt rescinded the offer, “thereby doing both German states a strong disservice.” As the Green Party press release stated, “The last minute cancellation must be understood as an affront. It’s sad, because Werra, Weser, fish and plants, and above all the local residents are in great need of these talks.”<sup>103</sup> The cooperation moved shakily forward as West Germans provided the means for new measuring equipment, among other things, and each side agreed to certain responsibilities.<sup>104</sup> These agreements, however, were not wide-ranging in their impact and desalinization of the Werra remained a point of contention until the end of the GDR.

The Elbe contained high levels of pollution as well when it crossed from East Germany into the West. On its path from Czechoslovakia, through the GDR, and into West Germany, the Elbe picked up high levels of heavy metals from Bohemia, nitrates from fertilizers, and other

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<sup>102</sup> “Positiver Ansatz: Ein Erdbeben wurde zum deutschdeutschen Politikum,” *Der Spiegel* 11/1985, March 11, 1985.

<sup>103</sup> RGH OWK 01, “Werra Entsalzung braucht Zusammenarbeit und Dialog – Doch DDR nimmt Zusage an Grüne zurück,” Pressemitteilung Nr. 981/87, October 23, 1987, Ost-West Kontakte, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>104</sup> MfS Rechtsstelle 210, “Beschluß des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 12. April 1988: Information über den Stand, die Probleme und das weitere Vorgehen zur Gewährleistung der Bergbau- und öffentlichen Sicherheit und zur Rohstoffsicherung im Kalibetrieb ,Werra,“ Rechtsstelle, BStU.

pollutants from other industries dumping into major tributaries like the Mulde and the Saale.<sup>105</sup> The Wofatex incident of 1977 (when five to six hundred kilograms of pesticide were dumped into the Mulde) was just one of many similar disastrous spills that the Elbe and its environs suffered in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>106</sup> Greens and Greenpeace activists in Lower Saxony and Hamburg were not just concerned about the high level of pollution for the river and the West German population, but also for the damage the pollution caused in the North Sea, into which the Elbe empties.

Though the problems were persistent, until December 1987, the SED refused to discuss them with FRG officially. An action in Dresden in November had forced the SED's hand, when five visiting Greenpeace members and East German activists had distributed fliers around the city that revealed the high levels of pollution and their impact on "Dresden-Hamburg-North Sea."<sup>107</sup> The activists were pushing for the GDR and the CSSR to participate in a conference on the ecological condition of the North Sea, because while the two countries did not lie directly on the body of water, their pollution damaged it. Shortly thereafter, in December, the SED agreed to trilateral talks on the matter.<sup>108</sup> In the last year or two of the GDR's existence, Honecker and the SED tentatively agreed to work together, or to essentially receive aid to let the West Germans improve the water quality of the Elbe, but they continued to drag their feet.<sup>109</sup> Even Schleswig-

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<sup>105</sup> MfS HA XVIII 21998, "Information über die Entwicklung der Beschaffenheit der Elbe und zur Durchführung von Maßnahmen der Abwasserlastsenkung," 1987, Hauptabteilung XVIII, Absicherung der Volkswirtschaft, BStU.

<sup>106</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>107</sup> MfS HA XVIII 2998, "Stellungnahme zu den Flugblättern der Internationalen Umweltschutzorganisation, Greenpeace', die von 5 Mitgliedern der Organisation am 14.11.1987 in Dresden verteilt wurden," Hauptabteilung XVIII, Absicherung der Volkswirtschaft, BStU.

<sup>108</sup> B II 567, "Kurzprotokoll der 13. Sitzung des Ausschusses für Umwelt, Naturschutz und Reaktorsicherheit," December 9, 1987, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>109</sup> Hermann Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen: Die DDR im internationalen System, 1949-1989* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007), 519-520.

Holstein was willing to help with some of the efforts to clean up the river, including lowering mercury and cadmium levels.<sup>110</sup> Ultimately, very little was addressed before the GDR began to fall apart, because the SED moved slowly and did not want to risk looking bad.

Thus, while connections grew between East and West, and West German Greens' efforts forced the issue, progress was torturously slow. The same old power games from Honecker, Mittag, and the Stasi demonstrated that maintaining East German status and interests was more important than solving problems that affected Germans on both side of the Iron Curtain. For there to be real improvement of East German or shared environmental problems, the SED's gerontocracy would have to let go of power.

#### *Joint Nongovernmental Projects*

Although official efforts to improve environmental conditions stagnated, East and West German activists had already begun to undertake joint projects. This cooperation stemmed from either projects that raised the profile of environmental disasters in the GDR or ones that affected both countries, like the Dresden example above. Perhaps most famously, the 1988 documentary, *Bitteres aus Bitterfeld*, illuminated the degree of pollution in the Chemical Triangle. Jointly organized protests tended to focus on West German provinces selling their waste to the GDR, such as at the waste disposal site outside of Schöneiche. Through protests, and very importantly, television broadcasts, cooperation between independent activists on either side hinted that a larger change might be afoot. Nevertheless, it is easy to exaggerate these projects because they were in fact the exception not the rule. They stand out more for their rarity, and, emphasize the continued difficulty of international collaboration.

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<sup>110</sup> MfS HA XVIII 24797, Correspondence between Hans Reichelt and Gunter Mittag, June 5, 1989, Hauptabteilung XVIII, Absicherung der Volkswirtschaft, BStU.

On September 27, 1988, the West German television stations, ARD and ZDF, broke precedent by broadcasting a thirty-minute documentary entitled, *Bitteres aus Bitterfeld*. While segments on the GDR were not unheard of, the documentary captured public interest because East German environmental activists associated with Arche had written, filmed, and smuggled it into the West to be shown on television there. Organized by Ulrich Neumann, Rainer Hällfritsch, and Margit Miosga, the film depicted the devastating effects of the chemical industry on the region, especially the dumping of hazardous chemicals into local water ways and abandoned open-pit mines.<sup>111</sup> After it was smuggled into the West, journalist and popular expert on the GDR, Peter Wensierski, helped to produce and air it. The documentary was so successful that the Environmental Library screened it at the sixth Eco-Seminar in October, ending the bitter feud between the two groups.<sup>112</sup>

Now, West Germans could not just read about, but see for themselves the extent of the pollution. One of the co-founders, Carlo Jordan, later suggested that hundreds of thousands of West Germans had seen the documentary, making the problem real for them.<sup>113</sup> The film was also especially important to East Germans illicitly watching West German television, because it gave them information about their own country that they would have never have otherwise received. By looking to the West, East Germans, along with westerners, could learn about the dangerously high levels toxins being dumped into the water and the air.

The documentary also raised another issue that became a flashpoint in the late 1980s, the disposal of waste in the GDR. As shown in *Bitteres aus Bitterfeld*, photo processing chemicals,

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<sup>111</sup> For a ten minute clip of the video with commentary by Wensierski, accessed May 24, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULaE5o3n3Bc>.

<sup>112</sup> Matthias Voigt, "Zangengeburt unterm Kirchendach," *Die Tageszeitung*, May 4, 1990.

<sup>113</sup> POL 509-3, "Teil II. Die Grünen aus dem Blickwinkel der Bürgerbewegungen der DDR," undated, *Die Deutschlandpolitik der Grünen in den 80er Jahren*, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.



pesticides, fertilizers, and other harmful chemicals were dumped unceremoniously into abandoned open-pit mines without any regard for proper disposal. The narrator described how when the ground froze in the winter, that runoff from the chemical plants flooded the gardens of a nearby housing complex. While East German waste disposal (or lack thereof) had been a problem for a long time, the issue garnered more attention in the late 1980s when East and West German activists came together to protest the SED's buying and mishandling of West German domestic and industrial trash.

West Berlin's waste had been sold to the GDR for it to handle for years, having no hinterland of its own in which to dispose of it. But as western-based group, Robin Wood, and activists in the East pointed out, the process of West Berlin selling its waste to the GDR was different from the usual waste disposal, and the landfill in Schöneiche became a symbol of inequality. Activists protested that accepting money to dispose of others' waste was hardly an incentive, and to make things worse, the trash sent to Schöneiche was largely the "waste of prosperity."<sup>114</sup> They also argued that there was a double standard, because West Berlin was not responsible for what happened to the trash in the GDR, and that Schöneiche's management did not follow the same standards as would have been required in the West. This discrepancy in regulation—and its practice if not theory—was particularly prevalent at Schöneiche and its partner dump in nearby Vorketzin, because they handled hazardous as well as regular waste.<sup>115</sup>

In protest of a new incinerator being opened on November 1, 1988, Robin Wood and the Environmental Library held a joint demonstration. Being a normal workday, the protest was just

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<sup>114</sup> RHG/ ÜG 03, "Alternativen zum Müll," undated, Arche, Grün-ökologisches Netzwerk in den Ev. Kirchen der DDR, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>115</sup> RHG/Th 02/09, "Infos zur Sonermüllverbrennung (sic) (SVA) und Deponie (MD) Schöneiche," Müll, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

going to be a “small circle of reliable people.”<sup>116</sup> Robin Wood activists attempted to block West Berlin trash trucks from crossing the border into the GDR near Lichtenrade, and then join East Berliners demonstrating at the landfill itself in Schöneiche. Unfortunately, there was some organizational confusion as well as Stasi suspicion, thanks to a West Berlin press conference, and so the protest was broken up before anyone could reach the site. As one participant later wrote in the *Umweltblätter*, “By 11:30, there wasn’t an unguarded bush” in Schöneiche county anymore, and the demonstrators were rounded up.<sup>117</sup> Though the November 1 demonstration was not as successful as the organizers would have liked, waste disposal galvanized East and West German activists and forged cooperation on a grassroots level unseen regarding other issues.

Schöneiche attracted the most attention from the press, perhaps, but it was not the only example of West German trash being sold to the GDR for western currency and with no consideration for the ecological consequences. The West German provinces of Schleswig-Holstein and Hessen, as well as other western European countries, were also guilty of selling their waste to the GDR. The hazardous waste site in Schönberg, not far from Wismar (not to be confused with Schöneiche), received trash from all over Western Europe. Greenpeace activists in West Germany and the Netherlands provided the data: “Roughly seven million tons of poisonous substances primarily from Western Europe have never been taken so cheaply,” and “From the FRG, Italy, France, Belgium, Holland, Austria, and Switzerland, nearly 1.3 million tons of waste is brought there annually.”<sup>118</sup> While purporting to have become increasingly green themselves, Western European countries were cheaply disposing of their waste and then turning a blind eye.

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<sup>116</sup> RHG/RG/B 19/09, “Robin Wood und Umwelt-Bibliothek gegen Giftmüllexport,” Umwelt Bibliothek, Redaktion *Umweltblätter*, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> RHG/Th 02/09, “Greenpeace Presse-Information, 31.11.89” and “Resolution,” undated, anonymous, Müll, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

Citizens of Wismar even took to writing West German politicians, because they thought they might gain more concessions from the other side than from the SED. In a letter to the West German minister president, a Wismar environmental group begged him to “use his influence to end West German export of waste.” They added, “our country has enough problems with its own waste. The GDR cannot become Europe’s trash dump!”<sup>119</sup> Western activists’ conscience about the larger balance of ecology in Europe accordingly melded with East Germans’ concern for local conditions to create collaboration on the interconnected issue of buying and selling trash. In the more transparent world of late 1988 and early 1989, the citizens’ of Wismar turned to western politicians for help, apparently a more viable option than in the past. Of course, just a year later as the reunification process began, the issue of waste disposal reappeared with a vengeance as former East German territory needed to comply with West German laws.

### **Conclusion**

Because Gorbachev’s reforms in 1985 were followed by the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in 1986, the environmental and political landscape of Eastern Europe changed dramatically. Immediate calls for information about the effects of the disaster led to demands for wholesale transformation of environmental policies, and ultimately the system more broadly. Travel within the Eastern bloc and between East and West allowed more people to share more amounts of information across an expanding geographic space. Especially in this period between 1986 and 1989, the Iron Curtain grew more porous and the contacts expanded more than the scholarship has traditionally illustrated. Western Europeans visiting Eastern Europe relayed information and tactics that were previously difficult to obtain, while environmental groups on both sides recognized shared concern for air, water, and human health in Europe, regardless of political

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<sup>119</sup> RHG/Th 02/09, Letter to the West German Minister President from the Wismar Ökumenisches Zentrum für Umweltschutz, March 2, 1989, Müll, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

boundaries. Chernobyl sparked not only antinuclear concern, but broader awareness of a range of environmental issues.

For East Germans, the relative ease with which the Polish government worked with independent activists cast the SED's more repressive character into even harsher light. Polish collaboration between official and independent activists succeeded in raising awareness, and even prompting some changes before 1989. The more relaxed Polish government permitted greater interaction between East and West, allowing the PKE and other independent organizations to learn, and profit, from western green movements. Although the flow of information increased and Poland had perhaps the only mass opposition movement in the Eastern bloc, the country's environmental movement did not become a mass movement, or even fully a part of the opposition movement.

In the GDR, too, although environmental awareness expanded dramatically after 1986, it did not constitute a mass movement. Small, if connected, groups based in the Protestant Church could exert some pressure party-state officials, but not enough to comprehensively address the serious, systemic (or systematic) environmental degradation they faced. Constant police and Stasi interference effectively sowed discord within the movement. Party-state institutions continually sought to keep it divided in an attempt to limit its influence. Without larger, structural changes, the environmental movement in the GDR was reaching a saturation point.

Fortunately, the larger changes in Eastern Europe and Western Europeans' heightened interest in the East exerted new and powerful pressure on the SED and fellow communist parties in the Soviet bloc. Western green activists visited the East on an unprecedented scale, reporting on pollution in the East and its disastrous repercussions on societies on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The Greens in parliament and ministerial posts in various West German states took

more proactive steps toward official and binding agreements on shared waterways and air pollution. In turn, East Germans learned about their own environmental situation from reading, watching, and listening to illegal West German media.

Nevertheless, without larger changes, the environmental movements in Eastern Europe would not be able to accomplish sweeping improvements. The political system refused to—or was incapable of—altering its priorities and structure to improve environmental conditions. Continued repression and censorship would keep the SED uneasily in power until the needed systemic changes became a possibility, and ultimately, a reality.

**CHAPTER 6**  
**Growing Together?**  
**Environmentalism and the Reunification Process, 1989-1990**

On September 4, 1989, as a peaceful prayer service at Leipzig's Nikolaikirche ended, those attending filed into the street protesting the GDR's travel bans. Although the Stasi tore their posters from their hands and arrested about one hundred of the demonstrators, more returned the next week, and the week after that, and the week after that. By October 9, 70,000 people filled the streets of Leipzig with peaceful demonstrations, forcing the police to back down or risk the backlash of a Tiananmen Square-like situation.<sup>1</sup> Two weeks after that, 320,000 packed into Leipzig's main streets, chanting "We are the people" and demanded free elections. Much to observers' surprise, the state with the least organized opposition and dissident leadership became the country best known for its mass demonstrations against its ruling communist party in what has become known as the "peaceful revolution."

While the East German Monday demonstrations became a media sensation in the fall of 1989, irreparable changes to communist power in Eastern Europe had begun months before. On February 6, 1989, Solidarność and Communist Party leaders met for the first of a series of meetings that ultimately led to the end of one-party rule in Poland. Lasting roughly two months, the Round Table Talks covered a wide range of social, economic issues that concluded with arranging for the first semi-free elections in the Soviet bloc. On June 4, 1989, the Solidarność's political wing overwhelmingly defeated all other contenders, though limits had initially been

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<sup>1</sup> Konrad Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 33-34.

placed on how many seats noncommunist parties could hold. Solidarność's success in the Round Tables and subsequent election became the vanguard of change in Eastern Europe. Reforms in Hungary, as well as other Eastern European countries, also tipped the scales toward democratization through the summer and fall. By November 9, 1989, even the most stalwart holdout of the communist system in Eastern Europe, the GDR, opened its borders when the Berlin Wall fell.

But where did environmental protest fit into the excitement of 1989, its peaceful demonstrations, and formal talks between communist and opposition leaders? Although environmental issues had been a constant and serious threat to the stability of Eastern European regimes in the 1980s, where it fits into the final days of communist rule and its collapse deserves further attention.<sup>2</sup> Protestors in the streets of Leipzig carried banners not just demanding free elections and the right to travel about, but also proclaimed "Stop Smog and the Environmental Catastrophe" and "Money for the Military? Our Environment needs it more!"<sup>3</sup> In Poland, too, Zygmunt Fura and the PKE participated in the Round Table talks. Moreover, discussions over pollution and industrial cleanup were a major part of the unification and democratization processes. Officials from environmental ministries and institutions negotiated the terms of the environmental that activists demanded be addressed.

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<sup>2</sup> Early works like Barbara Jancar-Webster's *Environmental Action in Eastern Europe: Responses to Crisis* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1993) demonstrate the importance of environmental activism in the 1980s, but much of the transition literature focused on political and economic transformation. For example, Jerzy Bojesza and Klaus Ziemer's edited volume, *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes in Europe: Legacies and Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), or Grzegorz Ekiert and Stephen E. Hanson's work, *Capitalism and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe: Assessing the Legacy of Communist Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), focus almost exclusively on political institutions and the market economy.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Schneider, ed, *Leipziger Demo-Montage Tagebuch Demontage* (Leipzig and Weimar: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1991), 123.

Up to now, unification scholarship has largely focused on the diplomatic and political significance of democratization and German unity, especially in a European context. A number of early works considered these questions, such as Timothy Garton Ash's *In Europe's Name* and Konrad Jarausch's *The Rush to German Unity*.<sup>4</sup> Others focused on the undoing of the communist systems, initially devoting special attention to oppositional leaders and protests, and only later turning to the failures within the communist structures.<sup>5</sup> More recent works look at the successes and failures of unification, especially regarding social welfare state, or these processes in specific regions.<sup>6</sup> These processes were clearly at the center of political and economic transformation of the former Soviet bloc, but how did environmental issues shape the immediate changes in 1989-90 as the system fell apart? Where did pollution fit into the other popular demands of unification? Finally, how were the new environmental polices conceptualized and implemented?

Looking back at 1989-90, the collapse of communism and reunification in Germany might seem inevitable, but upon closer examination, the excitement as well as the uncertainty reemerges. In the case of the environment, as well, as more broadly, a myriad of new, old, and quickly changing actors—with their often contradictory agendas—complicate a coherent

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<sup>4</sup> Konrad Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Random House, 1993). Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: the Revolution of '89 witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) and Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Random House, 2009). Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk represents a younger generation of scholars returning to the topic of the "peaceful revolution," with his book, *Endspiel: Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Manfred Schmidt and Gerhard Ritter's 2011 edited volume, *The Rise and Fall of a Socialist Welfare State: The German Democratic Republic (1949-199) and German Unification (1989-1994)* (New York: Springer Press, 2011) focuses precisely on these social welfare and political questions. Michael Richter's incredibly thorough *Die friedliche Revolution: Aufbruch zur Demokratie in Sachsen 1989/90* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009) examines the peaceful revolution in Saxony, but despite Saxony's oppressive pollution at the time, the environment barely merits a mention in his 1600+ page tome. Surprisingly, however, a number of the photos included in the two volume work are of environmental posters and protests.



narrative of this period. Timelines overlap, events and decisions in different places sometimes seem repetitive. While this narrative has attempted to minimize the confusion, it is important to remember that this was a tumultuous time with a plethora of actors who did not always consult with each other or reach conclusions at the same time.

As the communist system fell apart, replaced by new institutions and policies, Poland's and the GDR's trajectories diverged. When Zygmunt Fura and others established the Polish Green Party in late 1988, the state did not suppress the founding meeting. Poland's Round Table Talks, which began nearly a year before the East German ones, provided hope for change and improved environmental conditions. Renewed civil society and political parties provided a moment of optimism for environmental efforts in Poland. Emphasis on economic performance and tension within the Green Party frustrated hope for strong environmental policies. Inadvertently, the Solidarność's success meant that a trade union focusing on economic performance and competitiveness did not emphasize the importance of environmental regulation in its drive to democratize and privatize Poland's economy.

The GDR's leadership, however, clung tenuously to its power until November 1989, only tentatively suggesting reforms long after the Communist Party in Poland had relinquished control. Even with the SED's dominance called into question, what would happen to the GDR remained unclear. Calls for reform or a "third way" from within the GDR stood in stark contrast to Helmut Kohl's "Ten Point Plan for Reunification" from December 1989. Although the results of the March 1990 elections overwhelmingly mandated a reunification with West German, how that would proceed, environmentally, was not yet clear. The Federal Republic's strong and well-respected Green Party arose in a very different social and cultural atmosphere, occasionally creating confusion and tension with East German environmental activists. Like in Poland, the

question of how to privatize and make the economy viable in a competitive market overshadowed ecological concerns.

The way communism fell apart in the GDR and Poland shaped the successor states that followed and their approaches for environmentalism. For both, access to consumer goods and economic performance took priority. The largest different, of course, was that the GDR was incorporated into a wealthier and greener Federal Republic. Nearly two decades of rising environmental consciousness and effective regulation sensitized the architects of unification to the devastation in the East, though in some ways, simultaneously taking away from grassroots activism. The success of cleaning up the East by implementing West German environmental law has come to be seen as an unsatisfactory consolation for unemployment as the “new provinces” struggled to compete in the 1990s. In the transition of 1989-90 in the GDR and Poland, environmental issues were often not the highest priority, but continued to shape Eastern Europeans’ lives, even when not in the limelight. In Poland the movement’s struggle to find its place in a newly democratized society—and civil society—reflected continuing economic challenges, whereas in the GDR, environmental activists’ frustration with unification resulted in renewed concern for issues at the local level.

### **Polish Democratization and the Environment**

After the Communist Party’s concessions in September 1988, the future of state communism in Poland was uncertain. The decision to permit formal talks between the party and Solidarność pushed Gorbachev’s reforms further than ever before, conceding that there were other actors with valid ideas. As Zygmunt Fura and the other Green Party leaders stated in their founding meeting, they hoped to be formally admitted in order to inform future policy and any political and economic transformation. While successfully tapping into frustration with the party-state and environmental conditions, the PKE turned Green Party faced new challenges as it

transitioned from protest to hopefully setting environmental policy. Unfortunately, these new tasks required different skills, and were especially hard to develop as concern for economic performance clashed with environmental regulation. While Poland's opposition had been strong, and helped to propel the environmental movement along, once it negotiated power with the communist government, environmental concerns largely fell by the wayside, especially as the movement itself disagreed on how to best proceed. Unlike in Germany after unification, Polish environmentalism—official or unofficial—struggled to find its place in politics and society, disappointing activists who had hoped system change would also bring about an environmental transformation.

*Polish Ecological Club's Declaration of Ideology*

As the PKE's efforts grew in 1987 and 1988, members came together on an unprecedented scale and writing a "Declaration of Ideology" that was eventually published in early 1989. The well-known architect and professor, Stanisław Juchnowicz explained in the preface that the impetus for such a statement came out of the PKE's second national congress in February 1987. The PKE hoped that such a proclamation would "contribute to the development of an environmentally friendly society" and "environmentally conscious thinking."<sup>7</sup> With the easing of restrictions and hope for a more open society, the PKE leadership, hoped to connect with a broader base in the population.

The declaration and theses set high expectations for itself and its members, drawing on a number of international agreements as well as appealing to morality. It proclaimed that "the PKE is a social movement of people aware of the dangers of technological civilization and consumer society." It further specified that its members should be "working for the good of the nation in

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<sup>7</sup> Stanisław Juchnowicz, "Słowo Wstępne," *Deklaracja Ideowa I Tezy Programowe Polskiego Klubu Ekologicznego* (Kraków: Nakładem Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1989), 5.

the field of nature conservation or the environment in which man lives.”<sup>8</sup> It also said the importance of universal, moral values to in the PKE’s humanistic mission. Finally, it reaffirmed its previous commitment “high ethical values” as well as to the cooperation of enthusiasts, professionals, and journalists, which added “passion of action,” knowledge, and awareness, respectively.<sup>9</sup> These principles illustrate the delicate balance that the PKE was trying to strike between the tradition of expert-oriented conservation and a larger movement as it moved forward.

The 1989 proclamation clearly reflected the growing contacts between East and West, including the “principles of sustainable development” to appeal to nonmembers on both sides of the Iron Curtain.<sup>10</sup> Such language was not standard for Soviet-influenced science and suggested a more western, holistic approach to environmentalism. The PKE’s theses specifically addressed the importance of scientific and humanistic aspects to environmentalism and devoted attention to both in the forty-five page document. Though the result was a compromise between those who wished to emphasize one perspective over the other, the debate illustrated the evolution of the club’s thinking and mentality toward inclusion. As another contributor suggested, the heterogeneous character of the text and the “broad social engagement of [PKE] members must be considered an undeniable achievement.”<sup>11</sup> For some members, a declaration like this, and the work that went into creating it, signaled a rising environmental consciousness in the population more broadly.

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<sup>8</sup> “Deklaracja Ideowa,” *Deklaracja Ideowa I Tezy Programowe Polskiego Klubu Ekologicznego* (Kraków: Nakładem Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1989), 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Gumińska, “Wstęp do Tez Programowych,” *Deklaracja Ideowa I Tezy Programowe Polskiego Klubu Ekologicznego* (Kraków: Nakładem Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1989), 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Armed with such high-minded principles, the PKE sought to bring more members and activists into its fold in communism's final months in power. It incorporated new concepts and hoped to appeal to new members by clearly stating the club's platform and ambitions. Still, even greater challenges lay not too far ahead.

#### *A Polish Green Party*

In December 1988, the PKE took a different approach to the changing political and societal situation, founding a political party closely connected with the club. In its new role, the Polish Green Party faced new challenges. Internally, the Greens had to learn how to function as a political party and to set an agenda. In addition to these difficulties, the infant party had to find its place in the evolving political landscape negotiating its role among more powerful players. The Communist Party and Solidarność had already negotiated Round Table Talks in September 1988 and were set to begin in February 1989. Part of this task required establishing the party's relevance more broadly. Finally, the Polish Green Party sought legitimacy through associating itself with Western European green parties, most especially the West German one.

The new Green Party, under the leadership of Zygmunt Fura and others, sought first and foremost to establish environmental concerns as central to Poland's problems. Where Solidarność prioritized making the economy more competitive and democratizing, which were serious questions, Fura remained focused on ecology. In September 1988, the PKE had already announced the creation of the Polish Ecological Party, but it consisted really only of thirteen people involved in this process and with the explicit demand to participate in the recently announced Round Table Talks. Therefore, in December, they organized a larger assembly for an official founding meeting. Between seventy and a hundred delegates represented roughly four

hundred members from twenty-four locales.<sup>12</sup> This new Green Party focused on creating a platform, statutes for how the party would function, and a statement of principles. With an eye toward future elections in the Sejm, the party sought to make ecological themes political, but it also explained that it “must expand the bounds of political activity.”<sup>13</sup> The party leadership wanted to participate in any elections as an independent party, offering an alternative to the Solidarność-Communist dichotomy.

Distrust between different factions and personalities fractured the party internally, making it difficult to establish a clear position or trajectory. The backgrounds of the three spokesmen elected at the founding meeting in December 1988 show how many differences the new party had to overcome. One, Janusz Bryczkowski from Olsztyn characterized himself as independent, but others said that he was actually a “party man.” The second, Henryk Sobański, was a professional scientist and a longtime member of the PKE. The third, Leszek Konarski, had been involved in Solidarność in 1980-81 and worked for the well-known “perestroika weekly,” *Przegląd Tygodniowy*. Perhaps most shockingly, the heir apparent to a leadership position, Fura, was not elected as a spokesperson for the party. Although he had many connections internationally, according to the West German Green Party participant in the events, the reasons for his non-election were varied. She explained in her report, “some think he is too conceited and ambitious and that his political initiatives...unwise. Personally, he understood his defeat as the result of intrigue, though it wasn’t clear to [him] who was behind it or why.”<sup>14</sup> These early tensions within the party did not bode well for a cohesive green agenda.

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<sup>12</sup> B II 1 5732, Elisabeth Weber, “Bericht über eine kurze Polen-Reise im Dezember 1988 anlässlich der Gründung einer Grünen Partei in Polen,” 6, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 7.

These tensions were exacerbated by the emerging bipolar constellation with the Communist Party on one side and Solidarność on the other. Because the environmental movement, especially PKE, had situated itself as neither party line nor explicitly oppositional and included members from both sides, as the larger political situation in Poland shifted, it struggled to find its place. Solidarność leaders in Warsaw, such as Jacek Kuroń, claimed they had never even heard of the party, though in general, they believed that “Pluralism is good. All efforts to this end are worth pursuing.”<sup>15</sup> To complicate matters, some environmental activists, such as Elżbieta Oleńska from Poznań and Radosław Gawlik from Wrocław, preferred not to become involved in the party at all, contending they were “interested in ecology not politics.”<sup>16</sup> Potentially effective leaders who had been involved in the movement removed themselves from the political arena, leaving the new party without their direction or charisma. As the Green Party attempted to gain a foothold, the dominance of the two major players and conflicts within limited its influence and appeal to the population more generally.

In the hope of gaining more international attention, the Green Party reached out to its partner parties, especially in Western Europe. At the founding meeting, not only did West German Greens Elisabeth Weber and Thomas Kuhl come to observe the proceedings, but so did Ali Gronner from the Austrian Green Party and Sara Parkin of the European Greens.<sup>17</sup> The Polish Greens further shared their decisions and goings-on via letters and press releases, often translated into German or English for an international audience. Despite his electoral loss within the party, Fura dubbed himself in charge of “information and international cooperation,” and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 7-8.

accordingly mailed letters to the West German Greens announcing the party's founding and priorities. He explained that the party already had two thousand members and was "playing an important role in the democratization process."<sup>18</sup> Fura and others recognized that potential aid from the West might provide means to support the fledgling party, which would be difficult to find domestically.

Despite a strong justification for championing environmental causes, transitioning from movement to political party proved challenging for the nascent Green Party. In addition to struggling internally to define itself, the party also needed to establish itself in a swiftly evolving political constellation and a new international context. In the transition from independent and somewhat oppositional movement into organized party, the Polish Greens faced unforeseen challenges.

#### *Round Table to Elections*

The Green Party's stated goal had been to be able to participate in the Round Table Talks beginning in February 1989. Despite the Green Party's efforts to be represented at the talks, Solidarność remained the primary opposition partner. Although both sides had advisers and discussed environmental issues, especially air and water pollution, they never gained much public attention. As Padraic Kenney has argued in his work, *A Carnival of Revolution*, the Round Table was not the revolution, which he estimated had been underway since the summer before.<sup>19</sup> The Round Table was still important, because it suggested what a new Poland might look like. Solidarność and the Communist Party's control of the bargaining table did not bode well for the prioritization of environmental concerns, though they were addressed. While the environment

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<sup>18</sup> 80-114, "Die Polnische Partei von Grünen," undated, Polen, Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf.

<sup>19</sup> Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe, 1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 250.



was a subject of discussion, the primary focus of the Round Table Talks was how to create democratic political system and capitalist economy out of communism.

At the Round Table, Solidarność had more experts—primarily from the legions of the PKE—on environmental issues than the Communist Party, and these scientists raised relevant issues accordingly.<sup>20</sup> When they fit into the organization’s larger goals, Solidarność did raise questions about the pollution, especially when courting western interests.<sup>21</sup> At the Round Table, the PKE represented Solidarność.<sup>22</sup> Although Kenney suggests this was because the PKE was considered part of the “constructive opposition,” and a more moderate group, it was also because they had technical knowledge needed to make policy and worked with officials throughout the 1980s. More radically oppositional groups like WiP were pushed to the periphery, as were environmental issues in general.

Environmental issues became the center of attention at the relatively ignored ecology “subtable.”<sup>23</sup> Even in Barbara Hicks’s book on environmental movements and policy in Poland only briefly mentions the proceedings, maintaining that “discussions at the ‘subtable’ for ecology went smoothly and the parties reached an agreement on all issues except nuclear energy before the end of March.”<sup>24</sup> Exactly as the Green Party had feared and tried to avoid, the environment

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<sup>20</sup> Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland: A Social Movement between Regime and Opposition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 94. The PKE represented about forty percent of all environmental experts at the Round Table, according to Hicks.

<sup>21</sup> Solidarność had included strategic information about environmental pollution in German-language pamphlets intended for foreign audiences since at least 1986. Numerous of them ended up in the hands of the West German Greens. See for example, B II 3 1101, Solidarność, “Informationsbulletin,” Nrs. 37, 50 53-54, März 1986, April 1987, and August 1987, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>22</sup> Petr Pavlínek and John Pickles, *Environmental Transitions: Transformation and Ecological Defence in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 176.

<sup>23</sup> Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 251.

<sup>24</sup> Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland*, 149.

did not become a serious topic at the talks, receiving little media attention. Thus, a potential moment of change in which the Round Table could have raised the environmental movement's profile nationally came to nothing. The failure to gain traction demonstrated that while pollution was significant, a deep-seated environmental consciousness was still lacking among the general population, and that the communist political and economic structures remained at the heart of the talks.

The Round Table concluded on April 6, 1989, with Solidarność and the government agreeing on reforms for a more pluralistic society. The Communist Party's concessions included the freedoms of association and speech, and independent judiciary, and independent trade unions. Most importantly, the agreement changed the legislative bodies, recalling the pre-World War II Senate as the upper chamber and the Sejm as the lower.<sup>25</sup> In the June 1989 elections, the opposition was permitted to run people for thirty-five percent of the seats in the Sejm and all of the seats in the Senate. Although the Green Party put up candidates, they did not receive any of the seats, all of those open to the opposition went to Solidarność. For many defeating the Communists was more important than any other issue.<sup>26</sup> Solidarność tapped prominent figures like Radek Gawlik in Wrocław, who had credentials both as a member of Solidarność and as an ecologist, to represent it in the elections rather than have them listed as part of the Green Party. At least initially, Solidarność's power and popularity won out over other issues, even as Solidarność criticized the Green Party's existence, calling it "hyper-pluralism."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Glenn E. Curtis, editor. *Poland: a Country Study* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, October 1992), 175.

<sup>26</sup> Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*, 259.

<sup>27</sup> Aaron Pezem, "Zieloni czy Szarzy? Konflikt w Polskiej Partii Zielonych," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 8, 1989. Found in B II 1 1645, "Polen ab 1988," Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

The Polish Communist Party's authority clearly ended with the June elections. Nevertheless, Poland's future remained uncertain. *Solidarność* was a popular alternative to the ruling power, but transitioning from opposition to policymaking proved difficult for the trade union as well. Under the leadership of *Solidarność*'s star Lech Wałęsa, Poland entered into a confusing era, in which a trade union became antigovernment and antiregulation. It prioritized privatization and improving the economy almost at any cost. As Petr Pavlínek and John Pickles point out in their work *Environmental Transitions*, in the 1990s, even a spokesperson for the environmental ministry could say "right now, the environment is not a priority, because there are so many other needs."<sup>28</sup> Despite acknowledgement of environmental concern, it was obviously subordinated to other issues as Poland transitioned to a democratic and capitalist society.

#### *The Fate of Environmental Protest in Poland*

After the electoral failures of June 1989, the Polish Greens—as a party and as a movement—continued to struggle to gain national recognition. Internal issues divided the movement while the general population focused on other issues. When the Greens received any media attention at all, mainstream sources criticized the party's incoherence and infighting. Otherwise, environmental issues remained more of a localized concern, with organization and protest concentrating on specific polluters, not unlike it had under communist rule. Therefore, despite a burgeoning of environmental groups and movements in the 1990s as a response to the problems of communist production, environmentalism did not become a mass movement after the end of communism; nor did it gain the ability to set strict environmental policy.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Pavlínek and Pickles, *Environmental Transitions*, 176.

<sup>29</sup> Barbara Hicks makes reference to the growth of environmental groups after 1989 and argues that environmentalism's failures stemmed from a "civil society [that] was not simply anti-state, but took up issues and positions that went beyond the deep-seated split between officialdom and the opposition." Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland*, 161.

In the summer after the elections, newspaper articles in German and Polish media—in as far as they paid attention to it at all—criticized the Green Party’s internal strife. A contributor for the German *Tageszeitung*, Klaus Bachmann, described a split between the Bryczkowski and Sobański’s wing of the party, which was based in Olsztyn and Warsaw, and the activists based in Kraków. Apparently, the twenty-eight members in Warsaw who did not attend a special congress were kicked out of the party. Bachmann further complained that the Krakowians “did little more than reaffirm the Round Table’s environmental resolutions.”<sup>30</sup> Instead they argued over topics that seemed self-explanatory, such as abortion, the use of pesticides in agricultures, and even recreational hunting. His conclusion was that the Polish Greens had to ask themselves “how to create an environmental movement that doesn’t have the requisite consciousness.”<sup>31</sup> With this less than supportive statement, Bachmann unknowingly drew on some of the fears and assumptions that Weber had expressed in her report a half a year before. From the western perspective, the Greens were distinctly lacking in greenness.

Polish critiques, such as Aaron Pezem from *Solidarność’s Gazeta Wyborcza*, detailed the same division between the different factions, but highlighted different scenes. He accused Bryczkowski of being more interested in hunting than ecology and further clarified that in his hometown of Olsztyn, he had tried to run independently, in breach of the Greens’ party rules. Ultimately, Bryczkowski failed to get the requisite three thousand signatures, but Pezem considered this infighting and posturing to be “the embarrassing consequences of hyper-democracy.”<sup>32</sup> Pezem’s critique did not focus on the Greens’ apparent lack of environmental

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<sup>30</sup> Klaus Bachmann, “Polens Grüne sind sich nicht grün,” *Die Tageszeitung*, July 18, 1989, found in Materiały ogólne, Oddział Życia Społecznego, Biblioteka Ossolineum.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Aaron Pezem, “Zieloni czy Szarzy? Konflikt w Polskiej Partii Zielonych,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 8, 1989. Found in B II 1 1645, “Polen ab 1988,” Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

consciousness so much as their inability to function as a well-organized political party. For him, it appeared that Solidarność provided enough of an alternative and that the Greens' actions were actually detrimental to developing a democratic state.

After two years of Solidarność ruling the government, the Greens were still hoping for more electoral support. Without much domestic support, national spokesman, Fura, again turned to the West German Greens for aid. He stated that continuing ecological crisis and a weak economy, left people "frustrated and critical of existing political forces." In the upcoming election, the Green Party was hoping to win 10 to 15 percent of the vote.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the party still lacked basic materials to mobilize voters, asking friends in Germany for "papers, posters, flags, buttons, stickers," or other goods. Fura also requested donations, if they would be willing to provide them.<sup>34</sup> Despite this optimism, the party never broke one percent of the vote, ultimately joining with other lists in order to be more effective electorally.<sup>35</sup> Thus, although the Green Party kept trying, they did not succeed in gaining a broad base at home.

Into the 1990s, environmental concern remained an issue, but not a priority, as low standards of living and a weak currency weighed heavily on Poles' minds. A national study of 1992 found that only one percent of Poles listed the environment as the country's most serious problem, despite 66 percent mentioning environmental issues as "very serious." By contrast, nearly three quarters of respondents listed the economy as being the most important problem.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, from the outset, officials found it hard to sell the population on anything that might

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<sup>33</sup> A Kelly 3860, Letter from Zygmunt Fura, undated, Petra Kelly Archiv, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Erich G. Frankland, "Green Revolutions?: The Role of Green Parties in Eastern Europe's Transition, 1989-1994," *Eastern Europe Quarterly* XXIX, Nr. 3 (September 1995), 325-326.

<sup>36</sup> Curtis, editor. *Poland: A Country Study*, 63.

impede economic performance. In 1990, the environmental ministry introduced policies intended to emphasize “modernization and restructuring measures that theoretically would curtail pollution while they streamlined production operations.” A United States’ report on Poland determined that “the policy included distribution of information to the public to gain acceptance of economic sacrifice for environmental improvement,” but that real help only came once foreign (western) capital and loan forgiveness were exchanged for “domestic investment in pollution control.”<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, then, it was not purely domestic environmental consciousness that improved conditions in Poland, but also outside help from Western Europe and the United States.

### **Growing Protest in the GDR**

In contrast to the gradual transition in Poland, the GDR’s end was more surprising and dramatic. In May 1989, the SED had won reelection with what it claimed to be an astonishing roughly 98.5 percent of the vote. As Poland was on the verge of semidemocratic elections, the GDR appeared to be relatively stable. But under the surface, major reforms in Poland followed by similar changes in Hungary suggested that the relative stability of the GDR would not last long. When Hungary opened its borders to the West in the summer of 1989, East Germans fled first to Budapest and then to Prague, especially, in hopes of getting to the Federal Republic. When the Monday demonstrations began in Leipzig in September 1989, the SED leadership had to make a decision: would it follow China’s lead and put down the peaceful protests like in Tiananmen Square earlier in the year, or would it abstain from violence? Ultimately, it refrained from using force, began introducing reforms, and shockingly—and not entirely planned—opened its borders to the West on the night of November 9, 1989.

But where did the environmental movement fit into this story of mass, peaceful protest? Never exclusively a protest movement—also being incorporated into official discourse—

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 65.

environmentalism provided an underlying tension throughout the 1980s. Ultimately, however, as in Poland, environmental concerns became wrapped up in other, more concrete and immediate demands, such as the opening of the borders and more consumer goods, during the revolution of 1989.<sup>38</sup> Environmental networks provided a basis for many of the citizens' movements, which came to prominence from the fall of 1989 through the winter of 1990, though the activists focused on different issues during that period. While environmental issues were not in the foreground in the commotion of 1989-1990, they were essential to the underlying architecture of actors and concerns that arose in communism's final days. Well-known environmental activists took part in founding the citizens' movements and pushing for an ecological transformation in the GDR. In contrast to Poland, where politicians railroaded environmental concerns, these challenges shaped East and West German politicians' decisions.

#### *From Isolated to Mass Protest*

The May 1989 elections offered the first glimpse that all might not be well in the GDR when only 98.85 percent of the votes went to the SED.<sup>39</sup> To an outsider, this vote might seem unrealistically high, and it was. Although the official tallies acknowledged that roughly 140,000 citizens had voted *against* the one party-state, grassroots groups based in the Churches performed unofficial exit polls that suggested it was even higher.<sup>40</sup> The SED actually suppressed 10 to 15 percent of abstentions and no votes, with them representing a substantially higher

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<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of whether 1989 was revolution, reform, "refolution," or something else entirely, see Timothy Garton Ash's *Magic Lantern*, Konrad Jarausch's *A Rush German Unity*, or Charles Maier's *Dissolution*.

<sup>39</sup> "98.85 Prozent stimmten für die Kandidaten der Nationalen Front," *Neues Deutschland*, 44. Jahrgang, Nr. 107, May 8, 1989.

<sup>40</sup> "Aktueller Begriff: Die Kommunalwahlen in der DDR vom 7. Mai 1989," Wissenschaftliche Dienste, Deutscher Bundestag, accessed June 15, 2015, [https://www.bundestag.de/blob/276668/39aa97d8f3abe4e472ca39123e9cc0d6/die\\_kommunalwahlen\\_in\\_der\\_ddr\\_vom\\_7\\_\\_mai\\_1989-data.pdf](https://www.bundestag.de/blob/276668/39aa97d8f3abe4e472ca39123e9cc0d6/die_kommunalwahlen_in_der_ddr_vom_7__mai_1989-data.pdf).

proportion of the votes in areas where the Church and or university life was strong.<sup>41</sup> In the days and months leading up to the elections, it was environmental as well as other oppositional groups that had challenged the SED's hegemony and called for votes against the SED's candidates. Moreover, as the demands for major reform grew in the fall of 1989, environmental activists were among those leading the charge for meaningful change.

By the end of 1988, it had become clear to many environmental activists that significant improvement for nature would only come through structural transformation. From Arche to regionally-based groups, Christians and environmental activists pushed for people to defy the SED in their votes on May 7, 1989, demanding a more democratic system with political alternatives.<sup>42</sup> One letter coauthored by a number of groups in Berlin in January drew on their resolution from the previous year to “reject the practice and theory of self-segregating” from society.<sup>43</sup> Citing “environmental poisoning” among other societal ills, they claimed that “every voter, even if he chooses not to select alternative candidates, should be informed about elections laws and the ability to reform the electoral process.” The authors further called on Christians “to join with the many non-Christians in the GDR who also believe in justice, freedom, and human rights.”<sup>44</sup> This preparation for the election was just one way of challenging the system and protesting the results.

Other groups—environmental included—refused to vote in the election or participate in a corrupt system at all. Although they called it a “personal decision” rather than a boycott, groups

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<sup>41</sup> Jaraus, *The Rush to German Unity*, 38.

<sup>42</sup> RHG RG B 19/09, “Widerstandsrecht,” zusammengestellt von Uwe Schwabe (Initiativgruppe Leben Leipzig), 1989, Umweltbibliothek Redaktion, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>43</sup> RHG EP 11/01, “Ein Brief an Christen in der DDR und ihre Gemeindevertreter zu den Kommunalwahlen 1989,” January 8, 1989, Kommunalwahl '89, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



from across the GDR offered explanations as to why they, personally, would not be voting on May 7. One group from Thuringia explained that its members *would* take part in elections, if there were actually “political and substantive alternatives.” The authors cited the four points they considered most important—and currently lacking—for a better society:

Domestic policy (freedom of expression, travel, assembly, demonstration, information, and democratic criminal law); Ecology (environmental protection, consumerism, and waste of resources); Economy (independent representation of workers’ interests, lack of implementation of human creativity); Education (one-sided higher education, militarization, uneven treatment, pressure to get higher grades).<sup>45</sup>

Despite differences on how to approach the upcoming elections, they were already more politicized than previous ones, and environmental issues featured prominently into that process. In the aftermath of the election, tensions between the party-state and an emerging opposition heightened when opposition leaders exposed electoral fraud, especially in districts where universities or the Church were particularly influential.<sup>46</sup>

The controversy subsided for a while that summer and the SED continued on its five and ten year planned “progress.” Environmental policies, for example, illustrated shockingly little change in light of what was happening in the rest of Eastern Europe. In September 1989, the SED’s Central Committee gave its Cultural League’s Society for Nature and the Environment (GNU) guidelines for how to proceed for the next five year plan. Based on the Central Committee’s advisory council for environmental protection, the outlined goals focused on “propagating appropriate forms of environmental education” and using official media to highlight the GNU’s work.<sup>47</sup> Despite acknowledging that “protecting the natural environmental

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<sup>45</sup> RHG EP 11/01, “Erklärung des Arbeitskreises Solidarische Kirche, Regionalgruppe Thüringen,” March 16, 1989, Kommunalwahl ’89, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>46</sup> Maier, *Dissolution*, 132-133.

<sup>47</sup> DK 5/1830, “Konzeption zur weiteren Entwicklung der umweltpolitischen Arbeit des KBs der DDR und seiner GNU,” September 20, 1989, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

would become an even more important issue in the 1990s,” the resulting resolution did not offer any new ways of dealing with the issues. Instead, it continued to focus on “landscape days,” collaboration with experts, and cooperation with other Warsaw Pact countries.<sup>48</sup> These were the same tired strategies that the SED had employed since the early 1970s. Even as the communist system in Eastern Europe was collapsing, the East German leadership attempted to ignore it and plan its way out of the current political unrest.

But as the fall of 1989 approached the SED was faced with mounting political pressure at home. The first of the famous Monday demonstrations took place on September 4 in Leipzig after the conclusion of a peace prayer at the Protestant Nikolaikirche. Although the police responded with violence, tearing signs and arresting demonstrators, the protestors were not deterred. In the weeks that followed, more demonstrators filled the streets, armed only with candles, as the police attempted to arrest them. And the next Monday, some five thousand people came out into the streets after the prayer service and chanted “We’re staying here,” in contrast to those who had fled the SED’s repression.<sup>49</sup> By early October, the peaceful protest had escalated to alarming proportions. The police and security forces had responded with violence, water cannons, and arrests, and yet more protestors kept coming. Finally, on October 9, the protests reached a turning point when civic leaders and party officials called for restraint and the “free exchange of opinions.”<sup>50</sup> As the marchers left the Nikolaikirche, the security forces did not

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity*, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 34.

respond with violence, but let them proceed. Leipzig was not Tiananmen Square, and this demonstration was going to be permitted.<sup>51</sup>

The public demonstrations in Leipzig, and increasingly in other cities, too, signaled new hope for reform-minded dissidents and oppositional figures. In September and October 1989, these groups of individuals began to form what became known as citizens' movements, hoping to influence the construction of a new, or reformed, society and political system. Almost all of the citizens' movements founded in the fall of 1989 included environmental issues among their chief complaints with the state. In fact, many of them, such as New Forum, Democracy Now, and Democratic Awakening, included prominent environmental dissidents among their founding members. An East German Green Party was slower to appear, not being established until November 24, 1989. Many of party's members attributed the relatively delayed founding of a green party to the fact that other citizens' movements had already incorporated environmental issues into their platforms.<sup>52</sup>

Founded by well-known oppositional figures like Bärbel Bohley on September 9, 1989, New Forum was the first in a slew of citizens' movements to call for open dialogue with the SED. It called for "an open dialogue" and the "release of data" in the initial declaration, claiming that it offered not "a recipe or a political program," but a catalogue of major issues that needed to be discussed in the GDR.<sup>53</sup> New Forum's October 4 "Declaration to the Fortieth Anniversary of the GDR" decried the SED's attempts to label them as "enemies of socialism," but declared the

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Richter, *Die Friedliche Revolution: Aufbruch zur Demokratie in Sachsen, 1989/90* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 706.

<sup>52</sup> Hans Michael Kloth, "Grüne Bewegung, Grüne Netzwerk, Grüne Partei: Ein politologischer Versuch," in *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR, Das Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche, 1988-90, mit den Texten der ARCHE NOVA*, eds Carlo Jordan and Hans Michael Kloth (Berlin: Basis Druck, 1995), 177.

<sup>53</sup> Neues Forum, "Problemkatalog," September 11, 1989, accessed July 13, 2015, <http://www.ddr89.de/ddr89/nf/NF154.html>.

movement to be a “place for new thinking.”<sup>54</sup> On September 11 and 12, Democratic Awakening and Democracy Now, respectively, were founded and also demanded open dialogue. Democratic Awakening explicitly stated that they did not “reject the vision of a socialist social order,” while Democracy Now invited “all those who want to take part to enter into a dialogue about the principles and concepts of a democratic restructuring of our society.”<sup>55</sup>

New Forum, Democratic Awakening, and Democracy Now all listed environmental degradation among their top critiques of the system they wanted to reform. The founding members of New Forum stated, “On the one hand, we wish for an expansion of consumer goods and better supplies, while on the other hand we see the social and ecological costs and plea for a turn away from uninhibited growth.” They proceeded to cite other ecological issues, including energy policy, the estrangement of humans from nature, the consequences of different forms of pollution, and the limiting of consumer habits for future generations.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Democratic Awakening called for the “ecological restructuring of industrial society,” and Democracy Now stated that the “economy and ecology [must be] brought into harmony.”<sup>57</sup> In calling for a more democratic society, virtually all of the citizens’ movements recognized and traded on the GDR’s ecological disaster to gain credibility.

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<sup>54</sup> Neues Forum, “Erklärung zum 40. Jahrestag der DDR,” October 6, 1989, in *Die Opposition in der DDR: Entwürfe für einen anderen Sozialismus*, ed Gerhard Rein (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 1990), 15.

<sup>55</sup> Richard T. Gray and Sabine Wilke, editors and translators, “Preliminary Statement of Principles and Discussion Paper of the Reform Group ‘Democratic Awakening’ (October 30, 1989),” and “‘A Call for Intervention in Our Own Affairs’: Flyer of the Citizens’ Movement ‘Democracy Now’ (September 12, 1989) in *German Unification and its Discontents: Documents from the Peaceful Revolution* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 9, 38.

<sup>56</sup> Neues Forum, „Gründungsaufwurf: Eine politische Plattform für die ganze DDR,“ in *Die Opposition in der DDR: Entwürfe für einen anderen Sozialismus*, ed. Gerhard Rein (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 1990), 13.

<sup>57</sup>“Preliminary Statement of Principles,” October 30, 1989, and “‘A Call for Intervention in Our Own Affairs,’” September 12, 1989, in *German Unification and its Discontents*, eds. Gray and Wilke, 9, 38.

In part because nearly every citizens' movement incorporated environmental issues into its platform, the founding of a green party came relatively late. The Green Party in the GDR was eventually constituted at the Sixth Berlin Eco-Seminar from November 24-28, 1989. Largely groups from Leipzig, Dresden, Schwerin, Stendal, and Berlin who had been actively involved in Carlo Jordan's Arche convened to consider their environmental future as the majority of the East German population celebrated the border opening. Following up on a public appeal released on November 5, the party understood itself to "be a constituent part of the green movement in the GDR as well as the global ecological movement." Its primary goal was to implement "substantial ecological change in the GDR and a radical rejection of environmentally destructive and resource-squandering economic growth."<sup>58</sup> The founding document demanded constitutional change, as well as a renewal of society that included an emphasis on environmental and peace education.<sup>59</sup> It became the first citizens' movement or party to officially focus on the environment, and not to incorporate it as part of other societal or political concerns.

While the green party became Arche's political incarnation, other activists argued that this founding of the party was undemocratic. Therefore, they also created the Green League, which represented all green interests and would be an independent, non-party organization, analogous to the BUND (*Bund für Natur und Umwelt Deutschlands*, Association for Nature and Environment in Germany) in the West.<sup>60</sup> Decisions like these reflected the proliferation of civil society in 1989 and the separation of associational life from political parties, often considered a

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<sup>58</sup> DK 5/3386, "Information über das 6. Berliner Ökologie-Seminar vom 24. bis 26. 11. 1989," Einheitliches komplexes Umweltüberwachungssystem, 1989, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>59</sup> Die Grüne Partei in der DDR, "Erklärung der Gründungsinitiative für eine Grüne Partei in der DDR," November 26, 1989, in *Die Opposition in der DDR*, 119-120.

<sup>60</sup> DK 5/3386, "Information über das 6. Berliner Ökologie-Seminar vom 24. bis 26. 11. 1989," Einheitliches komplexes Umweltüberwachungssystem, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

precondition for democracy. They also suggested continuing distrust and rifts in the oppositional milieu that constituted the organizers of the citizens' movements, a lasting legacy of Stasi policies.<sup>61</sup> While New Forum and other groups in the citizens' movement had incorporated environmental policies, the Green Party in the GDR officially made it their primary goal. Like the opposition in the years leading up to 1989, this split in prioritizing the environment led to further challenges for the movement in the winter of 1990. Unlike in Poland, however, multiple groups took up the call for better environmental protection, even as they distrusted each other.

Outside of the major centers of political unrest, the rise of citizens' movements looked slightly different, often focusing on local and regional issues that did not gain national attention. In Upper Lusatia, for example, district officials were not ready to admit defeat since they did not see mass protest in their streets. On October 5, Zittau officials met with a number of ministers who had started a local chapter of the New Forum.<sup>62</sup> Local pastor, Alfred Hempel, had been one of the original thirty signatories of its founding document in Berlin on September 7 and publically discussed the New Forum at a prayer service in nearby Großschönau on September 21.<sup>63</sup> According to one of the oppositional figures who attended the meeting on October 5, the authorities stated: "We see that New Forum wants developments like in Poland and Hungary. This we cannot permit."<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, the ministers at the meeting declared themselves to be supportive of New Forum, but that it was not connected to the Church. They argued that "the

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<sup>61</sup> Jürgen Kocka, *Civil Society and Dictatorship in Modern Germany* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2010), 21.

<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that October 5 was four days before the fateful protest in Leipzig when police decided to not respond violently to mass demonstrators.

<sup>63</sup> Arnaud Liszka and Thomas Pilz, *Versuche in der Wahrheit zu Leben: Widerständiges Leben in der Oberlausitz, 1978-1989* (Dresden: Neisse Verlag, 2009), 67.

<sup>64</sup> 27-8, Wolfgang Müller, "Bericht über Gespräche beim Rat des Kreises Zittau und mit den Pastorinnen und Pfarrern über das 'Neue Forum'," October 10, 1989, Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf.

‘New Forum’ is a movement of individuals, who suffer from the current conditions with us and want to change them.”<sup>65</sup> While largely stemming from the Protestant milieu in the GDR the opposition was finally but swiftly moving beyond its confines.

In Lusatia, and especially Zittau, discontent focused on environmental issues surrounding open-pit mining, a topic that received little attention in other cities. Specifically, such plans intended to destroy parts of historic Zittau in order to gain access to the fruitful coal seam there, the so-called *Neißepfeiler*.<sup>66</sup> Removing a central point of contention in the region, Hans Modrow explicitly rejected this plan when he took over leadership in November 1989 in an attempt to pacify the burgeoning unrest.<sup>67</sup> But concessions like these were too little and came too late. The call for democratization would not be quelled with limited agreements to not tear down the historic city. Besides, even in the Valley of the Clueless, demands for better consumer goods and reforms like in Poland overwhelmed attention devoted to environmental questions.

In the fall of 1989, the citizens’ movements won new opportunities for association and political organization, though they continued to see themselves in an East German context. The New Forum demanded free space to discuss ideas, while the Green Party declared itself to be the “Green Party in the GDR.” Often overlooked in the later march toward unification, the fall of 1989 still held much uncertainty. While the mandate for change was clear, no one was entirely sure what it would entail. The demands from both the citizens’ movements and the mass

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Dieter Liebig. “Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung: Anspruch und Wirklichkeit: Die Energie- und Umweltpolitik in der DDR am Beispiel des Energieträgers Braunkohle” (Großhennersdorf: Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf, e.V., 2009), 98.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 33. Hans Modrow became the leader of the GDR on November 18, 1989, replacing Willi Stoph who had taken over for the ailing Erich Honecker in October. Egon Krenz was voted to take over as the head of the SED on October 18, 1989 and served in that position, until his resignation in December. After that, Modrow was the de facto sole leader of the GDR.

demonstrators did not immediately call for the end of the East German state. This shift in tenor would come more explicit after the unexpected opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9<sup>th</sup>. After this point, it became more and more apparent that the citizens' movements' goals and what most of the population wanted were not necessarily the same, as a desire to politically join West Germany became a stronger and stronger pull.

#### *Kohl's Ten-Point Plan for German Unity*

In the aftermath of November 9, no one knew what the path forward looked like. Just nineteen days after the opening of the Berlin Wall, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl came before the federal parliament to present a ten step plan for reuniting the two Germanys. This surprising announcement, as drafted by prominent CDU politicians Horst Teltschik, laid out steps for financial assistance, democratization, and eventually economic and political union between the two countries. While seemingly a transition away from environmental concerns with a focus on political transformation, the Ten Point Plan actually mentioned environmental issues in three of its key points. Thus, these issues remained a larger part of this transition period, and the language of unification than scholars have acknowledged up to now.

The Ten Point Plan first laid out measures to handle immediate concerns, providing humanitarian aid and medical provisions, but also looked toward longer term political goals. Although Kohl stated that his plan was not a list of "preconditions," West German help was essentially premised on a series of political, and later economic, changes. Chief among the political considerations was the SED reaching "an understanding with the opposition groups on a change in the constitution and a new election law."<sup>68</sup> The plan also demanded the SED's agreement to end its monopoly on power and the "abolition of laws on political crimes," and as a

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<sup>68</sup> Helmut Kohl (Horst Teltschik), "Ten Point Program for German Unity," November 28, 1989, accessed June 23, 2015, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=223](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=223).



consequence, release all political prisoners. With such these political reforms in mind, Kohl then presented ideas on how to improve the East German economy and to open it up to private activity, as Poland and Hungary had already done.<sup>69</sup> While these steps now seem self-evident, they greatly influenced on what terms reunification might take place.

Targeted at a wide audience, Kohl sought to address qualms about a reunited Germany at home and abroad. The idea of reunifying Germany not only signaled the end of the Cold War in Europe but also the postwar order, and Kohl accordingly emphasized the importance of a “pan-European” process. He wanted to improve West-East relations, to expand the European Community eastward, thereby bringing “a century that witnessed so much misery, blood, and suffering” to its conclusion.<sup>70</sup> Though caught by surprise, the West German parliamentarians overwhelmingly supported the speech and as a “historical contribution.” In the GDR, the SED leadership naturally reacted with reservation if not animosity to Kohl’s plan, even as the general population increasingly welcomed the plan. Placards and posters transitioned from calls for democratization and for “Gorbi’s” help to demands for unification.<sup>71</sup>

The only vehement opposition to Kohl’s plan in the West came from Green Party, which cited a wide range of issues with any form of unification. On one level, West German Greens feared that a German nation-state in the heart of Europe would lead to rise in German nationalism.<sup>72</sup> As on press release state, “The federal government is provoking unavoidable

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Wolfgang Schneider, ed., *Leipziger Demo Montag Tagebuch Demontage* (Leipzig and Weimar: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1991), 66, 79.

<sup>72</sup> Pol 509-4, Barbara Simon, “Thesen zur Deutschlandpolitik,” February 7, 1990, *Parlamentarische Geschäftsführung, Deutschlandpolitik, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung*. The *Anschluß* comment refers to the Third Reich’s annexation of Austria in 1938.

social dangers with its *Anschluß*-policy between the Federal Republic and the GDR...instead of European integration it is following a nationalistic agenda.”<sup>73</sup> Throughout the winter of 1990, the Greens continued to support the struggling citizens’ movements in the GDR, even as general popularity was shifting away from them and towards larger parties that supported a swift unification. Arguments that East Germans deserved to decide their own future through a sort of “two state solution,” at least in the near term, largely fell on deaf ears on both sides of the German-German border.<sup>74</sup>

In spite of the Green Party’s opposition to unification, Kohl’s emphasis on the environment was clear. In the Ten Point Plan, he raised it multiple times, a fact that has largely been overlooked. Three of the ten points mentioned pollution and the need to expand protection. Kohl drew on the Federal Republic’s efforts over the course of the 1980s, declaring it especially important to “intensify cooperation in the field of environmental protection” in his second point.<sup>75</sup> Two further points returned to the topic, one proposing common German institutions based on Modrow’s suggestion of a “contractual community” and another suggesting a pan-European environmental council. West German attention to ecological concerns in any potential reunification process illustrated both West German federal and provincial frustration of East German denial of the problems in the 1980s as well as the greening of West German society in the two decades prior. This context of environmental awareness and the economic prosperity promised a new era of protection in East German territory as a path to a West German-led unification was becoming ever more apparent.

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<sup>73</sup> Pol 509-4, “Konföderation statt Eingemeindung! März 1990,” Deutschlandpolitik, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

<sup>74</sup> Jarausch, *Rush to German Unity*, 68-69.

<sup>75</sup> Kohl, “Ten Point Program for German Unity.”

### *Round Table Talks*

Less than a month after the opening of the Wall, the opposition and party-state officials were coming together at a series of Round Table talks to explore the GDR's future. Between December 7, 1989, and March 12, 1990, representatives met sixteen times in order to discuss a range of issues from the economy to new election laws to the environment. Broadcast live, the talks influenced broader debates on the future of the GDR and potential reunification. With each meeting focusing on a specific theme, the Round Table discussions clarified the demands of the various citizens' movements. First among their concerns was the "disclosure of the ecological, economic and financial situation in our country." Especially in terms of the environment, the Round Tables focused on an "ecologically-oriented social democracy based on justice and solidarity."<sup>76</sup> What exactly ecologically-oriented social democracy should look like was not entirely clear, but the participants did agree that environmental consciousness should be central to the new political order.

From the beginning, the Round Table participants set out to discuss "our deep concern for the deep crisis in our unraveling country, its independence, and its long-term development."<sup>77</sup> The Round Table consisted of representatives from the citizens' movements, party-state apparatus, plus a handful of non-voting observers from the Church and specific interests (women, consumers, and environment). Although they acknowledged that they were not a parliament or any kind of government, they intended for their resolutions to be made public in order to address the matters at hand. Over the course of the talks, the opposition's side of the Round Table won various concessions from the SED, including the restructuring of election law,

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Hannes Bahrman and Christoph Links, *Chronik der Wende: Die DDR zwischen 7. Oktober und 18. Dezember 1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1994), 174-178. Each of the Round Table discussions had a primary topic, such as the economy or the environment. Of the sixteen discussions, the fact that one focused solely on the environment is indicative of its importance to this period.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

laws concerning freedom of political parties and assembly, a new constitution, and economic changes.<sup>78</sup>

On January 29, 1990, the Round Table focused primarily on environmental concerns, building on the recommendations of the Working Groups for Ecological Alteration. The day's resolution reiterated earlier calls for the "incorporation of ecological principles into the structure of society and the economic development of the GDR."<sup>79</sup> These measures included the education of politicians on ecological concerns, the implementation of new standards for industrial production, new energy and agricultural policies, as well as the establishment of environmental centers and ecological disciplines.<sup>80</sup> The participants also determined over the course of the Round Table Talks that "production must be organized with strict attention to the requirements of ecology and environmental protection and the thrifty use of resources."<sup>81</sup> The concern for the means of production honed in on frustration about the aging and inefficient planned economy under the SED. In the future, the pollution and its dangers to human life could not continue.

The Round Table's resolutions displayed not only an optimism about the changes that the opposition could implement but also addresses many of the issues that, in their opinion, delegitimized the SED dictatorship in the first place. For a regime to properly provide for its citizens, it had to provide for their physical safety and well-being, which included protection of the natural environment. Any regime that did not meet those expectations would lose credibility in the eyes of its citizens.

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<sup>78</sup> Round Table Talks, December 7, 1989, in *Neue Chronik der DDR*, ed. Zeno and Sabine Zimmerling (Berlin: Verlag Tribüne, 1990), 140.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 141

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 141-142.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

At the end of the Round Table talks on March 12, 1990, the participants passed a new constitution that one of the working groups had prepared. In addition to guaranteeing human rights and self-determination, the constitution laid out certain environmental rights.<sup>82</sup> In Article Thirty Three, the constitution declared that “state environmental policy has the responsibility of protecting against damaging the environment” as well as the “sparing use of nonrenewable resources and energy.” These statements clearly built on the SED state’s failures to protect the environment and to make efficient use of the resources in its territory. More specifically, it introduced the concept of “polluter pays,” saying that “whoever is responsible for environmental degradation is responsible for its restoration.”<sup>83</sup> These measures captured the problems of a system in which the state was both the polluter and the regulator, and demanded greater accountability for pollution.

As the Round Table discussions drew to a close in March 1990, however, it became evident that the people of the GDR and the citizens’ movements at the Round Table had different visions for the future. In fact, popularity for the citizens’ movements dropped significantly during this period, forcing three of them to join electoral forces in the upcoming elections in March. Their message for a “Third Way” was shouted down by demands—ones that Kohl encouraged—for unification. Nevertheless, throughout the unification process, bureaucrats remained committed to hammering out plans for environmental improvements in the (former) GDR. In Poland, parallel bureaucrats were not given the same autonomy, nor did they have the

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<sup>82</sup> Preamble, “Entwurf: Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Arbeitsgruppe ‘Neue Verfassung’ der DDR’ des Runden Tisches,” April 1990, accessed July 14, 2015, [http://www.documentarchiv.de/ddr/1990/ddr-verfassungsentwurf\\_runder-tisch.html#prae](http://www.documentarchiv.de/ddr/1990/ddr-verfassungsentwurf_runder-tisch.html#prae).

<sup>83</sup> Article Thirty Three, “Entwurf: Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Arbeitsgruppe ‘Neue Verfassung’ der DDR’ des Runden Tisches,” April 1990, accessed July 14, 2015, [http://www.documentarchiv.de/ddr/1990/ddr-verfassungsentwurf\\_runder-tisch.html#prae](http://www.documentarchiv.de/ddr/1990/ddr-verfassungsentwurf_runder-tisch.html#prae).

resources, to pursue a similar path with the result being divergent environmental paths in the 1990s.

### **Grasping at Straws: the Party-State's Responses**

Even before the elections made unification official, however, the East German party-state and its various institutions attempted to adapt to the changing political climate. While narratives of 1989-90 focus primarily on the citizens' movements and opposition, examining the process from the perspective of the party-state illustrates the complexity of the system, highlighting the fact that it was not a monolithic structure. Rather, within the party-state, multiple—and a growing number of—actors sought to influence the shifting political landscape. In October and November, key long-term leaders of the party and state leadership had been removed, most notably Erich Honecker and Willi Stoph. But this turnover went further, including in the environmental ministry and the Cultural League's GNU. Some of the old guard fought to retain their positions and status, as younger generation less committed to the now-disappearing leadership pushed for change. In this moment of transition, leaders attempted—or were finally freed—to introduce reforms and shift their focus.

Environmental Minister, Hans Reichelt, had been in his position since the 1970s, a long-time veteran of the system, but tried to hold on to it before eventually resigning. He printed and mailed small postcards to members of the GNU and others known for being involved in environmental concerns, asking for their support of a series of immediate concerns and demands. The targeted issues were largely ones that activists had been requesting for over a decade: “investment in desulfurization equipment” in power plants, “release of environmental and health data,” “increase in energy-saving measures including international cooperation,” “importing a

higher percentage of [anthracite] coal,” and lead-free gasoline.<sup>84</sup> Despite appealing to East Germans across the country, on a very basic level, the strategy did not appear to be successful. Having been the face of the ministry that withheld data and straight answers about conditions, this ploy must have seemed disingenuous at best. Reichelt stepped down from his position as environmental minister in January 1990.

He was replaced by Dr. Peter Diederich, who would take charge of the environmental union later that year. The ministry’s focus turned to preparing for the Round Table talks, especially the one devoted to the environment. Reports under Diederich openly acknowledged the system’s failures to protect it and explored—with the help of money from the West—the most efficient ways to improve conditions quickly.<sup>85</sup> Yet, they also began to discuss “criteria for societal development, in particular regarding economic development and the use of resources.”<sup>86</sup> Although unification was not official, officials worked under the premise that they must not only create economic but “humane” conditions, that were “ecological,” medically acceptable for humans, and responsible to “market mechanisms.” As a result, the MfUW recommended increased investment in ecological research within the ministry, as well as in the Academy of Sciences, and the Academy of Agricultural Sciences.<sup>87</sup> The ministry, which even sported a new

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<sup>84</sup> RHG/TH 02/01, “Postkarte,” DDR Umweltbewegung: allgemein, 1981-1989, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

<sup>85</sup> OKW 01, “Presseerklärung: Eva Quistop, die Grünen, Mitglied des Umweltausschusses des Europäischen Parlaments, erklärt zum Besuch der Umweltschützer aus der DDR bei Minister Töpfer am 13. Dezember 1989,” Ost-West Kontakte, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung. Discussions to take on six pilot programs, co-funded environmental projects between the FRG and the GDR, also began around this time.

<sup>86</sup> DK 5/3388, “Information über die Ergebnisse der 10. Sitzung des Runden Tisches zu ökologischen Fragen sowie über die Bildung des Grünen Tisches der DDR und Vorschläge zur Ausarbeitung des langfristigen Umweltprogramms,” February 5, 1990, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>87</sup> DK 5/3388, “Information über die Ergebnisse der 10. Sitzung des Runden Tisches zu ökologischen Fragen sowie über die Bildung des Grünen Tisches der DDR und Vorschläge zur Ausarbeitung des langfristigen Umweltprogramms,” February 5, 1990, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

name around the time Diederich took over, sought to remain relevant in these quickly changing times.<sup>88</sup>

Not only did official ministries seek to keep up with the evolving political atmosphere, but so did the SED's mass organizations, like the GNU. As late as September 1989, the GNU had been drafting its next Five Year Planning into the next couple of years. Leadership meetings organized conferences with the Free German Youth, the Chamber of Technology, among other SED associations.<sup>89</sup> On February 12, 1990, however, the GNU's central committee proposed changing its name to the *Bund für Natur und Umwelt* (Association for Nature and the Environment, BNU) under the meeting title of "Basis: Democratic Dissolution or Centralistic Chaos."<sup>90</sup> This new association declared independence from the SED's Cultural League, hoping to associate itself with the West German BUND.<sup>91</sup> While this decision caused friction within the GNU, it also reflected the desire to change with the times. In fact, the GNU come BNU was one of the few East German associations that succeeded in making the transition into the 1990s.<sup>92</sup>

The differences within the SED system came to light in unforeseen ways as the GDR collapsed and the unification process became more concrete. State officials—opportunists and

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<sup>88</sup> The ministry went from being the "Ministry for Environmental Protection and Water Management" to being the "Ministry for Nature and Environmental Protection and Water Management" around this time.

<sup>89</sup> DY 27/9650, "Entwurf: Maßnahmen zur Auswertung der Präsidialratstagung des Kulturbundes vom 28.9.1989 zur Umweltpolitik und den weiteren Aufgaben der Organisation und zur Umsetzung der dazu beschlossenen Konzeption," Umweltpolitische Arbeit des Kulturbundes und seiner Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt (Bundessekretär Fiedler), Kulturbund, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>90</sup> DY 27/6122, "Basis – Demokratische Auflösung oder zentralistisches Chaos des Kulturbundes der DDR," February 12, 1990, Konzeptionen zur Entwicklung der umweltpolitische Arbeit des Kulturbundes und der Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt, Kulturbund, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>91</sup> Hermann Behrens, et al. *Wurzeln der Umweltbewegung: Die „Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt“ (GNU) im Kulturbund der DDR* (Marburg: BdWi-Verlag, 1993), 80.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, the still-existing branch in Magdeburg. "Umweltkönig," accessed July 4, 2015, <http://www.umweltkoenig.de/oekologie-bnu-bund-fuer-natur-und-umwelt-landesverband-sachsen-anhalt-er-in-magdeburg-17591>.



reformers alike—increasingly collaborated with West German counterparts, if they had not already been pushed out of their offices.<sup>93</sup> In the mass social organizations, the decision to stay in their current form or to found new associations divided members. While often overlooked in the literature, these fissures highlight the uncertainty of the situation and remind us that party-state actors were not static. Although the communist structures had ossified, the people within them faced formidable questions about the future.

### **Coming Together? From Elections to Reunification**

Just six days after the last Round Table discussion was held, East Germans voted on their future. Would they look to reform the state they had lived in for the last forty years, or would they opt to unite with their western counterparts? Overwhelmingly, East Germans selected the CDU-led Alliance for Germany, signaling the beginning of the unification process, the political resolution of which occurred on October 3, 1990. The period from the election to the official unification, then, marked an exciting but hectic transition, including many decisions and laws on how to incorporate the economically struggling and environmentally devastated East into the affluent and greener West. The GDR and its SED leadership had been rejected, but fitting into the West's understanding of government—and environmentalism—presented new and unforeseen challenges. Among the most contentious issues were how to address the GDR's pollution that came from antiquated industries that were not likely to be viable on the open market.

#### *Popular Change and the Elections*

As early as November 1989, Bärbel Bohley noted that the masses and the citizens' movements were diverging. Another leading member of New Forum, Jens Reich, also realized in the weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall that the masses listened less and less to the opposition

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<sup>93</sup> Opportunists in this period were sometimes called *Wendehälse*, after the wryneck bird—a type of woodpecker that can turn its neck up to nearly one hundred eighty degrees—for so swiftly changing their political allegiances.

groups.<sup>94</sup> Even as the Round Table discussions between the SED and the opposition took place, popular sentiment was leaning ever more strongly toward Kohl's message of prosperity through unification with the West. The ultimate manifestation of this shift from protest to unification with the West came with the March 1990 elections.

Though the leaders of the citizens' movements represented the East German population at the Round Table talks, their own message resonated less and less with the population at large. As attention shifted away from the confrontation with the SED, some opposition leaders recognized the need to come together for electoral success. Long connected through opposition networks, these figures were familiar with each other, though personality clashes fueled tensions. On February 7, 1990, however, New Forum, Democracy Now, and Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (IFM) joined forces, forming the coalition called Alliance 90. Despite these combined efforts, the new collaboration failed electorally. Alliance 90 garnered less than three percent of the vote. The former opposition's mandate for leadership that had seemed apparent in the fall of 1989 had all but collapsed by the spring.<sup>95</sup>

The winner was the CDU-led Alliance for Germany, which promised "freedom, unity and prosperity," signaling the strength of the so-called "D-Mark diplomacy" and the desire for unification with the West.<sup>96</sup> As historian Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk put it, "the Alliance stood for the fastest path to unity. Their formula called for: 'Immediate introduction of the DM.' No one

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<sup>94</sup> "Jens Reich: Am wichtigsten ist die Befreiung von der Angst" in *Die Opposition in der DDR*, ed. Gerhard Rein (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag GmbH, 1989), 31.

<sup>95</sup> Alliance 90 would later become an official party in 1991, and then, ultimately, join the West German Green Party, becoming Alliance 90/the Greens.

<sup>96</sup> "18. März 1990: Erste freie Volkskammerwahl," Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, March 17, 2010, accessed July 5, 2015, [http://www.bpb.de/themen/01MOV.0.0.18\\_M%E4rz\\_1990%3A\\_Erste\\_freie\\_Volkskammerwahl.html](http://www.bpb.de/themen/01MOV.0.0.18_M%E4rz_1990%3A_Erste_freie_Volkskammerwahl.html).

could make a better offer.”<sup>97</sup> The election had become not about whether to unite with West Germany, but how to do it best. By the end of the campaign, only the reformed SED party opposed it.<sup>98</sup> Posters with these slogans dominated demonstrations and the sentiment overwhelmed public opinion polls. The Alliance for Germany won an astounding 48 percent of the vote (the East-CDU won forty one percent alone), while the second most popular party, the SPD (Social Democratic Party), finished far behind with only twenty-two percent of the vote.<sup>99</sup>

With this mandate from the population, the process of planning unification accelerated. Through the spring and summer of 1990, the political and economic union—perhaps the most publicized parts of the transition—occurred. As the economies were joined and the structures of SED rule stripped away, the general population rejoiced at the GDR’s imminent demise. But, in this “rush to German unity,” consideration of its potential repercussions were not given due attention. The western narrative, triumphalist in tone, told how Kohl brought democracy and capitalism to the decaying East. As the West learned the extent of the pollution, it had to create plans for the cleanup while also considering the economic impact of improving the environment. Between March and October 1990, the East German officials worked with West Germans to raise conditions to West German—or German federal—standards, while East German activists worked to shape their environmental future on a more local level.

#### *Preparing for Environmental Union*

Though the West had begun to learn about the East’s pollution in the second half of the 1980s, it was only after the unification process began in earnest that the hard numbers were

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<sup>97</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Endspiel: Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2009), 526-527.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 526.

<sup>99</sup> “18. März 1990: Erste freie Volkskammerwahl,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, March 17, 2010, accessed July 5, 2015, [http://www.bpb.de/themen/01MOVb.0.0.18\\_M%E4rz\\_1990%3A\\_Erste\\_freie\\_Volkskammerwahl.html](http://www.bpb.de/themen/01MOVb.0.0.18_M%E4rz_1990%3A_Erste_freie_Volkskammerwahl.html).

officially released. In the spring, the shocking “Environmental Report” came out, revealing the scope of the damage. The report explained that “mistakes, especially in policies for certain regions and structures, and increased the growing disparity between ecology and economy.”<sup>100</sup> These startling revelations informed politicians’ May agreements to “environmental union” and experts’ writing of the Environmental Framework Law (*Umweltrahmengesetz*, URG), which went into effect on July 1, 1990. In its effort to get East German quality of life on par with the West’s over the next decade or so, it put top-down requirements in place.

The thorough and disturbing revelations came out in the winter and spring of 1990. The prestigious American journal *Science* published an article that adopted a triumphalist tone. Describing Leuna’s factories as “dark satanic mills,” the author revealed that even in non-industrial areas the air “still holds more than twice the 80 micrograms per cubic meter of SO<sub>2</sub> and 75 micrograms per cubic meter of particulates that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has established as air quality standards.”<sup>101</sup> In March, Diederich made public the “Environmental Report of the GDR: Information on the Analysis of Environmental Conditions in the GDR and Recommended Measures.” Its goal was to “be a help and to provide an orientation to the most pressing questions.”<sup>102</sup> It was also supposed to “inform the population of the GDR and international bodies, to remove unclear matters...to stimulate public discussion, and to

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<sup>100</sup> *Umweltbericht der DDR: Information zur Analyse der Umweltbedingungen in der DDR und zu weiteren Maßnahmen* (West Berlin, Germany: Institut für Umweltschutz, 1990), 7.

<sup>101</sup> Daniel Charles, “East German Environment Comes into the Light.” *Science* 247, no. 4940 (January 19, 1990), 274.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Diederich, “Vorwort,” *Umweltbericht der DDR: Information zur Analyse der Umweltbedingungen in der DDR und zu weiteren Maßnahmen* (West Berlin, Germany: Institut für Umweltschutz, 1990).

further sensitize citizens to environmental questions.”<sup>103</sup> Yet in the sensational atmosphere of unification, its data added to the sense of panic.

East German officials had continued to collect it throughout the 1980s, providing the public with shockingly detailed environmental information in 1990. The report revealed that as percentage of its gross domestic income, the GDR spent roughly half of what the ten most industrialized countries in the West did. It also confirmed that the “continued use of outdated production processes and increased use of lignite...has led to crisis-laden conditions.”<sup>104</sup> West Germans were at long last provided answers to shared problems. A July 1990 *Spiegel* article relied on the report to expose the critical conditions facing fish and human—among other—populations tied to the Elbe River. Over seven and a half million East Germans in the Elbe’s catchment area “did not consistently have proper quality drinking water.”<sup>105</sup> These conditions naturally affected Germans in the Federal Republic downstream, too.

After the March elections, information about the GDR’s pollution continued to make the news, but the question for policymakers was how to transform laws as well as the physical environment. The first agreement on this matter—to create an environmental union—came alongside monetary, economic and social union on May 18, 1990.<sup>106</sup> The conditions for this were laid out in the Environmental Framework Law (URG), which was written in the spring of 1990 and put into effect on July 1. It was the central legal document for regulation throughout the unification process. This document was the product of ongoing meetings between East and West

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> *Umweltbericht der DDR*, 7.

<sup>105</sup> Sebastian Knauer, “Ein Fluß geht baden,” *Der Spiegel* 30/1990, July 23, 1990, 39.

<sup>106</sup> Kapitel V, Artikel 16, “Vertrag über die Schaffung einer Währungs-, Wirtschafts- und Sozialunion zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” May 18, 1990, accessed July 5, 2015, <http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bundesrecht/wwsuvtr/gesamt.pdf>.

German officials since February. In the initial meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of that month, Klaus Töpfer, the West German environmental minister, declared: “Our ambitious goal is to eliminate the difference in environmental conditions by the year 2000.” He further stated that “for me, one condition for creating a better environmental situation is the unimpeded introduction of a social and ecological market economy.”<sup>107</sup> Before the elections, the West German government had already promised 700 million DM to six carefully selected cleanup projects, including a high temperature incinerator to handle arsenic in Dresden and a plant to deal with mercury at Buna.<sup>108</sup> The environment was one arena in which the Federal Republic could showcase the successes of its social market economy and appeal to the East German population.

The URG “bound the environmental union with the economic union to create unified environmental standards,” implementing the FRG’s laws in the former East Germany.<sup>109</sup> While some East Germans complained that the West German Basic Law did not guarantee the right to a clean environment, as the GDR’s 1968 constitution had, suggested changes to already existing West German law were largely ignored.<sup>110</sup> The new laws were based on the West German principles of “prevention, polluter pays, and cooperation.”<sup>111</sup> As the same report noted, the difference between the East German “secondary resource acquisition”

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<sup>107</sup> DK 5/2849, Klaus Töpfer, “Gemeinsame Umwelt: Deutsch-deutsche Zusammenarbeit im Umweltschutz,” Umweltrahmengesetz, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO. Klaus Töpfer was the Federal Republic’s environmental minister during unification.

<sup>108</sup> Sebastian Knauer, “Ein Fluß geht baden,” *Der Spiegel* 30/1990, July 23, 1990, 45.

<sup>109</sup> DK 5/2849, “Kurzbericht über die Anhörung zum Umweltrahmengesetz im Ausschuß für UNER am 13. Juni 1990, 9.00 Uhr,” Umweltrahmengesetz, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>110</sup> DK 5/2849, Jörg Voigt, “Als Anlage wird die Beantwortung zu 1. der „Fragen an die Ressorts zur Vorbereitung des Staatsvertrages zur Herstellung der deutschen Einheit,“ vorgelegt,” July 3, 1990, Umweltrahmengesetz, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>111</sup> DK 5/2849, “Der Rahmen für ein besseres Bild unserer Umwelt: Umweltrahmengesetz bringt bundesdeutschen Standard,” Umweltrahmengesetz, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

(*Sekundärrohstofffassung*, SERO) and the “new-German ‘recycling’” was actually quite small. Programs like SERO had been recognized internationally as being progressive.<sup>112</sup> But rather than combining the best elements of two different systems, the vastly more successful one was imposed on the other. In bringing together the two Germanys, West German environmental law replaced East German ones the structures and associations that support them.

The East German People’s Chamber passed the URG on June 29, 1990, and it went into effect two days later. The law was built on a preliminary treaty passed on May 18 and focused on emissions and air quality, nuclear energy and technology, water management, waste, the chemical industry, nature and landscape conservation, and environmental impact assessment. It specified the requirements needed to get exemptions for old factories and the responsibilities of future owners, once many of the industries were privatized.<sup>113</sup> This language followed the West German tradition of “polluter pays” regulation. Although the law was “effective in the Federal Republic of Germany, and to be implemented as soon as possible in the German Democratic Republic,” it also stated that all East German “provisions will cease to be in force, insofar as they regulate articles one through seven” of this law.<sup>114</sup> Wide-ranging West German laws therefore paved the way for much cleaner, brighter environmental prospects in the former GDR.

The environment largely provided for in the URG received little attention in the Unification Treaty, which was passed two months later. Article 34 of the treaty reaffirmed the “environmental union” from May 18 and the URG, promising to “support a living standard that

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Artikel 1, Absatz 4, “Altanlagen,” Umweltrahmengesetz vom 29. Juni 1990, Gesetzblatt Teil I Nr. 42 – Ausgabetag: 20. Juli 1990, 653, accessed June 29, 2015, <http://deutsche-einheit-1990.de/wp-content/uploads/Gbl-URaG.pdf>.

<sup>114</sup> Artikel 8, Absatz 1, “Umweltrahmengesetz vom 29. Juni 1990,” Gesetzblatt Teil I Nr. 42 – Ausgabetag: 20. Juli 1990, 653, accessed: June 29, 2015, <http://deutsche-einheit-1990.de/wp-content/uploads/Gbl-URaG.pdf>.

was at least on par with the Federal Republic of Germany's." Vowing to protect against "dangers to the population's health," the treaty returned to the "preservation, polluter pays, and cooperation principles" laid out in the earlier agreements.<sup>115</sup> It would be easy to overlook the significance of environmental protection in the unification process. Despite the agreements of May and June 1990 having already determined its trajectory, environmental issues were crucial to unification, if not in the Unification Treaty itself. Their fate rested not only on regulation, but also on economic transition, social planning, and a host of other issues. The recovery of the East German environment over the next two decades was one of unification's greatest—if overlooked—successes.

#### *Environmental Activism Lost?*

In the swift and often confusing period of transition, the efforts of environmental activists disappear from the unification story. To a degree, they were excluded from policy-level decisions, which tended to take place between bureaucrats on both sides. Additionally, as protestors and activists, many did not have the experience relevant to making such decisions. Nevertheless, many continued their efforts through 1990, demanding better environmental conditions locally and pushing policymakers from East and West to confront the egregiousness of the pollution in certain industrial areas.

In Leipzig, for example, a number of groups from the Church, New Forum, and the Leipzig Environmental Library continued to protest local conditions and face new challenges. A 1990 citizens' initiative called for the end of open-pit mining in nearby Cospuden, "so that more citizens don't leave our country, so that coal dust and sand storms don't dirty our city, so that the

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<sup>115</sup> Kapitel VII, Artikel 34, Absatz 1, Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik über die Herstellung der Einheit Deutschlands (Einigungsvertrag), 31. August 1990, accessed June 29, 2015, [http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Themen/Politik\\_Gesellschaft/DeutscheEinheit/Einigungsvertrag.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Themen/Politik_Gesellschaft/DeutscheEinheit/Einigungsvertrag.pdf?__blob=publicationFile).



last of our damaged forest can be saved!”<sup>116</sup> Groups from in and around Leipzig called for the end of open-pit mining at the pollution that it caused. Other groups, like New Forum in Taucha, became concerned with the higher levels of waste with introduction of the market economy and the resulting rise in trash. New Forum and the Environmental Group Taucha started a joint campaign in May 1990 to make people aware of their rising consumption, promoting the motto: “Choose carefully and buy conscientiously.”<sup>117</sup> Thus, while having less of a presence in the highest levels of decision making, environmental groups from the GDR continued to do what they had always done best, address local issues.

Within the Protestant Church, the Ecclesiastical Research Center and closely connected groups used new opportunities to travel and to network beyond East German territory. Over the 1990 Pentecost holiday, East and West German Christian activists came together to brainstorm ways to reduce energy consumption in Germany. They suggested collaboration between energy experts as well as the Protestant Churches in East and West, as well as practical tips to use energy more sparingly as part of their “stewardship of creation.” In an open appeal to the parishes across Germany, Hans-Peter Gensichen and others took the opportunity of reunification to call for a “fifty percent reduction in energy use in the churches.”<sup>118</sup> Signers from Schwerin to Nordhausen, Berlin, and Dresden supported the measures and urged their own churches to join the effort.

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<sup>116</sup>1.2 Umweltschutz, “Markleeberger Umweltinitiative,” March 15, 1990, Sammlung Monika Lazar, Bestand Markleeberg 2, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

<sup>117</sup> Neues Forum Taucha, “Erst prüfen – dann kaufen!” May 1990, Umweltgruppe Taucha, Neues Forum, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

<sup>118</sup> RHG/Ki 18/02, “Offener Brief an Gemeinden, Gruppen, Synoden und Leitungen der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR,” June 5, 1990, Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Archiv der Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft.

While environmental activists did not take on the high-level positions they may have hoped for in the reunification process, they did continue to use traditional means. Through churches and local efforts, they addressed local problems and sought take on the new challenges of democratization and the introduction of a market economy. While these structures would decline in some ways over the course of the 1990s, their place in helping to make sense of economic and political transformation was critical.

### **Effects of Reunification**

Broad new policies quickly transformed the East German landscape. Within the first few years of reunification, the pollution levels dropped significantly, the result of a combination of effective new policies and deindustrialization. Skies became bluer and trees greener. On many levels, unification was a success story for the East German environment. Yet, it was not without qualifications, ones that can still be felt in the “new provinces” to this day. Exploring places like Leuna and Lusatia illustrates the improvements and challenges that unification and new policies brought to these two regions. Additionally, it highlights the fate of grassroots environmentalism in the former GDR. While the territory received huge amounts of aid from the federal government—and underwritten by wealthier West German taxpayers—the economic difficulties and resulting unemployment often overshadowed ecological improvements. At the same time, the opposition in the GDR struggled to find social and political importance in the 1990s, with few making the transition to successful politician in the Berlin Republic.

South of Halle in Merseburg the effects of unification were obvious. In the center of the GDR’s chemical industry, Merseburg lies between the chemical plants in Leuna and Buna, which synthesized ammonia and petrochemicals and Schkopau, a major plastics producer.<sup>119</sup> In late 1989, local New Forum members put out a notice, saying “Original Ideas Sought for

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<sup>119</sup> Schkopau was technically a branch of the larger Buna works.

Environmental Demonstration in January.” Under the theme “Mother, Father, Daughter, Son: for the Environment in Action,” they began to organize for protection in this time of transition.

Merseburg’s New Forum chapter was also active during the 1990 election, arguing that “Environmental protection affects everyone, because one cannot eat money.”<sup>120</sup> It demanded an improvement in air and water conditions, better waste disposal, renovation of devastated areas, and reduction of noise pollution. At the same time, students at the technical college in Merseburg requested a “Center for Environmental Toxicology and Medicine” to monitor and address the human consequences of the pollution.<sup>121</sup> Frustration with it found expression in 1989-90 through the New Forum’s work as well as demonstrations.

But concerns other than environmental protection dominated the mental landscape after October 3, 1990. The largest employers in the region, the Leuna and Buna chemical works, went from each having over ten thousand workers to not existing at all.<sup>122</sup> The plants were privatized, broken up, and downsized. Now, large tracts of the enormous grounds remain unused with only significantly smaller chemical operations, such as Infra Leuna Gruppe, Total Raffinerie Mitteldeutschland GmbH, and Industriemontagen Merseburg GmbH, using portions of the once mighty polluting plants. The largest of the new companies, Dow Olefinverbund GmbH, now employs roughly 1500 people, a small fraction of employment levels before 1990.<sup>123</sup>

Additionally, absentee owners from other countries have been embroiled in scandals over the acquisition of these assets. One of them, the publicly-owned French firm, Elf, paid out thirty

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<sup>120</sup> 4.28.216 “Meine—Deine—Unsere Umwelt: Neues Forum Merseburg,” January 1990, 2, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>122</sup> “Fakten Merseburg,” Stadtumbau Sachsen-Anhalt, 2010, accessed June 30, 2015, <http://www.iba-stadtumbau.de/index.php?fakten-merseburg>.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

million pounds under the counter in 1992 for a Leuna refinery.<sup>124</sup> While policies cleaned up the pollution—and without local activism once the new laws were implemented—unemployment and outmigration became the town’s largest challenges. Despite the New Forum’s 1990 quip about not being able to eat money, the rocky transition to capitalism overshadowed the achievements of new environmental protection.

In Lusatia, the 1990s were a difficult transition period, too. Long a rural region without major industrial centers, it remained a marginalized border area. Activists in Zittau and other regional cities pushed for better environmental protection in 1989-90, reestablishing the Environmental Libraries in Zittau and Großhennersdorf as independent associations once it became possible. The library in Zittau blended the values of the revolution with the language of the preceding opposition. In library’s charter, its founding members expressed their commitment to “democracy in all areas of life,” and reaffirmed their efforts for peace, human rights, and the preservation of nature.”<sup>125</sup> They also collaborated with the New Forum chapter in Leipzig and the provincial organization for all of Saxony. In 1991, after the New Forum joined forces with other citizens’ movements and the Greens to become Alliance 90/the Greens, they demanded a new political strategy to handle the “current crisis in the former GDR.” They called for new round table talks to discuss the process of privatization and to “annul the resolutions that discriminated against the former GDR in the Unification Treaty,” along with a series of

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<sup>124</sup> Jon Henly, “Gigantic sleaze scandal winds up as former Elf oil chiefs are jailed,” *The Guardian*, November 12, 2003, accessed August 14, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2003/nov/13/france.oilandpetrol>.

<sup>125</sup> 16-23, “Satzung der Umweltbibliothek – Zittau, e.V.,” undated, Umweltbibliothek Großhennersdorf. The Environmental Library in Zittau seems to have folded in the meantime, or perhaps simply merged with the still existing one in nearby Großhennersdorf.

environmental frustrations.<sup>126</sup> These continued efforts to protect the environment and to shape its recovery after 1990 suggest that work on the topic was not yet complete.

An ongoing challenge for Lusatia was the continued open-pit mining of lignite after unification. New measures greatly reduced the emissions from refining the coal, and in many ways, the environment improved dramatically. Western technology reduced pollution and worksite injuries, which according the Stasi, cost roughly 100 million Marks in 1988 in one power plant alone.<sup>127</sup> Despite these improvements, lignite continues to be a controversial fuel, and locals are largely in favor of it. Many of the mines and power plants in the area are now owned by the Swedish company, Vattenfall. They are large employers in a region that does not have many industries, and here, too, privatization cost the local population dearly. In 1990, roughly 65,000 people worked in Lusatian mines, but by 2000, that number had plummeted to about 7,000.<sup>128</sup> As Germany tries to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions, Lusatians worry for their future.<sup>129</sup>

The East German opposition also has struggled to find its place in the new political landscape of the Berlin Republic. A very few, such as Matthias Platzeck of Potsdam became successful politicians on a provincial scale. A founding member of the East German Green Party,

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<sup>126</sup> 4.28.401, "Sofortprogramm: zur Lösung der gegenwärtigen Krise in der ehemaligen DDR," Bündnis 90/Grüne Leipzig, May 1, 1991, Archiv Bürgerbewegung Leipzig.

<sup>127</sup> MfS/HA XVIII 27513, "Hinweise: Zum Schadensgeschehen auf dem Gebiet der Volkswirtschaft der DDR im Jahr 1988," Hauptabteilung XVIII Volkswirtschaft, BStU. The power plant in question was Boxberg, and it tallied 669 fires, 205 other disasters, 25 explosions, 3 dead, and 33 injured. The year before there had been a larger tragedy that left 8 dead and 52 injured.

<sup>128</sup> "Anzahl der Beschäftigten im Braunkohlenbergbau in der Lausitz in den Jahren von 1960 bis 2014," accessed June 30, 2015, <http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/161205/umfrage/braunkohlenbergbau-beschaefigte-in-der-lausitz-seit-1960/>.

<sup>129</sup> Tilo Berger, "Nix für die Umwelt, nix für die Lausitz," *Die Sächsische Zeitung*, May 20, 2015.

Platzeck eventually switched to the Social Democratic Party.<sup>130</sup> After serving in a number of different offices, he became minister president of Brandenburg in 2002 and held the office until 2013. Others, such as Carlo Jordan, made the transition to local politician. Jordan served a representative for the Alliance 90/the Greens in local Berlin in 1994-1995, but then withdrew from public office.<sup>131</sup> Platzeck represents more of an exception and Jordan the rule. Many of the oppositional figures struggled to be politically relevant. Having been denied the right to study in the GDR for their political activities, they had few credentials to show once the Wall fell. Some have turned to preserving their legacy, such through the work of the Robert Havemann Society and the Federal Commission for the Records of the State Security Service of the former GDR. But more fell into obscurity, never becoming public figures or politically active beyond the local level after 1990.<sup>132</sup>

The change in political power and the transition away from citizens' movements reflected a declining interest in environmental concerns in large part because the intensity of the problems declined considerably with unification. This decline, of course, did not happen in a vacuum. It happened in conjunction with the collapse of East German industries and soaring unemployment. Suddenly, one could swim in the lakes again, which was great, but finding a job was incredibly difficult. Perhaps this twist of fates can also explain the Greens' continuing poor electoral performance in the former East.

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<sup>130</sup> Platzeck was active in both official and independent environmental circles in the GDR. He worked as the section leader of "environmental health" in the office for health inspections in the district of Potsdam between 1982 and 1990. "Minister President of Land Brandenburg Matthias Platzeck," accessed July 5, 2015, <http://www.stk.brandenburg.de/cms/detail.php/lbm1.c.375521.de>.

<sup>131</sup> „Carlo Jordan“, hrsg. v. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung und Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft e.V., letzte Änderung September 2008, accessed July 5, 2015, [www.jugendopposition.de/index.php?id=202](http://www.jugendopposition.de/index.php?id=202).

<sup>132</sup> Tom Strohschneider, "Aus dem Schatten Gaucks," *Die Tageszeitung*, March 9, 2012, accessed July 5, 2015, <http://www.taz.de/!5098809/>.

## **Conclusion**

The tumultuous years of 1989-90 brought seemingly unbelievable changes to Eastern Europe within a very short period. Despite frustration with the existing system over issues like the environment, the status quo seemed relatively stable until early 1989. The GDR appeared to be weathering the storm especially well, celebrating with much pomp and circumstance the fortieth anniversary of the state as late as October 7, 1989. Yet, this interconnected series of processes, including the Polish Round Tables and mass demonstrations in Leipzig and Berlin, resulted in communism's end and the introduction of capitalism and democracy across the former Soviet sphere of influence by the end of 1990. The seemingly stable communist structure disappeared with hardly a whimper, much to the surprise of observers on both sides of the Iron Curtain. While scholars have tended to focus on economic conditions and political rights, environmental issues also played a crucial role in mobilizing discontent in the period leading up to 1989-90. In turn, activists responding to them shaped the constellation of protest movements that brought down communism. Nevertheless, environmental problems appear to have been more effective as an agent for protest than a unifying one.

This period of transition to democracy and capitalism, as much as it seems to be a clear trajectory looking back on it now, was full of both potential and uncertainty. As the SED slowly relinquished power, who was going to fill the vacuum and with what priorities was not entirely clear. Opposition leaders presented one vision, but in the GDR, their goals were increasingly divorced from a population desirous of unification. As a result, a myriad of old, new, and quickly changing actors—each with their own agendas—pushed to shape the character of the transformation, or at least their tiny part in it. The years of 1989-90 showcased the multitude of forces that pulled in different directions, at times creating confusing and contradictory timelines, before ultimately agreeing on what the future would look like. Many scholars have commented

on the peacefulness and smoothness of the revolutions and transformations, but the incredibility of that accomplishment and the potential for conflict should not be forgotten.<sup>133</sup>

The role of the environment in the GDR, and especially Poland, has largely been written out of this narrative. Despite a wealth of independent environmental groups in Poland in the 1980s, ecological matters took a backseat during and after the Round Table Talks. Poland's potential for an organized green party and movement fell apart as infighting and questions of prioritization plagued both. In the end, Poland's Green Party became thoroughly marginalized in the 1990s, never winning enough votes to enter the Sejm. In the GDR, the environment was overwhelmed by other immediate, previously impossible, calls for travel rights, better consumer goods, unification. In reexamining posters, appeals for a more democratic society, and the declarations of the citizens' movements, the degradation and protest over it were widespread. New Forum's platform included a prominent environmental plank, independent Green Party was founded in the GDR, and the environment received its own Round Table Talk.

Throughout the processes of democratization and privatization, the networks of the pre-1989 period remained crucial. Especially at the local level, activists continued to advocate for local conditions and ecological justice. In part, this tradition of protest and grassroots networking made functioning at the highest levels of bureaucracy and policymaking difficult. These were not skills, especially in the GDR, that had been permitted to coexist. As a result, activists both felt excluded or ignored in the process while also tending to withdraw from it. Additionally, in both Poland and the GDR, economic concerns took priority over environmental ones, especially in Poland where "shock therapy" created instability, unemployment, and further discontent. Beyond

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<sup>133</sup> Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*, 144. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity*, 71. Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent*, 347. Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern*.



that, however, the German and Polish cases diverge. In Poland, environmental issues garnered fairly little support, and polls suggest that the general population lacked a strong “environmental consciousness” throughout 1990s, only beginning to change in the 2010s.<sup>134</sup>

During the unification process in Germany, environmental union was relatively uncontroversial. Both East and West agreed it was a major issue and support for improvement came from both sides. Compared to privatization and economic policy, cleanup was successful.<sup>135</sup> Bankrolled by West German taxpayers, pollution was addressed, new parks created, and former open-pit mines flooded and turned into pristine recreational lakes. Moreover, with strict regulations actually being implemented—unlike in the GDR—there was little need for grassroots environmental networks to organize and protest. In effect, it removed the impetus for the movement fomented under the SED system. Thus, while the environment in the former East Germany has become a natural Disneyland for tourist and nature enthusiasts, the legacy of unemployment and outmigration has complicated the success of the environmental cleanup.

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<sup>134</sup> Janusz Krupanek and Beata Michaliszyn, “Umweltpolitik in Polen,” *Polen-Analysen Nr. 86*, March 15, 2011, 5-6, accessed June 30, 2015, <http://www.laender-analysen.de/polen/pdf/PolenAnalysen86.pdf>.

<sup>135</sup> Estimates on the cost of the cleanup vary, however, ranging from 82 to 321 billion DM. See Heinrich Pehle and Alf-Inge Jansen, “Germany: The engine in European environmental policy?” in *Governance and Environment in Western Europe: Politics, Policy, and Administration*, editors Kenneth Hanf and Alf-Inge Jansen (New York: Routledge, 1998), 85. Though the authors oversimplify East German environmental practices, they do provide accurate estimates of the cost of environmental unification.

## CONCLUSION

On a sunny June morning in 2014, I hopped off the train in Bitterfeld, the one-time capital of the East German chemical industry. Standing on the platform, to my left, on the far side of the tracks, sprawled the grounds of the former VEB Chemiekombinat Bitterfeld. Glimpses through the crumbling concrete and wire fences revealed a depressing combination of abandoned East German factories, rusting pipes, and vast, unkempt yards. Under clear blue skies, green and golden grasses reclaimed the open spaces and saplings grew out of chimneys that used to belch smoke. The section of the Kombinat closest to the train station—a very small fraction of the entire premises—boasted brightly painted new buildings with well-maintained access roads and railroad tracks. Once an East German industrial hub employing thousands of workers and spreading for miles, the emptiness of this “People’s Own Enterprise” only highlighted the scale of the transformation since 1990.

From the train station, I turned away from the chemical plant and toward the town of Bitterfeld. Wide streets built for communist parades and spectacles were devoid of activity, barely a car parked on the street or a fellow pedestrian to be found. A few blocks beyond the 1990s-renovated town square, I finally found what I had come to see: a beautiful lake with sail boats, ducklings swimming in the water, and an immaculately maintained concrete boardwalk, complete with an overlook jutting out into the water. Twenty-five years ago this pristine lake had been an enormous, gaping hole in the ground. Known as “the Goitzsche,” it had been the open-pit mine that provided the coal to fuel the chemical plant. Yet, it also served as an official

dumping ground for runoff, leftovers from industrial chemical processed, and household waste. In the years since unification, this mine had been cleaned up, made structurally sound, and flooded for recreational use. It finally opened—with much local media attention—in 2005, making it the largest lake in Saxony-Anhalt.<sup>696</sup>

When the GDR collapsed in 1989-90, Bitterfeld was one of the most polluted sites in Europe. Having been the subject of the 1988 documentary, *Bitteres aus Bitterfeld*, the town has come a long way. The coal-stained buildings are cleaner, and both public and private funds poured into Bitterfeld to clean up the ecological devastation. As I rode the train back to what now felt like the cheery and bustling city of Halle, I concluded that Bitterfeld was not the dump or wasteland that had been described to me, but rather a sad symbol of the promises and failures of the “East German experiment.”

### **State and Environment**

Bitterfeld, with its chemical industry and open-pit mining, at once represented the SED’s most optimistic vision of the future and its harshest realities. It was an integral part of a production-oriented model that rebuilt East Germany after the destruction of World War II, competed with the West, and championed communist technology during the Cold War. While never as successful as the Federal Republic, the GDR experienced high growth after the war, quickly becoming the strongest economy in the Soviet bloc. The SED poured money into the development of certain, specialized industries, including the chemical, and established an international reputation.

The optimism of this vision contributed to the SED’s embrace of environmental protection in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. Cold War competition pushed the SED to look

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<sup>696</sup> “Vom Tagebau zur Seenlandschaft,” *Goitzsche*, accessed July 7, 2015, <http://www.goitzsche-tourismus.de/goitzsche-bitterfeld/geschichte-goitzsche>.

more progressive than the capitalist West, and “socialist environmentalism” played both a practical and a symbolic role in that decision. By the late 1960s, the SED realized how much pollution was negatively affecting not only the country’s economic performance, but the well-being of its citizen-workers.<sup>697</sup> According to communist thought, the workers’ state must take care of its workers.<sup>698</sup> At the same time, the West German government’s reluctance to environmentally regulate industries added to the SED’s incentive to be ahead of the curve, including the right and responsibility to a clean environment in the 1968 version of the constitution. The combination of internal and external pressure to adopt environmentalist language and practices led to the creation of a number of laws and ministries in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The GDR was not alone among the Soviet bloc countries in turning its attention to environmental issues. The trajectory of environmental protection was perhaps logistically easier as well as more logical for the SED than for the Polish Communist Party. The long tradition of German conservation laws and cultural practices of spending time in nature provided a foundation on which it could conveniently build. Conservation laws dated back decades, while hiking and other outdoor organizations already enjoyed widespread popularity in the Cultural League. Since the 1950s, the SED tapped into the longstanding connection between nature and

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<sup>697</sup> DC/20I/3715 “Prognose: Industrielle Abprodukte und planmäßige Gestaltung einer sozialistischen Landeskultur in der DDR,” 1968, Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.

<sup>698</sup> DC/20I/3/744, “Begründung des Gesetzes,” 1969, Ministerratbeschlüsse: Dokumente und Materialien zu den Tagesordnungspunkten, BArch-SAPMO.

nationhood in German culture to create a sense of legitimacy.<sup>699</sup> The GDR's relative affluence meant the SED could afford to lend more resources to environmentally-minded projects.

For the Polish Communist Party, the task of engaging with the environment was more difficult, having fewer institutions or traditions on which to draw. Constant and deep economic woes meant that the economy continued to receive priority over other issues, while at the same time lacking the cash flow to invest in structural environmental degradation. Piecemeal legislation, with each aspect of pollution being governed by a different law or regulatory body, made it difficult to regulate pollution, even as the Communist Party created new nature conservation organizations, like the *Liga Ochrony Przyrody* (LOP).<sup>700</sup> Finally, a general lack of public interest meant that there was little push from the bottom-up for such changes in the 1960s and 1970s. Those that did push for better environmental regulation largely came out of the academy, more according to Polish traditions of expert-based environmentalism rather than popular nature conservation and environmentalism. Instead, the Polish opposition tended to focus on workers' rights, like raising wages and stopping price increases, and the freedom of the Catholic Church.

By the 1980s, both countries faced increased pressure regarding environmental concerns from within, even as their economies fell further behind the West. The SED's response was twofold. On the one hand, it classified environmental data, making it more difficult for the general population to make informed accusations against the party-state. It also cracked down on people who wrote petitions, shutting down their complaints. Increasingly it distrusted people

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<sup>699</sup> Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Scott Moranda, *The People's Own Landscape: Nature, Tourism, and Dictatorship in East Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014).

<sup>700</sup> Michał Kulesza, „Efektywność prawa i administracji w zakresie ochrony przyrody i środowiska, Fragment Raportu KOP PAN na III Kongres Nauki Polskiej,” in *Problemy Ochrony Polskiej Przyrody*, ed Romuald Olaczek and Kazimierz Zarzycki (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1988), 23.

within the system, questioning the loyalty of scientists, including a younger generation trained in the party-state's expanded environmental programs since the early 1970s. On the other hand, the SED and the environmental related institutions continued to expand programs and commitments as long as they did not require wide-ranging reform. These efforts included the new Society for Nature and the Environment (GNU) in 1980, and the State Environmental Inspection and Center for Environmental Development later in the decade.

While in the 1960s “smokestack” industrialization had appeared to successfully overcome the damages of World War II, the economic situation of the 1970s looked profoundly different. Aging technology that could not keep up with advances in the West, but more importantly, the changing global economy created serious problems for the GDR and the rest of the Soviet bloc. The oil crises of the 1970s meant that the GDR received less oil from the Soviet Union, and as a consequence, had less of its own to refine and sell to the West for hard cash.<sup>701</sup> Yet western countries who had bought goods from the Soviet bloc began investing in other parts of the world, especially Asia, decreasing demand for goods from the GDR. The shifting global economy compounded domestic economic difficulties. To maintain the standard of living and placate the population, the SED and other communist states had promised better consumer goods to its citizens. But to bankroll these changes in a planned economy that was cumbersome and slow to respond, the Eastern bloc turned to western countries for loans. Now, indebted to the West, but with little economic improvement and a declining population, the East was reluctant to heavily invest in something like the environment that might further lower production and damage output.

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<sup>701</sup> Raymond Stokes, „East Germany and the Oil Crises of the 1970s,” in *The East German Economy, 1945-2010*, ed. Hartmut Berghoff and Uta Andrea Balbier (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 131.

The SED and the Polish Communist Party both followed a general trend of engaging more with environmental issues in the 1970s and into the 1980s, but never truly prioritizing them. Faced with economic stagnation, indebtedness to the West, and political ossification, the pollution worsened. By the 1980s, experts privately admitted that some environmental degradation “objectively cannot be resolved right now...and no solution applied.”<sup>702</sup> The amount of investment required to improve aging industries and creatively solve the multitude of environmental problems simply could not be found. As the 1980s progressed, the SED and the Polish Communist Party tried to maintain power—and environmental policy—with an ever narrowing range of options. From that point, the economic and environmental interests were increasingly at odds at one another, creating a tension that would only be resolved with the GDR’s collapse in 1989-90.

### **Independent Environmentalism**

In the 1970s, the context of increased regulation and new environmental institutions and associations raised expectations for East Germans’ quality of life. When official recourse to worsening conditions did not result in improvements, concerned individuals searched for spaces in which they could express their consternation, and even take action. The form of independent association varied between the GDR and Poland, shaping the rhetoric and organizing power of the movements, but each exerted pressure on the party-state. Despite these differences, both East German and Polish activists were both greatly influenced by the rise of green movements, and later parties, in the West. Not initially considered a politically dangerous topic, the degradation of the environment raised concerns that did not strictly fit into a state-opposition dichotomy,

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<sup>702</sup> DK 5/1982, “Bericht über Probleme des Geheimnisschutzes beim Informationen zum Umweltschutz,” October 25, 1982, Arbeitsgruppe für Organisation und Inspektion beim Ministerrat, Ministerium für Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, BArch-SAPMO.

ultimately creating a movement that contributed considerably to undermining the socialist project.

The Protestant Church in the GDR took an early interest in the environment, and further capitalized on its new position in East German society after the 1978 concord with the SED. Oddly enough, in giving up its openly oppositional stance, the Protestant Church gained more leeway from the SED. Accordingly, it opened its doors to a wide variety of groups, including conscientious objectors, peace activists, women's and gay right groups, as well as environmental activists. Top-down support, thanks to individuals like Heino Falcke and the Ecclesiastical Research Center in Wittenberg, met bottom-up interest to support the movement. Individual groups based in parishes around the GDR used the structure of the Church to spread their message, but also to learn about the activities of groups like them in other parts of the country.

As many scholars have noted, the independent environmental movement became more explicitly oppositional over the course of the 1980s.<sup>703</sup> Yet, upon closer examination, there was significant contact between the official and independent movements, breaking down the traditional state-opposition dichotomy. Some members participated in both the GNU and local church groups. Some, like Annette Beleites of Schwerin, were in fact scientists working in state institutions and volunteers in the independent movement on the weekends. The independent movement depended, at least partially, on what information its activists could glean from official publications, just as the existence of an environmental movement beyond the confines of the party-state structure challenged its credibility. Participation in both types of organizations confused hardline officials, but also suggests more fluidity and complexity in East German society, blurring rigid distinctions between “state” and “opposition.”

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<sup>703</sup> See, for example, Detlef Pollack, *Politischer Protest: Politisch alternative Gruppen in der DDR* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2000).



In many cases, this overlap was strongest outside of Berlin, where “oppositional” figures were scarcer on the ground. These groups have received fairly little attention, in general, but in looking beyond the capital, regional variations become clear. They responded to local issues, such as open-pit mining or the chemical industry, looking to local officials—who might well be neighbors—to find solutions. In the coal mining region south of Leipzig, for example, independent activists and local officials experienced a warming and cooling of tensions in the early and mid-1980s, before they became more openly hostile in the late 1980s. In Lusatia, a small circle of activists worked diligently to raise awareness about pollution from open-pit mining, but the rural character of the region and the dependence on the coal for jobs made it difficult to establish a critical mass of individuals. More urban areas, like Berlin and Leipzig, however, boasted numerous groups who increasingly worked with one another as well as networking with more isolated groups. By examining both urban and rural environmental groups, regional distinctions and tactics become evident, which highlights greater diversity in the movement.

Despite, and at times because of, the movement’s expansion, it encountered continuing fractures and new struggles. With the collapse of the peace movement in 1982 and 1983 and the environmental movement’s rising popularity, it came under closer scrutiny from the Stasi and other official bodies, which actively sought to keep the movement divided. Surveillance of meetings, unofficial informants, along with a host of other Stasi tactics succeeded in sowing distrust among members. At the same time, the movement’s host, the Protestant Church, was conflicted in its stance on “the groups.” Some of the leadership actively supported them, and the Church passed an official resolution, committing itself to a “Christian responsibility for creation”

in September 1984.<sup>704</sup> But others feared it would jeopardize the Church's relationship with the SED. In addition to this confusion, the Christian rhetoric that the groups had successfully used to push against the "socialist environmentalism," often contained anti-consumerist and moralistic language that did not appeal to a broad spectrum of the population. Thus, although independent environmental activism expanded dramatically after 1986, its place in the Church remained tenuous and its influence on the wider East German public somewhat limited.

### **Transnational Contexts**

Despite these obstacles, the independent movement continued to grow, in no small part fueled by events beyond the GDR. Most especially the West German green movement offered a vocabulary, organizing principle, as well as financial and practical support. Environmental activism made great strides in the Federal Republic in the 1970s, pressuring local and federal governments to preserve biodiversity, to reduce air and water pollution, and to curb the construction of nuclear power plants.<sup>705</sup> These successes provided not only an inspiration, but also a more effective way for East Germans to talk about pollution in their own country. Using the more evocative West German *Waldsterben* (Dying of the Forest) rather than *Forstschaden* (Forest Damage) exposed the ways in which the SED belittled the problems it attempted to hide. Moreover, the grassroots character of the West German movement appealed to East German activists who were fully aware of their limited ability to organize and protest in the SED dictatorship.

The establishment of a successful Green Party in West Germany and its entrance into the federal parliament further helped the independent movement in the East. With the status of a

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<sup>704</sup> RHG/KFH 07, "Beschuß der Synode des Bundes zum Thema 'Christliche Verantwortung für die Schöpfung' vom 25. September 1984," Kirchliches Forschungsheim Wittenberg, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft,.

<sup>705</sup> Frank Uekötter, *The Greenest Nation? A New History of German Environmentalism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), 178.

political party, the Greens sent emissaries to the East, who met with independent activists and aided them in a variety of ways. Crucial to this collaboration was Dr. Wilhelm Knabe, an ecologist turned Green politician, who had fled the GDR as a young man in the 1950s. He, along with Elisabeth Weber, traveled to the Eastern bloc, and encouraged West German Greens to engage with pollution on the other side of the Iron Curtain. They also pressed for collaboration between the governments on shared environmental problems, like the heavily salinized Werra River.

The Green Party's relationship to the East was nonetheless fraught with tension. The party was much more firmly rooted in Western European concerns and traditions, and many had little interest in engaging with Eastern Europeans about environmentalism on the other side of the Iron Curtain. For those who did look eastward, many held at least some level sympathy for the SED's socialist project, making a decision for or against independent activists difficult. The Greens' conflicted stance on the GDR again raised its head during the unification process of 1990, when it was the only major western party to not openly support it. For them, unification of the Germanys seemed uncomfortably nationalistic and best to be avoided. Nevertheless, the Green Party's work to sensitize West Germany to environmental questions factored into how the federal government thought about unification, prioritizing new anti-pollution measures.

The environmental activism in Poland reflects a better organized movement with international connections, though it was marginalized by the opposition in its own country. The Polish Ecological Club's ability to walk the line between officialdom and opposition was much more commonplace than in the GDR, while groups like *Wolność i Pokój* became strictly oppositional without the protection of religious affiliation. With the Polish Communist Party's embrace of glasnost and perestroika, and in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl,

Poland became a key site of international exchange, breaking down divisions between East and West. Western activists met, counseled, and financially supported Eastern European activists and helped established connections across the Soviet bloc. Such leniency surprised East German activists, whose government openly rejected Gorbachev's reforms. Despite this increased openness, and high levels of pollution, environmentalism did not become a major engine for the opposition to the system in Poland. Paradoxically, despite more freedom, there were environmental gains.

The legacy of environmental activism in both the former GDR and Poland is therefore conflicted. While providing sources of protest that destabilized the communist regimes, it has tended to be overlooked in scholarship about the transition. Impulses for grassroots environmentalism declined in the former GDR as new regulations improved air and water quality. In Poland, material standard of living concerns and the transformation of the system took precedent over other quality of life questions. Activists' positions on how to solve environmental problems within the new systems were unclear, perhaps even to themselves. Some absented themselves from the process entirely in order to prioritize other issues, while others continued to push for change through civil society rather than through politics.<sup>706</sup> Environmental issues delegitimized the communist system, but in light of extensive clean-up projects in the 1990s, have become secondary to questions about employment and economic performance.

### **Legitimacy and Environment in German History**

East German environmentalisms illuminate the complicated character of German history in the twentieth century, contributing to our understanding of the postwar era and the relationship between the two Germanys. Although sometimes disregarded as a footnote in German history,

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<sup>706</sup> B II 1 5732, Elisabeth Weber, "Bericht über eine kurze Polen-Reise im Dezember 1988 anlässlich der Gründung einer Grünen Partei in Polen," 7, Bundestagsfraktion, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

the GDR provides a unique opportunity to compare developments in two states that were previously one.<sup>707</sup> Both East and West Germany sought to define themselves and establish a legitimate governments that differentiated themselves from the Third Reich and from each other. They were laboratories for competing political systems on the front lines of the Cold War, even as they drew on the same past and distanced themselves from it. Where the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) established a successful democracy based on the principles of the social market economy, the GDR's "real-existing socialism" struggled for popular support and political legitimacy. Although the GDR was the system that failed after forty-five years, it nevertheless provided an alternative to which the FRG had to respond.

In their desire to define themselves and competing for legitimacy on the European and world stages, the two Germanys inevitably addressed topics common to the postwar experience. One of those was the environment. Though responding in different ways to domestic and foreign impetuses, both states determined that environmental protection was an area in which the government had a responsibility to its citizens. The SED further used their claim of protection to emphasize the superiority of the party-state, and its ability to protect its citizens. This decision expanded the concept of the welfare state beyond questions of material wellbeing to include quality of life issues that socialism had previously ignored. Government responses to pollution, then, did not only arise in response to protest—in the GDR government action actually predated an independent movement—but as part of the state's claims to legitimacy and to building a better future.

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<sup>707</sup> Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 5, *Bundesrepublik und DDR, 1949-1990* (Munich: Ch. Beck, 2008), 361. For a discussion of the usefulness of Wehler's categorization, see Donna Harsch, "Footnote or Footprint? The German Democratic Republic in History," 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Lecture of the GHU, Washington, DC, November 12, 2009, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://www.ghi-dc.org/files/publications/bulletin/bu046/009.pdf>.

The SED's stance on the environment, however, overextended the party-state's abilities, creating precisely what it feared most: a legitimacy gap. The high-minded ideals and visions of creating a workers' paradise as set out in the 1968 constitution resulted in the SED broadening its claim on East Germans' wellbeing well beyond what communist states had originally mapped out. It claimed protections and rights that the FRG did—or would—not match. Ultimately, the SED could not uphold its own goals, as the discrepancies between promise and reality grew larger. In the battle between the Germanys to represent the true German state, the SED not only failed to make communism appealing, it failed to fulfill the guarantees employed to make it so.

Cold War competition exacerbated the tension between East and West Germany on an official level, yet for independent activists, it provided opportunities. Material support from western activists made it possible to critique the regime, publishing samizdat newsletters and circulars. It also gave them a language and an example of protest. Challenging the inertia of the government, the West German green movement successfully changed the dynamics and composition of politics in the FRG. In doing so, it became a model for what might be possible, as East German officials noted in 1983, when Green Party members met with a Leipzig-based Christian group in 1983.<sup>708</sup> Additionally, Germany-language media in the FRG gave independent activists an outside avenue for communicating concerns abroad as well as back into the GDR. This situation, predicated on two states and a competition between, helped to raise the profile of environmental issues domestically and internationally.

When the GDR collapsed in 1989 and the reunification process began, the environment became one of the issues that united East and West Germans. Both populations were shocked to discover the extent of the pollution and its impact on East Germans who lived in the most

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<sup>708</sup> A 56, "Besuch von den Grünen," *Der Sonntag: Gemeindeblatt der Evangelisch-Lutheranisch Landeskirche Sachsens*, November 18, 1983, Personalbestand: Wilhelm Knabe, Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

heavily affected regions of the country. Despite bickering about how to carry out the cleanup, its basic necessity was never called into question. East and West Germans had begun to value environmental protection in the postwar period irrespective of whether they lived in the East or the West. Compared to other unification debates, addressing pollution was not terribly controversial. In large part, then, the consensus from both sides was so high that it did not merit much public debate. Moreover, in the years following 1990, the successes in cleaning up the environment have overshadowed any potential for frustration, and has led many to overlook the importance of the issue at the time.

### **Environment and Cold War**

The East German case illuminates a new aspect of the Cold War narrative and challenges certain assumptions about the rise of environmental consciousness and green movements. Rather than reinforcing stark divides between the progressive New Social Movements of western European liberal democracies and conformist societies under communism, the case of the environment demonstrates two dynamics regarding environmentalism. First, Eastern Europeans, and especially East Germans, were concerned about environmental conditions. This consciousness did not exist only among a few individuals in the Churches, but also existed within the party-state bureaucracy. Second, environmental concerns did not develop in isolation on either side of the Iron Curtain, but rather developed across it. On environmental issues, the Iron Curtain was more porous than has sometimes been acknowledged.

The rise of environmental consciousness is most commonly associated with the New Social Movements of western-style liberal democracies, but closer examination of the GDR (and Poland) challenges that assumption. Eastern European states and peoples developed different styles of environmentalism than in the West, but they faced a common problem and sought solutions to it. The GDR's "socialist environmentalism" clearly recognized the environmental

hazards associated with high levels of industrialization and presents a method of addressing it. Only when its answers were inviable or unable to be implemented did East Germans begin to look more seriously into alternatives.

Christian activists in the GDR, too, represented a strain of environmentalism that is distinct both from the SED's and from the West German Greens. Their brand highlighted Christian rhetoric and biblical teachings whereas the other two were largely, if not entirely secular movements. The turn to religion was in part a practical one, given that the Protestant Church was one of the few places in which protestors could congregate. But many of those who found their way into Christian environmental groups were not solely calculating. Some truly believed the language they produced. The Protestant Church itself fostered this line of thinking in its commitment to environmentalism and its institutions, most especially the Ecclesiastical Research Center in Wittenberg. Finally, the use of such rhetoric created an effective critique of the SED. Practical or not, many environmental groups' religious tenor in their programs and publications undermined the official, technical-oriented version of environmentalism.

The study of environmentalism lends itself to crossing borders, which the East German case supports. Neither state nor independent environmentalism in Eastern Europe developed in isolation. Responses to acid rain became important across Eastern Europe, as the Greenway activists clearly pointed out. Despite agreements between Soviet bloc countries, difficulties remained. Additionally, though pollution moved primarily from east to west, it represented a problem to both sides of the Iron Curtain. West German rivers bore the burden of East German mining and chemicals after the water flowed cross the German-German border. Not even East German soldiers catching dead fish before they crossed could stop West Germans from knowing or experiencing the extent of the GDR's problems.



People and ideas also moved across borders, often supporting the case for more protection. Activists traveled from the GDR to Poland, and from the GDR to the FRG, as well as from Poland to parts of Western Europe. Environmentalism highlights the complex and interconnected character of pollution, policy, and protest. While opportunities and priorities depended on the political system, the concern about pollution and the need for a response did not. What created the most difficulty for Eastern European regimes, then, was when activists gained greater access to one another and became better armed to challenge the state. From this perspective, environmentalism in postwar Europe was a phenomenon that transcended political boundaries, including the allegedly impenetrable Iron Curtain.

The case of environmentalism in the GDR broadens understandings of how different social and political regimes respond to the tension between economic production and environmental degradation. Often assumed to be a product of the green movements based on grassroots organization in democratic societies, environmental protection—as policy or as a challenge from the opposition—under dictatorship expands conceptions of environmentalism and its goals. It encourages us to reconsider the relationship between state, industry, and consumption on the one hand and social activism and quality of life questions on the other. Together, these different impulses—from East and West, from party-state and opposition—led to wide-ranging agreement on environmental issues during unification and in the years since then. Rather than viewing the GDR as a rump state, it was the confluence of Eastern and Western ideas about environmentalism and is crucial to our understanding of the “greening” of postwar Europe.

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##### *Regionen*

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