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# Re-Interpreting West Germany's Ecological Revolution: Environmental Politics, Grassroots Activism, and Democracy in the Long 1970s

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### Abstract

In looking at the ways in which the relationship between environmental matters and the political developed and changed in West Germany during the long 1970s, this article reinterprets the ‘ecological revolution’ that occurred at that time and rethinks the trajectory of German environmentalism. To get at the politicization of environmental concerns in the 1970s, the article compares two narratives: the ‘technocratic invention’ of environmental politics by government officials, and the career of grassroots anti-nuclear activism. It shows that though these two trends developed in relationship with one another, their protagonists increasingly came to speak past one other. Not only did they begin to understand environmental problems in different ways, they also drew different conclusions about where environmental matters were to be debated, and what ought to be done in order to resolve environmental concerns. By describing these developments and the approaches to environmental politics they brought forth, the article reconceives the ecological revolution as an extended period when conflicting interpretations of environmental affairs underpinned competing approaches to politics as such. While government officials sought to make the environment part of standard political praxis, grassroots activists used environmental concerns as a wedge to push open a wider debate about popular participation within parliamentary democracy. The long confrontation between these two perspectives gave way, during the 1980s, to an environmentalism that was not only level-headed and consensual, but also a seminal concern of German politics.

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## Keywords

Anti-nuclear movement, citizens' initiatives, ecological revolution, environmental policy, modern environmentalism, West Germany, the Greens

In 1970, the World Wildlife Fund co-founder and former Nature Conservancy director-general Max Nicholson proclaimed that an 'environmental revolution' was afoot. The revolution, Nicholson explained, had a 'double face'. It could be seen both 'as a man-made change, sudden and worldwide, in our natural environment', but also as a 'transformation in our attitude to that environment'.<sup>1</sup> Historians have followed Nicholson's approach, arguing that the years around 1970 saw an 'ecological revolution' comprising both the dramatic changes to the earth brought about by the postwar 'great acceleration', but also changing human attitudes towards the environment.<sup>2</sup> In this context, a wide range of events, ideas, and disasters that took place around 1970, from the *Torrey Canyon* oil spill (1967), to the first Earth Day celebrations in the United States (1970), to the United Nations' Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and the publication of *The Limits to Growth* (both 1972) are lumped together.<sup>3</sup> Altogether, these happenings evidenced an 'epochal change' that amounted to nothing less than 'the crystallization of a new force in the culture and politics of the world: modern environmentalism'.<sup>4</sup> Modern environmentalism differed from its predecessors because of its undisguised political salience, but also because it brought together 'a previously heterogeneous batch of efforts' into 'one large entity with a tendency to become global'.<sup>5</sup>

Modern environmentalism's emergence in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) has been told as just such a story of consolidation. The FRG's 'ecological revolution' has been described as a transformation from '*Heimat- und Naturschutz*' (literally, homeland and nature protection, but often referred to in English as conservationism) to '*Umweltschutz*' (environmental protection). Around 1970, the story goes, nature

<sup>1</sup> Max Nicholson, *The Environmental Revolution: A Guide for the New Masters of the World* (London 1970), 21.

<sup>2</sup> On the 'ecological revolution' concept, see: Frank Uekötter, *Von der Rauchplage bis zur Ökologische Revolution* (Essen 2003); and Joachim Radkau, *Die Ära der Ökologie* (Munich 2011). References here are to the English translation: Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, Patrick Camiller, trans. (Cambridge 2014). On the 'great acceleration', see: J. R. McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Cambridge, MA 2014).

<sup>3</sup> On Earth Day, see: Adam Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day* (New York 2013). On Stockholm and *The Limits to Growth*, see: Kai Hünemörder, *Die Frühgeschichte der globalen Umweltkrise und die Formierung der deutschen Umweltpolitik* (Stuttgart 2004), esp. 277ff.

<sup>4</sup> Jens-Ivo Engels, *Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik. Ideenwelt und politische Verhaltensstile in Naturschutz und Umweltbewegung* (Paderborn 2006), 14; J. R. McNeill, 'The Environment, Environmentalism, and International Society in the Long 1970s', in Ferguson et al., eds, *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA 2010), 278.

<sup>5</sup> Radkau, *Age of Ecology*, 112.

protection, which ‘concerns itself with the conservation of natural and nearly natural biotopes, of plants and animals’, became but one part of the more ‘comprehensive’ concept of environmental protection, which ‘concerns itself with the entirety of human natural resources, including artificial environments’.<sup>6</sup> Such tales of crystallization present the era around 1970 as a turning point, and modern environmentalism as a powerful, consolidated force.<sup>7</sup> In so doing, however, they also make environmentalism nebulous and diffuse.

Understanding modern environmentalism – and the changes that brought it about, then, requires getting closer to the action. To do so, this article looks at the ways in which the relationship between environmental matters and the political developed and changed in West Germany during the long 1970s. It turns first to the ‘technocratic invention’ of environmental politics by government officials, a narrative well suited to the idea that the making of environmental politics was a sudden work of consolidation.<sup>8</sup> Next it looks at the career of grassroots anti-nuclear activism in 1970s West Germany, showing how this project linked concerns about environmental issues with the practice of democracy itself. Though these two trends developed in relationship with one another, their protagonists increasingly came to speak past one other. Not only did they begin to understand environmental problems in different ways, they also drew different conclusions about where environmental matters were to be debated, and what ought to be done in order to resolve environmental concerns. Despite ongoing grassroots activism, however, the argument that environmental affairs were adequately addressed within parliamentary democracy, and that environmental regulation comprised a standard, even convivial, part of government work gained steam after the long 1970s. On the one hand, the Green Party’s hard-won acceptance within the parliamentary sphere brought the grassroots insurgency into high politics, marking as Edgar Wolfrum has put it, a seminal ‘integrative achievement of the Federal Republic’s democracy’.<sup>9</sup> In so doing, the Greens’ emergence diminished grassroots activists’ claim that they were ignored by – and thus stood outside of – the political mainstream. But the new conservative government’s bold environmental rhetoric and its further environmental reforms, capped by the establishment of a Ministry for the Environment in 1986, were also fundamental to the consolidation of the environment as a broad, but nonetheless distinct sphere of politics.

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<sup>6</sup> Engels, *Naturpolitik*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Engels, for example, speaks of the 1970s as a time that saw the ‘formation of the field of actors who continue to shape environmental politics today’. Engels, *Naturpolitik*, 12. In an essay devoted to the question of whether 1972 marked an ‘epochal turning point’ in environmental history, Kai Hünemörder notes the continuation of certain trends in the way environmental affairs were addressed in politics, but nonetheless concludes that ‘the events around the year 1972 could justify talk of a new historical period’. Hünemörder, ‘1972 – Epochenschwelle der Umweltgeschichte?’, in Franz-Josef Brüggemeier and Jens Ivo Engels, eds, *Natur- und Umweltschutz nach 1945. Konzepte, Konflikte, Kompetenzen* (Frankfurt 2005), 142.

<sup>8</sup> Engels, *Naturpolitik*, 275.

<sup>9</sup> Edgar Wolfrum, *Die geglückte Demokratie: Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart 2006), 479.

In studying these developments and the approaches to environmental politics they brought forth, this article questions the notion that West Germany's ecological revolution is best understood as a brief moment of epochal change, when environmental destruction suddenly became too much for humanity to bear and attitudes towards the environment abruptly shifted. Instead, it conceives the ecological revolution as an extended period when conflicting interpretations of environmental affairs underpinned competing approaches to politics as such.<sup>10</sup> While government officials sought to make the environment part of standard political praxis, grassroots activists used environmental concerns as a wedge to push open a wider debate about popular participation within parliamentary democracy. Throughout much of the long 1970s, these two perspectives confronted one another, making the environment a subject of political and societal contention.

Thus, looking separately at political environmentalism and grassroots activism, and tracing the fault lines between them during the long 1970s, opens the way to a re-conceptualization of West Germany's ecological revolution. Instead of a moment of sudden change, or a straightforward process of consolidation, the ecological revolution becomes a protracted process, a time of openness – and dissonance – when ecological concerns began to influence politics in different ways and the shape of modern environmentalism remained indistinct. This process fostered the reform and expansion of environmental legislation, but it also shifted political praxis, and underpinned an incisive critique of West German politics and democracy that briefly offered vistas onto a radically different society.

## The 'Technocratic Invention' of *Umweltschutz*: Government Environmental Politics

The emergence of environmental politics in West Germany can be told as a story of 'refolution', that is, of transformation from above through administrative re-organization.<sup>11</sup> This is the aim of Edda Müller's 'insider' account of the social-liberal government's environmental politics, *Innenwelt der Umweltpolitik* (The Inner World of Environmental Politics), which draws on her experience working at the Ministry of the Interior in the 1970s, and which has provided key evidence for leading scholarly works on the subject.<sup>12</sup> Müller's narrative is straightforward: Government ministers sowed the seeds of environmentalism, bureaucrats following their direction nurtured those seeds to maturity, and society played only the objective role of 'fertile

<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the approach aligns with Holger Nehring's description of the 1970s and early 1980s as 'the ecological moment'. Holger Nehring, 'Genealogies of the Ecological Moment: Planning, Complexity and the Emergence of "the Environment" as Politics in West Germany, 1949–1982', in Sverker Sörlin and Paul Warde, eds, *Nature's End: History and the Environment* (Basingstoke 2009), 115–40.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Garton Ashe coined the term 'refolution' in 1989 in order to describe a movement of 'deliberate reform led by an enlightened minority [...] in the still ruling Communist parties' of Poland and Hungary. Timothy Garton Ashe, 'Revolution: The Springtime of Two Nations', *New York Review of Books* (15 June 1989), 3–10.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example: Hünemörder, *Frühgeschichte*, 155; Engels, *Naturpolitik*, 285; and Frank Uekötter, *The Greenest Nation? A New History of German Environmentalism* (Cambridge, MA 2014), 86–7.

ground'.<sup>13</sup> The story begins with the 'technocratic invention of *Umweltschutz*' by Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who became Minister of the Interior when the new Social-Liberal government took office in 1969.<sup>14</sup> Shortly after assuming his post, Genscher decided to name a department that had recently been switched from the Ministry of Public Health to his Interior Ministry 'Section U' for *Umweltschutz*. Thus, the Genscher anecdote is suited to the idea that environmental politics emerged rather suddenly around 1970, subsuming earlier piecemeal approaches to nature protection and conservation.

Though Müller's account holds that politicians were ahead of West German society and the press in terms of the politicization of environmental protection, she also maintains that the 'political momentousness and later political explosiveness of environmental affairs' was likely 'unknown' to them. Her assertion that the consolidation of environmental politics was viewed within the Interior Ministry as a matter of 'bureaucratic reorganization' suggests that Genscher did not intend to create a new field of political contention, let alone to transform German politics, by inaugurating Section U.<sup>15</sup> Instead, amidst the transfer of power at the federal level, the apex of the student movement, and the contentious extra-parliamentary debate over the Emergency Laws, consolidating environmental regulations was a stable, non-contentious field of politics. The proliferation of discussions about environmental regulation around 1970, in other countries, but also within international organizations, informed government officials' approach to the subject and suggested that it had consensus support.<sup>16</sup>

Regardless of their intentions, government officials in the FRG worked determinedly in the early 1970s to shape the new field of environment politics. In so doing, they created the framework for a more comprehensive approach to environmental regulation. The government's October 1971 Environmental Program articulated its conception of environmental politics as 'all measures necessary [...] to secure a safe environment for humans [...] and to protect soil, air, water, flora and fauna from disadvantageous effects of human interference'.<sup>17</sup> In introducing the document, Chancellor Willy Brandt also noted the broad and integrative nature of the new policy area. He called the 'particular initiatives of the past' insufficient and emphasized his government's prerogative to replace them with an 'overall plan' that comprised 'a core area of the government's work program for the introduction of domestic reform'.<sup>18</sup> Under the leadership of

<sup>13</sup> Edda Müller, *Innenwelt der Umweltpolitik. Sozial-liberale Umweltpolitik – (Ohn)macht durch Organisation?* (Opladen 1986), 51.

<sup>14</sup> Engels, *Naturpolitik*, 275.

<sup>15</sup> Müller, *Innenwelt der Umweltpolitik*, 55–6. According to Genscher's friend Peter Menke-Gluckert, Genscher had no idea what environmental protection was in 1969, and called Menke-Gluckert to learn more. Menke-Gluckert, 'Der Umweltpolitiker Genscher', in Klaus Kinkel, ed., *In der Verantwortung* (Berlin 1998), 162.

<sup>16</sup> Müller, *Innenwelt der Umweltpolitik*, 52–3. See also: Jan-Henrik Meyer, 'Who Should Pay for Pollution? The OECD, the European Communities and the Emergence of Environmental Policy in the early 1970s', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2017), 377–98.

<sup>17</sup> 'Umweltprogramm der Bundesregierung', Bundestag Drucksache VI / 2710, 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Section U's Director, Peter Menke-Glückert, the Interior Ministry initiated bureaucratic reforms that helped to affirm the environment's important new position: an inter-ministerial council for environmental affairs was established, and regular meetings of the ministers responsible for environmental affairs in each of the FRG's ten federal states were organized.<sup>19</sup> All in all, the bureaucratic reforms and broad sweep of the Environmental Program consolidated the environment as a particular and significant policy area with the bureaucratic framework required to support it. Such efforts epitomize the idea that environmental politics was created rather suddenly through the lumping together of previously heterogeneous efforts and fields of policy.

Even as the federal government created environmental politics through an act of consolidation, it 'continued pre-existing regulatory strategies' in addressing the problems it had now linked together.<sup>20</sup> Like previous efforts at regulating pollution, which had occurred in individual states (especially the populous and heavily industrialized state of North Rhine-Westphalia), but also at the federal level, the Brandt government's environmental policies focused 'on pollution control, [which was] the purpose of no fewer than 34 of the total 54 new laws and ordinances by 1976'.<sup>21</sup> Among other forms of pollution, airplane noise, leaded gasoline, trash removal, DDT, and air quality were all subjects of new regulation.<sup>22</sup> The invention of environmental politics in the Ministry of the Interior, then, meant primarily that the government 'differentiated environmental politics both institutionally and in terms of content' and passed numerous new pollution control bills in a short period.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the government's approach to environmental politics could be summed up as a 'concentration on technical solutions that excluded divisive social questions'.<sup>24</sup> Bureaucratic organization and pragmatic problem solving, including cooperation between government and industry – certainly not a radical approach that got to the underlying causes of pollution and the destruction of nature – underlay government officials' construction of environmental policy.

In fact, even though the government pursued policies that made some representatives of industry uncomfortable, it took the utmost care to formulate a 'cooperative politics'

<sup>19</sup> Hünemörder, *Frühgeschichte*, 155. In December 1970, Bavaria had established 'not only the first Environmental Ministry in Germany, but also the first in Europe and worldwide'. Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Umwelt und Verbraucherschutz, 'Fast ein halbes Jahrhundert Bewahrung unserer Lebensgrundlagen: das Bayerische Umweltministerium', [https://www.stmuv.bayern.de/ministerium/aufgaben/geschichte\\_umweltministerium.htm](https://www.stmuv.bayern.de/ministerium/aufgaben/geschichte_umweltministerium.htm) (accessed 5 November 2020). On the establishment of environmental politics within Bavarian bureaucracy (a process with many parallels to the developments in Bonn), including the creation of the Staatsministeriums für Landesentwicklung und Umweltfragen, see: Ute Hasenöhl, *Zivilgesellschaft und Protest. Eine Geschichte der Naturschutz- und Umweltbewegung in Bayern, 1945–1980* (Göttingen 2011), 265–74.

<sup>20</sup> Engels, *Naturpolitik*, 289.

<sup>21</sup> Uekötter, *The Greenest Nation?*, 87. On previous efforts at environmental regulation at the state level, see esp. Frank Uekötter, *Age of Smoke: Environmental Policy in Germany and the United States, 1880–1970* (Pittsburgh, PA 2009); and Brüggemeier, *Blauer Himmel über der Ruhr* (Essen 1992); on the links to federal politics, see: Müller, *Innenwelt der Umweltpolitik*, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Uekötter, *The Greenest Nation?*, 87.

<sup>23</sup> Müller, *Innenwelt der Umweltpolitik*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> Hünemörder, *Frühgeschichte*, 173.

aligned with economic interests.<sup>25</sup> One Interior Ministry official pledged that, ‘the Federal Government will do everything it can to maintain the performance of the German economy and – inasmuch as it is required – help with targeted measures like tax benefits or assistance with research’.<sup>26</sup> Reading the writing on the wall, the Federal Association of German Industry (BDI) seized the opportunity to incorporate itself into this sort of economically-friendly, technical environmentalism. Already in 1970, it accepted responsibility for the ‘social costs of industrial production, including pollution’.<sup>27</sup> Shortly thereafter, the BDI’s president, Fritz Berg, praised Germany’s prior achievements in the area of environmental protection, organized a working group on the topic of ‘Industry and Environment’, and began to speak of industry’s prerogative to ‘keep the disturbance of the living environment [*Lebensraum*] in check’.<sup>28</sup> Not only was the government’s approach tacitly endorsed by industry, it also garnered the support of politicians from across the party spectrum.<sup>29</sup>

If Genscher’s ‘technocratic invention of environmental protection’, is the opening salvo in the narrative of a technical and consensual approach to environmental regulation, then it also came with a very clear view of what constituted environmental politics: bureaucratic reforms, pollution controls, and negotiations with industry were its central tenets. Surprisingly, such an approach has obvious parallels with the ‘attempt to reconceptualize environmental issues as a matter of scientific knowledge, technological innovation, economic incentives and administrative efficiency’ that the political theorist Ingolfur Blühdorn attributes to 1990s environmentalism and equates with outright efforts to ‘depoliticize and objectivate environmental policy’.<sup>30</sup> Since Blühdorn’s critique of what he calls ‘eco-politics in the mode of objectivation’ stems from the idea that environmental politics changed markedly between the 1970s and 1990s, it is notable that the basic components of ‘eco-politics in the mode of objectivation’ so clearly existed ever since Genscher’s ‘invention’ of *Umweltschutz*.

## ‘Citizens on the Barricades’:<sup>31</sup> Grassroots Anti-nuclear Activism on the Upper Rhine

A second well-known story of the politicization of environmental concerns in West Germany – one that begins in the ‘mythical history’ of anti-nuclear protests in the

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 172. See also: Thomas Dannenbaum, “‘Atom-Staat’ oder “Unregierbarkeit”? Wahrnehmungsmuster im westdeutschen Atomkonflikt der siebziger Jahre’, in Franz-Josef Brüggemeier and Jens Ivo Engels, eds, *Natur- und Umweltschutz nach 1945. Konzepte, Konflikte, Kompetenzen* (Frankfurt 2005), 278–9.

<sup>26</sup> State Secretary Hartkopf, quoted in Müller, *Innenwelt der Umweltpolitik*, 89.

<sup>27</sup> Engels, *Naturpolitik*, 285.

<sup>28</sup> Hünemörder, *Frühgeschichte*, 177.

<sup>29</sup> Engels, *Naturpolitik*, 284.

<sup>30</sup> Ingolfur Blühdorn, ‘A Much-Needed Renewal of Environmentalism?’, in Clive Hamilton, François Gemenne and Christophe Bonneuil, eds, *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (London 2015), 158.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Otto Fehr, ‘Bürger auf Barrikaden. Die Fehler der baden-württembergischen Landesregierung’, *Die Zeit* (7 March 1975). Available: <https://www.zeit.de/1975/11/buerger-auf-barrikaden>



Upper Rhine valley – centers around a very different concept of the political than does the Genscher story.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the long 1970s, the Upper Rhine valley was the site of anti-nuclear protests targeting nearly a dozen reactors proposed by planners in Germany, France, and Switzerland.<sup>33</sup> The protest movement's best-known chapter was the nine-month occupation of a nuclear reactor construction site at the village of Wyhl, which began in February 1975. Aside from earning the tiny village an entry in the encyclopedia of 'German Memory Sites', the Wyhl occupation 'attained a model character for the struggles against nuclear energy in the 1970s, had 'symbolic and signal-function', and was 'known around the world'.<sup>34</sup> Though reactor opponents organized conventional demonstrations, participated actively in the licensing process, and even took legal action to stop construction of the reactor, the Wyhl struggle became known on account of the occupation – a dramatic, direct action protest carried out by middle-aged rural people. Dieter Rucht's *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben* (From Wyhl to Gorleben), long the pre-eminent study of the West German anti-nuclear movement, positioned Wyhl as that movement's founding moment.<sup>35</sup> Since nuclear energy was among the most hotly debated topics in West German politics during the 1970s, studying grassroots anti-nuclear activism offers another look at the politicization of environmental matters in the FRG.<sup>36</sup>

Even if it later became known around the world, the campaign against the Wyhl reactor was not met initially with much interest beyond the Upper Rhine valley. This was largely because the protest began on account of localized, technical concerns that seemed provincial. The debate over the Wyhl reactor focused first on questions about cooling water discharge, precisely the sort of problems that the federal government's new top-down approach to environmental politics seemed poised to answer painlessly. Since planners in France, Switzerland, and West Germany proposed the construction of a dozen nuclear facilities along the Upper Rhine from Basel to Strasbourg in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Rhine fishers and shipping firms grew concerned that discharged cooling water would raise the river's temperature, negatively influencing fish stocks and impairing visibility on the water.<sup>37</sup> In seeking to solve this very issue, the

<sup>32</sup> Bernd-A. Rusinek, 'Wyhl', in Étienne François and Hagen Schulze, eds, *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte II* (Munich 2001), 661.

<sup>33</sup> Several recent studies have focused on the region and the anti-nuclear movement there. See, for example: Natalie Pohl, *Atomprotest am Oberrhein. Die Auseinandersetzung um den Bau von Atomkraftwerken in Baden und Elsass (1970–1985)* (Stuttgart 2019); Stephen Milder, *Greening Democracy: The Anti-Nuclear Movement and Political Environmentalism in West Germany and Beyond* (Cambridge 2017); Andrew Tompkins, *Better Active than Radioactive! Anti-Nuclear Protests in 1970s France and Germany* (Oxford 2016). Anti-nuclear protest in the Upper Rhine Valley also plays a central role in Engels, *Naturpolitik*.

<sup>34</sup> Rusinek, 'Wyhl', 652.

<sup>35</sup> Dieter Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben. Bürger gegen Atomprogramm und nukleare Entsorgung* (Munich 1980).

<sup>36</sup> As Uekötter has put it, for example, 'In no other country did the nuclear issue become as decisive for environmentalism as in Germany'. Uekötter, *The Greenest Nation?*, 92.

<sup>37</sup> Milder, *Greening Democracy*, 22–8.

links between the local struggle and government policy-making became apparent: in accordance with the technical approach that characterized government environmental problem-solving strategies, utilities firms proposed discharging the cooling water as steam through cooling towers, instead of sending it directly into the river. In solving one problem, however, this proposal created a new one: local agriculturalists became concerned that discharged steam would become trapped in the air over the Rhine valley, creating fog and blocking out vital sunlight. The expected results were 'more fungal diseases, more hail, and thus more damage to the tobacco, corn and wheat crops'.<sup>38</sup> The region's prized wines would suffer a particularly disastrous fate: an expected 30 percent reduction in light intensity would reduce the vintage from 'fine wine' to mere 'table wine'.<sup>39</sup>

At this stage, the debate about nuclear energy in the Upper Rhine valley echoed similar localized struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. Like the fight to stop the construction of a hydroelectric dam in the Wutach Gorge in the nearby Black Forest, for example, the Upper Rhine valley anti-reactor struggle emphasized local people's concerns about how a particular project would affect their communities and their livelihoods.<sup>40</sup> In fact, Rhine valley farmers and vintners made clear that they were 'not principally against the use of nuclear energy to produce electricity'. What they would not countenance was 'a technologically second-class solution for the disposal of excess heat'.<sup>41</sup> It seemed, in other words, as if the nuclear problem in the Upper Rhine valley was a perfect match for the technical, problem-solving brand of environmentalism *en vogue* in and around the Interior Ministry: design a 'first class' means of disposing of excess heat and the matter would be settled, development could proceed. At first, the government of Baden-Württemberg, which was responsible for licensing the project, and the quasi-public Badenwerk utility firm, which was to operate the reactor, took just this tack, agreeing to require cooling towers in order to appease fishers and shippers, and relocating the planned reactor from Breisach to Wyhl so that it would be slightly further from the most renowned local vineyards.<sup>42</sup>

Agriculturalists found these solutions insufficient, however, and so their concerns persisted. Expecting that officials would take their side once they realized the extent to which the proposed Wyhl reactor would harm their crops, local people decided that they simply needed to make themselves heard.<sup>43</sup> Like people with particular problems related to planning, development, and preservation in many other parts of the country, they organized themselves into 'citizens' initiatives' in order to participate more fully in the discussion

<sup>38</sup> Ernst Jenne, 'Kernkraftwerk – meine Existenzbedrohung!', in Bernd Nössler and Margret de Witt, eds, *Wyhl. Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends. Betroffene Bürger berichten* (Freiburg 1976), 19–21.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen Milder, 'Between Grassroots Protest and Green Politics: The Democratic Potential of 1970s Antinuclear Activism', *German Politics and Society*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2015), 29.

<sup>40</sup> On the Wutach, see: Sandra Chaney, *Nature of the Miracle Years: Conservation in West Germany, 1945–1975* (New York 2012), 85–114.

<sup>41</sup> Gutmann, 'Bürger wehren sich gegen Reaktor-Boom am Hochrhein' [unknown newspaper (likely *Badische Neueste Nachrichten*), hand-dated August 1972]. GLA Karlsruhe. S Umweltschutz 762.

<sup>42</sup> Pohl, *Atomprotest am Oberrhein*, 80ff.

<sup>43</sup> Milder, *Greening Democracy*, 54–5.

over the planned reactor.<sup>44</sup> In some ways, 'citizens' initiatives' were a new sort of organization that emerged around 1970.<sup>45</sup> They were neither permanently organized political parties nor chance gatherings of local notables. Instead, they were groups that comprised a variety of community members with a specific, shared concern. At the same time, citizens' initiatives were not completely novel. The tactics they employed were time-honored. In the Wyhl struggle, citizens' initiatives sought to share their concerns by writing letters, organizing petition drives, commenting at public hearings, and even parading their tractors throughout the agricultural region. Holding meetings after church services or on the fringes of other local gatherings, the citizens' initiatives that fought against the Wyhl reactor could only be understood in relation to longstanding local social networks.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps the real change vis-à-vis earlier local struggles over development and conservation came on account of concerned citizens' unwillingness to back down, even if continuing to push their concerns meant doing more than appealing to government officials via petitions or comments at public hearings. Since the reactor's opponents and the government officials supporting the project stuck to their guns, the struggle quickly escalated beyond the legal framework of liberal democracy. Having run out of patience with reactor opponents after several years of squabbling, the government sought to end the debate. At one hearing, it brought in a professor of agricultural meteorology who explained in a 'brash and impertinent manner' that local vintners' concerns about their vineyards were inaccurate, implying that vintners did not properly understand viticulture.<sup>47</sup> At another hearing, a government official simply shut off the audience microphones, stopping farmers and vintners from voicing their concerns at all.<sup>48</sup>

It was as a result of these exchanges that the struggle over Wyhl grew beyond its localized, technical origins. Now, citizens began to see government intransigence and disregard for the concerns of the 'affected population' as a threat to democracy, for which they organized a mock funeral after walking out of a July 1974 hearing. A pastor involved in the protests emphasized that it was democracy rather than steam discharge or agricultural interests that were now at stake in the Wyhl struggle. If such interactions between government and citizens were 'allowed to serve as an example in our Federal Republic', he wrote in a letter to the local newspaper, 'wide circles of the population will lose their trust in the democratic order'.<sup>49</sup>

Declining trust in the democratic order played an essential part in motivating the 1975 occupation of the Wyhl reactor construction site. Having been thwarted in their efforts to

<sup>44</sup> Peter Cornelius Mayer-Tasch, *Die Bürgerinitiativebewegung. Der aktive Bürger als rechts- und politikwissenschaftliches Problem* (Reinbek 1976).

<sup>45</sup> Engels describes the citizens' initiatives as 'one of the most conspicuous changes in the public life of the 1970s', and writes that they 'shot out of the ground like mushrooms, beginning in 1969/1970'. Engels, *Naturpolitik*, 322.

<sup>46</sup> On Rhine valley citizens' initiatives' place within local communities, see: Milder, *Greening Democracy*, 71–5.

<sup>47</sup> Ernst Schillinger, 'Breisach – Der Kampf beginnt', in Nössler and de Witt, *Wyhl*, 29–33.

<sup>48</sup> Milder, *Greening Democracy*, 77.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Bloch, 'Nicht gegen dem Willen der Bevölkerung durchsetzen', *Badische Zeitung*, 14 August 1974.

organize themselves and express their concerns within the democratic system, opponents of the Wyhl reactor decided to physically stop the reactor's construction. An initial occupation carried out by several hundred local farmers and vintners was short lived. Baden-Württemberg's Premier, Hans Filbinger attributed the action to 'nationally organized manipulators' and ordered police to clear the site, a task they accomplished in a brutal fashion by unleashing police dogs and training high-pressure water cannons on the occupiers.<sup>50</sup> By blaming outsiders and deploying the police, Filbinger only reinforced the links between the nuclear debate and democracy. The brutal police crackdown led rural people to re-evaluate their relationship to Filbinger's party, the CDU. Local party chapters folded and Christian Democratic candidates for the upcoming village council elections dropped out.<sup>51</sup> The police intervention also shifted the context of the Wyhl protest: just days after the first occupation was ended, some 28,000 protesters descended on Wyhl and re-occupied the site. They built up 'an impressive encampment that included housing, public meeting spaces, a field kitchen, and much more'.<sup>52</sup> Busloads of visitors arrived daily to hear the story of the struggle against nuclear reactors in the Upper Rhine valley and to learn about the occupation. On the occupied site, they experienced a community that had come together in new ways in order to express its dissatisfaction with government decision-making processes.

It was in this framework – as a struggle over democracy and against unjust use of state power – that the Wyhl struggle became known throughout Germany and beyond.<sup>53</sup> Far from the technical concerns about steam discharge that had initially motivated protests in the Rhine valley, outsiders interested in the movement came to view it as a model for a political insurgency capable of achieving radical change. Petra Kelly, a future co-founder of the West German Green party, first visited Wyhl shortly after the occupation began. Soon after her visit, she called for a 'chain reaction' of grassroots anti-reactor protests like the one she had experienced at Wyhl. Such actions, she proposed, could initiate a new, bottom-up politics throughout Western Europe.<sup>54</sup> For Kelly, such collective activism was a sort of "counter-power" that is natural and common to all [...] the power of transformation, rooted in the discovery of our own strength and ability to be active participants in society'.<sup>55</sup> The anarchist newspaper *graswurzelrevolution*, meanwhile, published an article proclaiming – in an apparent echo of Che Guevara's call to make 'one, two [...] many Vietnams' – that 'one or two more Wyhls would cause the atomic program

<sup>50</sup> '200 Mann stoppen Reaktorbau in Wyhl', *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 20 February 1975.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen Milder, 'From the Margins to the Core: How Woman-led Anti-Nuclear Protests influenced Parliamentary Politics and Christian Democracy in 1970s West Germany', in Tiziana Di Maio and Cecilia Dau Noelli, eds, *Female Activism and Christian Democratic Parties in Europe* (Leuven 2022).

<sup>52</sup> Milder, *Greening Democracy*, 117.

<sup>53</sup> Though I focus on the occupation's echoes within Germany here, much has been written on its echoes around the world. See, for example: Jan-Henrik Meyer and Astrid Kirchhof, 'Global Protest Against Nuclear Power', *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2014), 165–90.

<sup>54</sup> Petra Kelly, 'WAS TUN??? Einige Aktionsmöglichkeiten für die Westeuropäischen Sozialisten!' (Letter, November 1975), 1. Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis – Petra Kelly Archiv Akte 534,2.

<sup>55</sup> Petra Kelly, *Thinking Green! Essays on Environmentalism, Feminism, and Nonviolence* (Berkeley, CA 1993), 37.

of government and industry finally to collapse'.<sup>56</sup> The Communist League (KB), which had shown little interest in environmental protests earlier in the decade, called for new protests at other reactor sites following 'Modell Wyhl' and declared that the anti-nuclear movement had the potential to become a 'political mass movement'.<sup>57</sup>

In the latter half of the 1970s, these sorts of pronouncements were surprisingly common – and appeared to be at least partially accurate. Anti-reactor protests in Northern Germany, in particular in the towns of Brokdorf and Grohnde, where reactors were also planned, turned into brutal confrontations between tens-of-thousands of protesters and well-equipped police. Though these demonstrations were rooted in local disputes over reactor development, people from all over the Federal Republic, and beyond, joined in.<sup>58</sup> As a result, questions about the relationship between opposing individual reactors and wholesale political change bubbled to the surface. But the broad spectrum of participants in the anti-nuclear struggle made coming up with a clear-cut, shared political program difficult. For the Communist League of West Germany (KBW), the anti-nuclear movement was a step forward in the class struggle, because it would help to bring about a 'solidary coalition of the millions of expressed or exploited in our country'.<sup>59</sup> Another group of transnationally-minded activists around Petra Kelly, meanwhile, looked beyond the FRG's borders, deeming 'GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE !!!!!' the best route towards the creation of a 'peace power Europe'.<sup>60</sup> Other opponents of nuclear energy reassessed their political participation at a more fundamental level on account of their experiences in the movement. As the vintner Annemarie Sacherer put it, for example, she now understood 'that the values of health, life, and peace were not to be taken for granted' and 'may not even be guaranteed by democratically elected governments'.<sup>61</sup> Even if there was no ideological red thread linking these different outlooks on the wider ramifications of anti-nuclear activism, they shared a questioning of the state that went beyond its nuclear program and suggested that deeper changes were required.

Far different from the reforms and technical efforts to address pollution that comprised the federal government's environmental program, then, anti-nuclear activism was a challenge to the state that gave environmental concerns pride of place in arguments about democracy and participation, and deployed direct action and civil disobedience to get

<sup>56</sup> Wolfgang Hertle, 'Platzbesetzungen', *graswurzelrevolution* 20-1 (June 1976): 21.

<sup>57</sup> KKW Kommission, KB/Gruppe Hamburg, 'Modell Wyhl', *Arbeiterkampf*, Vol. 6, No. 96 (29 November 1976); and Michael Steffen, *Geschichten vom Trüffelschwein. Politik und Organisation des Kommunistischen Bundes, 1971 bis 1991* (Berlin 2002), 179.

<sup>58</sup> On the transnational nature of such protests, see: Andrew Tompkins, 'Grassroots Transnationalism(s): Franco-German Opposition to Nuclear Energy in the 1970s', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2016), 117–42.

<sup>59</sup> KPD Regional Komitee Baden-Württemberg, 'Kein KKW in Wyhl', 23 February 1975. ASB 3599.

<sup>60</sup> Petra Kelly, 'WAS TUNEinige Aktionsmöglichkeiten für die Westeuropäischen Sozialisten !' (November 1975). PKA 534.2.

<sup>61</sup> Annemarie Sacherer, 'Zehn Jahre danach', in Christoph Büchele, Irmgard Schneider, and Bernd Nössler, *Wyhl. Der Widerstand geht weiter. Das Bürgerprotest gegen das Kernkraftwerk von 1976 bis zum Mannheimer Prozeß* (Freiburg 1982).

its message across.<sup>62</sup> It could be argued, then, that environmental concerns underpinned the first criticism of the West German democratic order to attain popular support.<sup>63</sup> Though most anti-nuclear activists stopped far short of calling for the overthrow of the democratic system, they nonetheless conceived and practiced democracy in new ways, getting more involved themselves, and emphasizing the importance of popular concerns and the rights of the ‘affected population’ in democratic decision-making.<sup>64</sup> In so doing, they made grassroots anti-nuclear activism and the discussions it unleashed a space for thinking beyond the standard framework of parliamentary democracy, and hence a challenge to the status quo.

Though the government officials and grassroots activists who took up environmental matters in the early 1970s had begun from concerns about similar problems, they came to understand those problems in different ways, revealing contrasting ideas about where, and by whom such problems ought to be discussed and how they could be resolved. While officials relied on meetings with leaders of industry, and deployed regulations and bureaucratic reforms, grassroots activists pushed for the right to intervene directly in regulation. They strove for more control over their communities and their environments. Because these competing perspectives made environmental matters the basis for different approaches to politics as a whole, the ecological revolution was something of a cypher for conflicts within West German politics and society during the 1970s.

### **After the Revolution: West Germany’s ‘Ecological 1980s’<sup>65</sup>**

Though environmental politics and grassroots environmentalism each continued into the new decade, the tensions that had made the 1970s into a period of ecological revolution began to dissipate in the 1980s. Two developments in particular reinforced government officials’ approach to environmental politics and diminished grassroots environmentalism’s power as a source of radical social critique. On the one hand the new conservative-liberal government took up environmental politics with a zeal equal to, or perhaps even surpassing that of its social-liberal predecessor, paving the way towards the ‘consensual politics of environmental moderation’, said to be characteristic of late twentieth century Western Europe.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, the newly formed Green Party (*Die Grünen*) entered parliament in 1983, claiming to bring representatives of grassroots concerns

<sup>62</sup> Michael Hughes, ‘Civil Disobedience in Transnational Perspective: American and West German Anti-Nuclear Power Protesters, 1975–1982’, *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2014), 236–53.

<sup>63</sup> The Federal Republic’s policing of radical dissent, and even the limited space for conflict within West German democracy in the 1950s and 1960s has been the subject of several recent studies. See, for example: Karin Hansew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany* (Cambridge 2012); and: Claudia Gatzka, *Die Demokratie der Wähler. Stadtgesellschaft und politische Kommunikation in Italien und der Bundesrepublik, 1944–1979* (Düsseldorf 2019). I conceive grassroots anti-nuclear activism as a profound criticism of West German democracy with popular support in the sense that it (unlike the late 1960s student movement, for example), drew support from across society.

<sup>64</sup> Milder, *Greening Democracy*, 14.

<sup>65</sup> Uekötter, *The Greenest Nation?*, 113.

<sup>66</sup> J. R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York 2001), 352.

directly into the establishment. Although grassroots conflicts over environmental problems continued in the 1980s, and although engaged citizens' attitudes towards politics and democracy continued to shift amidst the ongoing strife, it had become harder to argue that the concerned citizens were not represented in parliament or that environmental matters were not taken seriously in Bonn. As a result, grassroots activism lost much of its trans-local relevance, not to mention its stature as a fundamental critique of democratic praxis in the Federal Republic of Germany, even as environmental concerns gained pride of place in the halls of government.

Immediately after it replaced the social-liberal coalition in October 1982, the new conservative-liberal government under Chancellor Helmut Kohl took up environmental concerns with gusto. Already in the short period before the snap election of March 1983, newly installed Interior Minister Friedrich Zimmermann facilitated the enactment of pollution controls on large combustion plants, a measure intended to reduce acid-rain-causing sulfur dioxide emissions.<sup>67</sup> When he came into office, Zimmermann seemed far more likely to undo the environmental policy enacted by the social-liberal governments of the 1970s than to push ahead with meaningful legislation. Known as a particularly business-friendly member of the parliament's most conservative party, Bavaria's Christian Social Union (CSU), one of Zimmermann's first moves as Minister was to lay off Peter Menke-Glückert, the pioneering director of Section U.<sup>68</sup>

Why, then, did Zimmermann push through an Ordinance on Large Combustion Plants during his first months in office? In his memoir, Zimmermann does not simply own up to his part in bringing about the sulfur dioxide controls, but rather styles himself a champion of environmental concerns. He boasts of having 'dropped the temperature in the room to an Antarctic level' by telling the manager of Germany's largest utility company that he would have no problem installing new sulfur scrubbers at his company's power plants since, 'I have just read your balance sheet, you have six billion Marks set aside. [Installing sulfur scrubbers] is possible and you will do it'.<sup>69</sup> Nor was Zimmermann's environmental bravado limited to private meetings and retrospective accounts. On the floor of the Bundestag, he proclaimed that 'after maintaining peace, the protection of the environment is the most important task of our times', and announced that the German government would stand 'at the forefront of environmental protection in Europe'.<sup>70</sup> In making such bold statements, Zimmermann was perfectly aligned with the Kohl government's overarching approach to environmental policy. Kohl's creation of a Ministry of the Environment, which he announced at a June 1986 press conference on his government's response to the Chernobyl disaster, finalized environmentalism's

<sup>67</sup> Zimmermann also later pushed through legislation that required catalytic converters in automobiles. Friedrich Zimmermann, *Kabinettsstücke. Politik mit Strauss und Kohl, 1976–1991* (Frankfurt 1991), 218.

<sup>68</sup> Birgit Metzger, 'Erst stirbt der Wald, dann du!' *Das Waldsterben als westdeutsches Politikum (1978–1986)* (Frankfurt 2015), 331.

<sup>69</sup> Zimmermann, *Kabinettsstücke*, 220.

<sup>70</sup> Friedrich Zimmermann, 'Regierungserklärung. Unsere Verantwortung für die Umwelt' (15 September 1983), re-printed in Zimmermann, *Umwelt Politik in Wort und Tat* (Stuttgart 1986), 133, 137.

consolidation as a sphere of politics, and evidenced its importance.<sup>71</sup> A few months later, after winning re-election, the Chancellor echoed Minister Zimmermann's earlier proclamations and committed Germany to a 'pioneering role' in the European Community's development into an 'environmental community'.<sup>72</sup>

Political calculation certainly played a part in such environmental sentiment. Environmentalism had become popular by the 1980s; environmental reforms might help win votes.<sup>73</sup> And yet, within the newly constituted field of environmental politics there was ample space for maneuver. The Combustion Ordinance was relatively cheap for the corporations it targeted, and perceived by environmental organizations, Green politicians, and even the youth wing of the Christian Democratic Union as a symbolic measure with no teeth and far too many loopholes.<sup>74</sup> Though it later proved quite effective in reducing acid rain, the measure was based in compromises between government and industry. It hardly marked a dramatic change in daily practice or the bottom line, even for the companies it targeted.

Such policies, then, followed the trajectory of the bureaucratic *Umweltschutz* that had been initiated by Genscher and Menke-Glückert at the outset of the long 1970s. Indeed, as Menke-Glückert himself put it in 1981, 'the time of large legislative endeavors was over'. The environmental politics of the 1980s would be no more than 'finishing touches' in terms of 'administrative practice, cooperation with industry, the state of technology'.<sup>75</sup> According to Menke-Glückert's own description, government environmental politics – already in the 1970s, but certainly by the 1980s – epitomized Francis Fukuyama's famous characterization of politics at the 'end of history'. Writing at the end of the Cold War, Fukuyama grouped efforts to address environmental problems together with 'economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems [...] and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands'. Such bureaucratic problem-solving contrasted harshly with the politics of the previous decades, when 'worldwide ideological struggle [had] called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism'.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, precisely because of its effectiveness in combating the problem of acid rain, the Combustion Ordinance epitomized the idea that resolving environmental problems simply meant investing saved profits in readily available technical solutions. Such an approach, based in smart management and 'green engineering', was emblematic of

<sup>71</sup> 'Erklärung von Bundeskanzler Helmut Kohl vor der Bundespressekonferenz am 3. Juni 1986'. BArch, B 136/24408.

<sup>72</sup> Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Regierungserklärung, 18 March 1987. Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll, 11/4, 63.

<sup>73</sup> In her history of the acid rain debate, Birgit Metzger has explained the new government's speedy passage of the Combustion Ordinance as both an effort to gain votes in the upcoming election and as a result of the government's conviction that utility companies could easily pay for the reform's costs. Metzger, *Erst stirbt der Wald*, 350–2. For Uekötter's explanation of the Combustion Ordinance, which emphasizes the government's perceived need to 'catch up' with popular environmental sentiment evident in 'widespread protests' see Uekötter, *Greenest Nation?*, 124.

<sup>74</sup> Jens Newig, 'Symbolic Environmental Legislation and Societal Self-Deception', *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2007), 276–96, here, 286–91; and Metzger, *Erst stirbt der Wald*, 356.

<sup>75</sup> Peter Menke-Glückert, quoted in Uekötter, *The Greenest Nation?*, 122.

<sup>76</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?' *The National Interest*, Vol. 16 (1989), 3–18.



what Frank Uekötter has referred to as the ‘pure green’ environmentalism of West Germany’s ‘ecological 1980s’.<sup>77</sup> It was underpinned by ‘Ecological Modernization Theory’, which was being shaped by German economists in the late 1980s and which propounded that technological advances and innovative reforms could resolve environmental problems within the current system. Yet, even if ‘pure green’ environmentalism flourished in the 1980s, gaining support from across the political mainstream and taking on theoretical underpinnings, such a technical approach had already been present in the hallways of government power since the outset of the 1970s. Perhaps a more significant change, then, was the splitting of grassroots activism and its shifting relationship to environmental politics.

The relationship between environmental politics and grassroots activism shifted with the emergence of the German Green party (*Die Grünen*) at the end of the 1970s. The Greens’ self-conception as an ‘anti-party party’ and scholars’ description of the Greens as a ‘paradox between movement and party’ makes the Greens’ distance from the political establishment – and the party’s proximity to extra-parliamentary activism – clear. Indeed, the Greens had grown out of grassroots anti-nuclear activism. The first green candidates’ lists emerged out of struggles over nuclear reactors and the siting of a facility for nuclear waste in Northern Germany.<sup>78</sup> The Greens grew in popularity in the early 1980s, at the same time as the movement against NATO’s decision to station new nuclear missiles in Western Europe mobilized millions. Like the Green party itself, the peace movement of the early 1980s built on 1970s activism against nuclear energy. The 1970s anti-nuclear movement served as an ‘experiential space’ for the 1980s peace movement, making Germans from all across society more comfortable with street protest and even direct-action tactics.<sup>79</sup> The way in which the anti-nuclear movement linked localized concerns – like individual reactor projects – with diffuse societal issues – like the proliferation of nuclear radiation, but also questions of democracy – also aided the peace movement, suggesting links between particular missile sites, for example, and the widespread destruction that would be sown by nuclear war.<sup>80</sup>

The Greens’ lineage in the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s and their links to the ongoing mass peace protests of the 1980s were on display when Green Party MPs entered the Bundestag for the first time in 1983. The Greens celebrated their election with a ‘ritual procession’ through the streets of Bonn, an impressive attempt to showcase the inclusive aspirations of their bottom-up political environmentalism. The 27 new MPs carried ‘a huge rubber globe and a branch of a tree that was dying from pollution’, and were

<sup>77</sup> Uekötter sets this ‘pure green’ environmentalism against the red-tinged ‘Marxist interpretations from the 1970s’. Uekötter, *Greenest Nation?*, 125.

<sup>78</sup> Anna Hallensleben, *Von der Grünen Liste zur Grünen Partei? Die Entwicklung der Grünen Liste Umweltschutz von ihrer Entstehung in Niedersachsen 1977 bis zur Gründung der Partei DIE GRÜNEN 1980* (Göttingen 1984).

<sup>79</sup> Silke Mende and Birgit Metzger, ‘Ökopax. Die Umweltbewegung als Erfahrungsraum der Friedensbewegung’, in Christoph Becker-Schaum, ed., *Entrüstet Euch! Nuklearkrise, NATO-Doppelbeschluss und Friedensbewegung* (Paderborn 2012), 123.

<sup>80</sup> Susanne Schregel, *Der Atomkrieg vor der Wohnungstür. Eine Politikgeschichte der neuen Friedensbewegung in der Bundesrepublik, 1970–1985* (Frankfurt 2011).

accompanied by 'representatives from various citizens' movements and from other countries'.<sup>81</sup> In her maiden speech to the parliament, Petra Kelly, who had gained political prominence through her links to grassroots anti-nuclear activism and become a leading figure in the peace movement, served as the Greens' lead candidate in the election, and became one of the delegation's three spokespeople in the Bundestag, claimed to 'speak for the peace and ecology movement'.<sup>82</sup> Superficially at least, it was undeniable that grassroots activism had arrived in parliament.

But despite the Greens' roots, and their goal of representing social movements in parliament, many grassroots activists rejected representation by the Green party, preferring to continue their work in citizens' initiatives outside of parliament. They were motivated in part by fears that the Greens might 'obliterate the citizens' initiatives' non-partisan model and also fail to achieve anything within parliament'.<sup>83</sup> Offered the opportunity to select one of their own to stand as a candidate for the Greens' list of candidates for Baden-Württemberg's state parliament in 1980, Upper Rhine Valley grassroots activists demurred. They worried that their own organizations 'would be weakened via cooperation with the Greens, if intra-party conflicts were carried over into the citizens' initiatives'.<sup>84</sup> In short, labels and lineage were not enough for those activists who understood their project as existing beyond parliamentary politics and were concerned about the ways the new Green Party's emergence would shift the parliamentary terrain. From a particular vantage point, these fears were justified. Even the Greens' limited electoral successes of the 1980s contributed to the sidelining of grassroots activism. The emergence of a new political party explicitly dedicated to environmental concerns, pushed the existing parties to emphasize their own environmental contributions.<sup>85</sup> With all of the parties talking about the environment, and the government apparatus dedicated to environmental regulation gaining prominence, grassroots activists' claims that they were not being heard in Bonn lost salience. The idea that environmental politics took place in and around the Bundestag gained weight.

And yet, grassroots activism persisted regardless of the prestige environmental politics had achieved in Bonn. Even after the Bundestag had enacted the Combustion Ordinance, for example, citizens remained deeply concerned about acid rain. Dissatisfied with the new legislation, they called for 'more forceful implementation of the Combustion Ordinance and the reductions of emissions caused by transportation'.<sup>86</sup> At first glance, such demands seem to fall short of the 'deep changes to politics and society' that historian Birgit Metzger claims the movement advocated.<sup>87</sup> And yet, citizens' concerns persisted

<sup>81</sup> Fritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnak, *Green Politics* (New York 1984), xiii.

<sup>82</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll, 10/4, 4 May 1983, 128. Kelly was not herself a grassroots organizer, but she was a frequent visitor to grassroots anti-nuclear protests and she was deeply inspired by what she saw. See: Stephen Milder, 'Thinking Globally, Acting (Trans-)Locally: Petra Kelly and the Transnational Roots of West German Green Politics', *Central European History*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2010), 301–26.

<sup>83</sup> Milder, *Greening Democracy*, 232.

<sup>84</sup> Pohl, *Atomprotest am Oberrhein*, 274.

<sup>85</sup> Müller, *Innenwelt der Umweltpolitik*, 114–7.

<sup>86</sup> Metzger, *Erst stirbt der Wald*, 580.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 515.

because they extended beyond the framework of simply enacting legislation – that is to say, concerned citizens pushed for more than what parliament could really do. What is more, the broad alliances forged by activists, which included ‘established environmental organizations alongside all sorts of citizens’ initiatives’, as well as ‘forest groups, tree growers, and sawmill owners’ could be seen as a sort of prefigurative politics of societal inclusion.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, by organizing across all sorts of social cleavages, and seeking ways to take action right where they lived, concerned citizens used grassroots activism to change their attitudes towards parliamentary democracy and to seek out further opportunities for participation; in so doing, they turned street demonstrations into an accepted part of political life in West Germany.<sup>89</sup>

The struggle over the nuclear reprocessing center planned for the village of Wackersdorf in Bavaria’s rural Upper Palatinate was perhaps the best single example of how grassroots anti-nuclear activism continued to shift citizens’ attitudes towards politics and democracy in the 1980s, regardless of the consolidation of environmental politics in Bonn. Citizens first entered the discussion about the reprocessing plant with specific, locally focused demands. Even after organizing themselves into citizens’ initiatives in 1981, concerned locals continued to debate whether they opposed only the reprocessing plant planned for their region, or if they were against nuclear energy *per se*.<sup>90</sup> They were also reticent to take to the streets, feeling as one citizen-cum-activist put it, as if ‘I was doing something illegal by exercising my right to protest’.<sup>91</sup> Once again, it was the protracted dispute with government officials that eroded what another opponent of the project described as his ‘trust [...] rock-solid trust’ in the authorities, and opened the way to new forms of protest and new sorts of cooperation.<sup>92</sup> By late 1985, however, when opponents of the project briefly occupied the construction site, conservative locals countenanced cooperation with outsiders and even anarchists.<sup>93</sup> The broad support that the struggle against the Wackersdorf plant received from across Bavaria was evidenced by the tens of thousands who joined protests in the Upper Palatinate as well as the mass protests that took place in central Munich. It was also evident in the waxing ‘Wackersdorf feeling’ – the growing sense of conflict between citizens and government over ‘a question that reached deep into daily life’.<sup>94</sup> Thus, as historian Janine Gaumer has argued, the conflict at Wackersdorf showed once again ‘that a social need for the realignment of the power relationship between the state and its citizens could be negotiated within the framework of environmental protection’.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 580. Petra Kelly and other anti-nuclear activists frequently emphasized this attribute of anti-nuclear protests. See, for example: Petra Kelly and Roland Vogt, ‘Ökologie und Frieden. Der Kampf gegen Atomkraftwerke aus der Sicht von Hiroshima’, *Forum Europa*, Nos 1 / 2 (1977), 18.

<sup>89</sup> Philipp Gassert, *Bewegte Gesellschaft. Deutsche Protestgeschichte seit 1945* (Stuttgart 2018).

<sup>90</sup> Janine Gaumer, *Wackersdorf. Atomkraft und Demokratie in der Bundesrepublik, 1980–1989* (Munich 2018), 68.

<sup>91</sup> Alfred Wolfsteiner, quoted in Gaumer, *Wackersdorf*, 129.

<sup>92</sup> Wolfgang Nowak, quoted in Gaumer, *Wackersdorf*, 65.

<sup>93</sup> Gaumer, *Wackersdorf*, 152–92.

<sup>94</sup> Lisa Schnell and Wolfgang Wittl, ‘In Bayern wächst das Wackersdorf Gefühl’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (12 May 2018).

<sup>95</sup> Gaumer, *Wackersdorf*, 322.

Nonetheless, this function of grassroots struggles over environmental matters was overshadowed by the action in Bonn by the late 1980s. The efforts of officials like Minister Zimmermann to profile themselves as champions of environmental politics placed environmental regulation in the spotlight, and thus undercut the idea that environmental concerns were not important to the government. As a result, it became increasingly difficult to develop system-critical arguments or renegotiate the relationship between state and citizen within the framework of environmental politics. Moreover, even though many grassroots environmentalists did not see eye-to-eye with the German Green party, or accept Green politicians' claims to serve as the movement's parliamentary 'spokespeople', the existence of the Greens made it more difficult to argue that environmental concerns had no representatives within the parliamentary system. To outsiders, at least, it certainly appeared as though citizens concerned about environmental affairs had an entire Bundestag delegation to represent them in Bonn. All in all, then, the establishment of environmental regulation as a serious field of government work, coupled with the emergence of a party explicitly committed to environmental concerns, diminished environmentalism's standing as a radical critique of the existing political order – regardless of whether these developments fully resolved the problems that concerned grassroots activists.

## Conclusion

In West Germany, government officials had already begun consolidating environmental regulation into an important sphere of politics around 1970. They did so even as the UN organized its Stockholm conference, the Club of Rome published *The Limits of Growth*, and pollution gained space in press headlines. At the same time, Germans concerned about the proliferation of nuclear energy organized grassroots protests which challenged not so much the government's environmental policy as the state's democratic practices. These two developments represented two different approaches to the politicization of environmental affairs, which were separated particularly by their strikingly different conceptions of politics. While government officials focused on complementary reforms and compromises with industry intended to resolve environmental problems in a consensual manner, grassroots activists called loudly for new modes of participation. These conflicting approaches to environmental concerns made the long 1970s into a period of ecological revolution, when the relationship between environmental matters and politics was in flux. Despite the countervailing trends that defined it, the period of ecological revolution also served as a sort of echo chamber for environmentalism, reinforcing the importance of the environment within politics and society as a whole. Grassroots activism contributed to the popularity of environmental concerns, while government reforms also evidenced the new field's significance for lawmakers and regulators. At the very latest with the Kohl government's claims to environmental leadership in Europe and the creation of the Ministry of the Environment in 1986, the project of making environmental affairs into a matter of mainstream politics was complete. This consolidation of regulatory environmentalism undercut grassroots activists' efforts to renegotiate power relationships, because by incorporating environmental concerns into the mainstream it voided their most trenchant system-critical arguments.

Seeing the ecological revolution as an extended period of conflict shifts the way we think about the development of environmentalism and democracy in postwar West Germany. Traditional interpretations, which see the ecological revolution as a moment of ‘epochal change’ or the precipice of the green present fit the widely accepted historical master narrative of Germany’s ‘long way’ from fascism ‘to the west’ or its postwar procession from dictatorship to ‘fulfilled democracy’.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, tales of the FRG’s transition from environmental ‘latecomer’ to ‘Green Germany’<sup>97</sup> match the country’s perceived maturation into a ‘not only rich, but also respected, democratic country’.<sup>98</sup> Clever pollution controls and ‘green engineering’, the key components of the ‘pure green’ environmentalism that took center stage during West Germany’s ‘ecological eighties’, are well-suited to this image.<sup>99</sup> The unflinching critiques of West German democracy voiced by grassroots environmentalists during the 1970s seem out of place within such narratives.

Juxtaposing these two trajectories evidences the breadth of environmentalism’s political ramifications amidst the ecological revolution, when environmental concerns could be linked not only to arguments for stability and consensual governance, but also to insurgent demands for a radically different future. Doing so makes clear that if it was the work of government officials that came to epitomize the level-headed, consensual ‘German’ approach to environmental politics in the 1980s, it was the challenging, confrontational attitude of popular environmentalism that linked environmental concerns to divisive questions about democratic praxis and made environmentalism into a seminal political issue within the FRG. Thus, re-interpreting West Germany’s ecological revolution as a time when the meaning of environmental politics was up for debate also hints at messier, more conflicted alternatives to straightforward, whiggish narratives of democratic and environmental progress in the postwar period.

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<sup>96</sup> The ‘long way to the west’ (Winkler) or ‘fulfilled democracy’ (Wolfrum) narrative is one of the leading interpretations of German history in the twentieth century. See: Heinrich August Winkler, *Der Lange Weg nach Westen* (Munich 2000); and Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Geglückte Demokratie* (Stuttgart 2006).

<sup>97</sup> Uekötter, *The Greenest Nation?*, 21.

<sup>98</sup> Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich 2014), 1251.

<sup>99</sup> Uekötter, *The Greenest Nation?*, 125.