

Green Perspectives #13, December 1988

Ideological Conflict in the German Greens

Introductory Note: In June 1988, several leaders of the Realo wing of the West German Greens issued a manifesto for Realo politics. (Realos are Greens who support a coalition government with the German Social Democratic Party.) The title, *To Be or Not To Be* – a conscious reference to Hamlet's soliloquy – reflects their conviction that the Green party must either "be" as they prescribe or else "not be," that is, exist at all. And what they prescribe to avoid such "suicide" is a thoroughgoing transformation of the Green party itself, both ideologically and structurally.

The manifesto argues that since their emergence in the early 1980s, the Greens have developed from "a coalition of small groups to a party, from a protest movement to a force for ecological reform and to a powerful factor in parliaments." This development into a parliamentary force for change was "pragmatically necessary." The manifesto urges Greens to remake the Green party in accordance with this "necessary" step, which, they complain, it has failed to do.

The manifesto blames the Left (formerly known as the Fundis) for the present crisis in the party precisely because it has blocked this remaking. The Realos contrast the earlier, vital accomplishments of the party especially its ability to popularize Green ideas in the minds of the electorate – with its present paralysis. The party is at a "programmatic standstill and is regressing; boredom and dogmatism, organizational chaos these are the essential causes of the existential crisis of the Greens."

The ideology of the present party is said to have become "theoretically ossified" into mere catch-phrases. These catch-phrases include such items as the call for West Germany to withdrawal from NATO (which the Realos oppose); the immediate shutdown of nuclear energy plants (no longer politically viable, according to Realo Rezzo Schlauch); and anticapitalism. (The Realo manifesto characterizes the present society as "industrial," not as "capitalist.")

Instead of making these unrealistic, catch-phrase demands, the Realos claim, Greens should accept the existing system as a framework for environmental reform. This approach is necessary because "the ecological threat to industrial society can be turned around only in the framework of the existing system." The manifesto praises the creation of the present West German state in 1945, even though it was imposed by the Allies, because it has "opened a new chapter of German democratic culture."

The Realo manifesto goes on to argue for a reformist ecological politics: "Ecological politics has meant and still means reformism." Indeed, the role of the Green party is to become the voice of ecology in mainstream politics. The manifesto calls for "state measures" to solve environmental problems, including the international recognition of environmental standards by multinational corporations—thus implicitly accepting these corporations' existence.

Moreover, the manifesto argues, the present "combination of a market economy, parliamentary democracy, statism, and private enterprise" is now generally accepted by a large number of people. Presumably, anew "enlightened" middle class has emerged. The manifesto appeals to this middle class, indeed, it declares that "we need to open the Greens... to the new middle classes."

Because the system is generally accepted, a reformist ecological politics, the manifesto argues, would have widespread appeal among the "enlightened" middle class. "For such a [reformist] politics we will be able to find widespread agreement in the new middle classes, and above all they will be indispensable for environmental politics." Above all, such an appeal could get votes in elections—apparently the prime concern of the authors.

In particular, the party should appeal to what it calls the "Citoyen 2000" – the middle-class, urban, liberal Yuppie – as the historical subject of Green politics, just as the proletariat was the historical subject of socialist politics. Realo Hubert Kleinert has even advanced a notion of "ecological capitalism."

In effect, the Realo authors of the manifesto envision the German Green party as a suitable coalition partner for the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Realo leader Joschka Fischer has called for the "FDP-ization" of the Greens, that is, for a Green party that is small but can be the deciding bloc of votes in parliamentary

decisions and that can therefore be influential, like the FDP, the liberal Free Democratic Party in West Germany today. The Greens, he has argued, must become "a better FDP."

However, complains the manifesto, the present Green party is obstructing these "historically necessary" changes. Its existing structure blocks the ability of the Green party to make coalitions. Under the existing doctrine of separation of office and mandate, Greens must perpetually rotate. This doctrine must be abolished, for then the structural boundaries among the various parties in mainstream politics will be weakened, the better to make coalitions.

The manifesto closes with a statement that explicitly denies the history of the Green party: "The Greens are an ecological reform party, and as this we are entitled to transform its politics itself. For this we were elected, and for this we founded the party."

At the June 1988 "Perspectives" conference in Bad Godesburg, many Greens greeted the Realo manifesto with ridicule and outrage (see *Green Perspectives* 9). Left Greens, eco-socialists, and radical feminists unequivocally rejected its prescriptions. Even some Realos (now known as the "Critical Realos") rebelled against what they regard as the high-handedness of the authors (Joschka Fischer, Hubert Kleinert, Jo Müller, and others) in promulgating it.

Two former Green Bundestag deputies from Hamburg, Thomas Ebermann and Rainer Trampert, criticized the Realo manifesto in their article "Yuppie Ho!" (which originally appeared in the German magazine *Konkret* in July 1988). Regarded as the leading eco-socialist Greens, their response is presented here for informational purposes. The issues raised in these excerpts are relevant to problems that exist in Green movements in English-speaking countries, and we hope they will provoke discussion. -*The Editors*

The Response of the Hamburg Left

"We are at a loss and in despair. By all indications, the Green Party is being pressed to a decision: Either it remodels itself pretty quickly along the lines that prominent Realos demand, or it will be weakened and perhaps even destroyed."

Any reading of the "Manifesto of Green Realpolitik" along lines other than those of the above summary would be a fantasy. Indeed, the political practices of the top Realos are proceeding along these very lines. Their "taboo breaks" in favor of the prevailing ideologies and social conditions follow each other in quick succession. The Greens should – according to the Realos – see the state in a positive light. This goes beyond merely accepting the state monopoly of power, which was what the debate was about some time ago. Now they are saying that the Greens should advocate NATO membership – not simply accept it as a present inevitability. The Greens should favor the capitalist economic order – not only concede its present stability. And the Greens should elevate those who profit from social inequality to the privileged clientele of their politics ("the subject of our democratic ideal").

In addition, they say, the Greens should disavow a series of uncompromising radical demands. "The imbecilic demand for the immediate shutdown of nuclear energy plants is no longer viable," says Rezzo Schlauch. Numberless Realo representatives have expressed themselves in a similar fashion, not only on this particular demand.

For this politics, a odiously normal party is necessary, one that would overcome the inconvenient constraints imposed by party-congress decisions on parliamentary fractions (naturally, only on the basis of conscience!). It would be a party that would see its "most brilliant" heads permanently in parliament – - naturally, preferably in ministerial offices – and that would "emancipate" itself from the existing separation of office and mandate in order to be credibly and universally led by the strongest hands of the party.

The leading Realos insist on such a party, freed from its irreconcilable differences with the CDU [Christian Democratic Union, the conservatives], the FDP, and the SPD. ... The message is unambiguous: either the Greens become as the Realos prescribe, or the election of the SPD is recommended. Farewell to pluralism, farewell to diversity. ... Those times are past. The manifesto of the Realos thus takes no issue with the politics of other parties, but rather engages in an orgy of thrashing the Greens and their present political profile. A few samples: In the Green party, we are told, a "regression to authoritarian sects of the left - radicalism of the 1970s" is occurring. The Green party persists in uttering "vituperative radical phrases" in "an infantile radicalism." It is "dogmatic, repulsive, pitiable." It holds "left-radical revival meetings."...

The manifesto expresses feelings of disgust toward the one single and true enemy in society-the

"fundamentalist sectarian opposition." This hatred is directed specifically against the left, but it also extends to the party majority [at the base], for in spite of everything, it was democratic majorities that elected the [largely leftist] executive committee and that have chosen this nauseating radicalism. The manifesto signals a complete break and readiness for a split.

Veiled only slightly behind this feverish snorting lies the social subject on whom the Realos set their sights for their project of constructing a survivable party. Let us examine one sentence in particular from the manifesto a bit more closely. It reads: "The urban, liberal, consumption-happy [*konsumjreundlicher*] Citoyen, who is primarily oriented to his or her personal life projects but who at the same time protests against nuclear energy and ecological insanity and who feels an obligation of solidarity with the marginalized and with the minorities hit by new poverty, is the subject of our democratic ideal."

A particular social being is thus chosen to embody the Green democratic ideal. This being is "urban," for the democracy that the Realos want is for educated people, and one comes upon those elites mainly in the (big) cities—especially during the nightlife in Frankfurt! To avoid problems, the Realos will maintain in the course of the debate that urban Citoyens also sometimes live in the country. That way, the rural Realos will not notice exactly what their leaders think of them.

Second, the "subject of the Green democratic ideal" is "liberal" and primarily oriented toward his own "personal life projects." He is therefore a tolerant person and understands much—as long as it does not interfere with his "personal life projects."...

Third, he is "consumption - happy." This phrase tells us what his social position is: for the Citoyen, things are now materially splendid. And in his unending "personal life project" he may make the claim to be able to publicly display what he can afford in his consumption-happy stance. He has experienced or he has heard that there are places where "achievement does not pay" – such as [among people on] fixed incomes in alternative projects or (according to the ideal) among the Greens. He does not particularly care for that.

Fourth, he is a Citoyen and knows that our state is not a reptile.

Fifth, he opposes nuclear energy and ecological insanity. With this opposition, we do not disagree; with this opposition, he is welcome to work with us – yes, both as an ally for some of our goals and as a voter. But with opposition, he will become neither the subject of our democratic ideals nor the privileged subject for our politics, because:

Sixth, he knows himself to have an "obligation of solidarity with those marginalized and with the minorities hit by the new poverty." The subject of Realo-Green democratic ideals himself is therefore one who has been neither marginalized nor ground into poverty. He feels himself bound in solidarity to those "objects" of the democratic ideal who have been ground into poverty. This means he may regret their "lot," pity them, and perhaps also make a material contribution to them. But there must always be poor and marginalized people, for with his specific characteristics, our Citoyen can flourish only on that foundation of social inequality, class society. The "subjects" of the Realo-Green democratic ideal are thus themselves expressly not the unemployed, or foreigners, or recipients of social welfare. They are not pensioners, nor do they work in factories on conveyor belts or in office buildings on word processors.

That democracy has something to do with the economic self-determination of those who engage in production—of this, there is no hint in the Realo manifesto. That the fate of millions of people is determined by the decisions of only a few owners or controllers of capital, who decree unemployment and who manufacture needs without any democratic intervention by the people who are affected by their decisions, simply does not appear. That the spiritual and physical impoverishment and the spiritual and physical pain suffered in industrial work are nobody's "personal life project" but are based on economic force is simply screened out. Instead, we read: "free time and self-employment have now become so important that factories and jobs are no longer fully at the center of normal [!] life plans and work plans. Because of this, greater chances for personal fulfilment have been opened for everyone."

Each person now creates his own happiness; given the rich offerings of this society. Those who do not make it have only themselves to blame. That is our liberal Citoyen's real view of the exploited in this society – and our Realos have described no one but themselves!

In fact, the Realo acceptance of "ecological capitalism" arises from no political or theoretical effort. The Realos waste no words struggling with the question of how ecological rationality is to be reconciled with an economy that grows only at the price of its own self-destruction. We hear not a word about ... the fact that

capital flows to where the highest rates of profit can be expected-regardless of the use-value of what is produced.

Ultimately, the Realos want to be recognized as the most up-to-date consultants for industry and finance. "Do you want to tempt entrepreneurs into the Greens?" asks Stern, and Hubert Kleinert [Realo advocate of "ecological capitalism"] responds, "They need [the Greens] because they themselves have an interest in change."...

It doesn't matter – the game [of the system] can be improved. [The Realos] simply go ahead and make any demand at all: for a people-reconciled imperialism, a grassroots-democratic stock exchange, a woman loving patriarchy, a violence-free state, lustful assembly-line labor, a peace-promoting NATO. With such demands, it is guaranteed that everything will surely stay the way it is.

The ideas of the Realos and those of the Left Greens are mutually exclusive.... The antagonism is real; it is not contrived, as the group "Fresh Start 88" suggests. (1) The "Fresh Starters" reduce real arguments [between the Realos and the Left] about content and strategy to "the quarrel between the wings." But as a matter of fact, they themselves basically cultivate the conflict because it is only as a result of the conflict that they can justify their own existence. ...

A historical reality is clouded over to weaken the position of the Left in the Greens. Statist ideologues and the Realos suggest that opposition and resistance accomplish nothing, that only playing the game [within the system] brings about reforms. But this hoary argument always serves to weaken [opposition movements'] ability bring about real change. It was not Lassalle's pleading with Bismarck but the fight for a better society that brought about the new social laws in Germany. Other reforms also came about in the same way. When we are told that social conditions today are not conducive for this, we respond that that does not make the opposite true. On the question of how to develop real political effectiveness, we stand in a closer alliance with the extra-Green Left and against the Realos, who are loyal to the state....

The crisis in the Greens reflects a general decline in left-alternative politics, in readiness for conflict.... The Realos' appeal to the Citizen parallels the new feeling that one must serve one's own career instead of getting one's feet wet in conflicts. The "turnaround" (2) and the Yuppie zeitgeist have entranced many more people than simply those who actually succeed in making a career. Stress over grades, difficult access to universities and to apprenticeships, and fear that one may later end up with the unemployed have called for accommodation. Whoever makes it through all this wants to enjoy his success to the full and not endanger it further. The Left and the Greens are an unpleasant appeal to bad conscience.

This swing of the "new thought" converges with a sense of resignation on the part of the old activists. Instead of rotting, capitalism has succeeded in making its standards into a measure of development worldwide; this creates resignation among those who once opposed the system. Ideals collapse. A generation surrenders and jumps onto the last car of the moving train.... Inactive revolutionaries praise recognition of NATO, the modern CDU, and everything that moves toward the Right as sensible "taboo breaks." Powerlessness is compensated for by recognition of the existing order....

This situation is nothing to celebrate. But there are also strong countertendencies that must not be overlooked. How many people rejected and boycotted the "pumping of the people"? (3) How many have been encouraged by the courageous fight of the inhabitants of the Hamburg Hafenstrasse and their friends? (4) Haven't high-school students, who are supposed to be totally adapted to the system, also-surprisingly, to us – massively gone on strike and demonstrated? In spite of the defeat in Rheinhausen, wasn't a struggle nonetheless fought that was more radical than many before among industrial workers? (5) ... All these are important augurs for the renewal of an alternative politics. Although they are not the great wave that raised the Greens to prominence, the Greens must beware of putting themselves out of the game by turning to the Citizen.

In this situation we have no facile healing method, and we take no joy in the possible flight [from the Greens] of the leading Realos, should the party withstand their pressures. We can imagine what a loss of blood this would be. We are not interested in victory in death. On the other hand, if the Realos do succeed with their stance of favoring NATO, the state monopoly of violence, and capitalism, and we ourselves therefore have to leave the Greens, this would mean the complete defeat of the Green approach. We doubt that a Green FDP would be successful in elections – that place is already politically occupied. But it would be

far worse if the hopes and possibilities for political change with Green participation were to die. The Greens... must face the question of whether they will survive as a force for social change or merely as the superfluous enhancement of the existing party landscape.

NOTES

(1) "Fresh Start 88" (*Aufbruch 88*) is the name of the Centralos or Neutralos who emerged in late 1987 and in their own manifesto asserted the middle against the Fundi-Realo confrontation. The "Fresh Starters" try to synthesize the two tendencies, regarding each as having part of the truth: "The bitter truth that basic changes are urgently necessary, but not possible at this time, splits in two, forming factions." Because of their aura of Christian reconciliation, they have been mocked as "the blessed."

(2) The "turnaround" is a CDU slogan that refers to the shift from thirteen years of SPD rule to CDU rule in the early 1980s.

(3) The 1987 census came to be known as "the pumping of the people" because the questions it asked went far beyond mere counting.

(4) A set of houses on the Hafenstrasse in Hamburg were occupied by Autonomes squatters; the city's many attempts to dislodge them have failed. The struggle has had an inspirational quality; see George Katsiaficas, "Europe's Autonomes," *Zeta* (November 1988), pp. 90-91.

(5) Workers at a steel plant in Reinhausen, in Nordrhein-Westphalia, went on strike to protest its closing, in defiance of the SPD and their own union, beginning in late 1987. The militant strike received tremendous community support.

Translation by Janet Biehl, with the invaluable help of Peter Fuchs.

The *Utne Reader*: Some Unfinished Business

by Murray Bookchin

Introductory Note: The *Utne Reader* of November/December 1988 contained a "Zeitgeist" piece by Jay Walljasper, managing editor of the magazine, titled "Social Ecology versus Deep Ecology." Walljasper devoted some two printed pages to summing up his views of this debate in the U.S. Greens. After taking a slap at the New Left for "bitter factional fighting," Walljasper fell back on an argument advanced by one Brian Tokar and proceeded to explain the social ecology versus deep ecology debate as a matter of geography more than ideas. Citing Tokar with approval, Walljasper nailed down the major issues as follows: "The social ecology philosophy has its deepest roots in New England, while many deep ecology advocates hail from the Western U.S. Rugged wilderness and an individualistic frontier ethic still abound in the West, while the New England landscape is dotted with small communities in a more pastoral, socialized setting." Clear? So, allowing that both sides "have a great deal in common ... why the big rift? Some of it stems from the forceful personalities of the figures involved" (i.e., David Foreman and Murray Bookchin).

We find this to be a typical New Age 1980s non-argument. We live in an Era of Therapy, as well as of Reagan reaction, when motives count for more than ideas, style for more than content – and now, with Tokar on the loose, where you *live* counts for more than what you *say*. This forecloses all serious discussion of ideas. We would have to look at maps rather than texts or take our dispute to a therapist, who would try to adjust our "personalities" like a psychic chiropractor.

In answering Walljasper's piece, Murray Bookchin wrote a double-spaced, two-and-a-half-page response. He tried to unscramble this fascinating "residential" interpretation of ecological ideas, which blatantly sidetracks the reader's attention from issues to geography. Walljasper printed the response in the next issue, as he had promised to do – but nearly half of it was omitted. What was printed in the January/February 1989 *Utne Reader* (in its orgiastic issue on the moral high-mindedness and redeeming virtues of modern corporations) made it seem that Bookchin had exclusively addressed ideological confusion in the U.S. Greens.

In fact, much of the letter addressed the Walljasper Tokar thesis. We have no doubt that Walljasper is quite sincere in his belief that a large part of the dispute is a matter of residence. But many of us who have known Brian Tokar since his Clamshell Alliance days and his doings in Vermont are likely to have a more jaundiced opinion of both the "residential" thesis and its author's shadowy "politics."

Be that as it may: we wish to clarify the *real* issues raised by Bookchin in his letter, so we are reprinting it here in its entirety. We are weary of a tendency among deep-ecology acolytes to focus on the "motives," character structure, "conspiracies," and "red" pedigree of people who disagree with their homilies. It would be useful to get down to *ideas* rather than style, *content* rather than form, and *views* rather than residence. Readers, of course, can judge the merits of the debate for themselves, but we think it is time to deal with the issues involved, not the personalities or where they live. -*The Editors*

Bookchin's Response to Walljasper

Jay Walljasper's "Zeitgeist" account of the social ecology-deep ecology dispute in the last *Utne Reader* was disappointing, to say the least. There are American Greens who, while vigorously championing forms of "eco-capitalism" and "eco-profits," are trying to make believe that they are not in the same movement with Green anarchists and independent socialists, who are advocating eco-collectivism. Other Greens have all but joined the Democratic Party, while the Berkeley-based East Bay Alliance (which Charlene Spretnak helped to found) unabashedly declares in its summer 1988 newsletter that "most of us are Republicans." Many Greens celebrate one or another form of pious supernaturalism, while others are secular naturalists. Some are harsh Malthusians who blame the entire ecological crisis on population growth, and others detest Malthus's approach and blame the crisis on an irrational "grow-or-die" economy. There are antihumanist Greens who are avowed misanthropes and others who are deeply concerned with the human condition in a deteriorating natural world.

I could go on endlessly with such far-reaching ideological differences that have very practical implications. These differences are often "resolved" by turning many Green conferences into choral chants that "We Are All One" or by engaging in back-rubs and "pagan" rituals. This is not "unity in diversity," as Walljasper puts it. It is sheer chaos. Worse: it turns the Green movement into a New Age caricature of the serious alternatives the movement could open to responsible and ecologically oriented people in the U.S.

No one wants to slap any kind of party line on the Greens – least of all social ecologists, who derive their ideas from an anti-authoritarian Left that has nothing in common with monolithic organizations. We are earnestly trying to build an ecologically relevant New Left for the 1980s and 90s – a recently formed Left Green Network – whose functions are educational, not designed to shred the Greens into warring sectarian factions. We are trying to address broad principles that should be of concern not only to Greens but to *all* people who seek radical social change and who are repelled by the New Age nostrums that abound all over the place. For Walljasper to bias *Utne* readers toward the mystics who adhere to deep ecology's quasi-religious quietism, Malthusianism, and crude primitivism in the name of "regional" differences verges on a dubious attempt to close off *any* debate within the Green movement and reduce basic differences to mere matters of temperament and style.

Green Perspectives, which is one of several newly emerging Left Green periodicals, may be published in Vermont, but its largest single groups of subscribers are Californians. By contrast, some of the harshest New Age opponents of the periodical live in Massachusetts and Maine. Californians and north-westerners have long pioneered in the real-life community and inner-city ecological programs that Greens should be engaged in everywhere. Attitudes toward Third World peoples, working people, the oppressed generally, and the importance of social issues have far less to do with where one lives than whether one is privileged, affluent, and overly self-indulgent. Put quite bluntly: this has much more to do with a *class* mentality than a "regional" one.

Certainly no one expects a "Green group in rural North Carolina" to hold "the exact [!] set of views as one in Madison, Wisconsin," as Walljasper puts it. This is a pure red herring. Eclecticism may be very much in vogue these days, but one finally reaches a number of bedrock issues like whether one supports "eco-capitalism" or democratic collectivism, independent politics or Republican politics, supernaturalism or naturalism, Malthusianism or ecological humanism that should be thoroughly explored, without accusations of "divisiveness" and black humor about "leftists" shooting at each other in a circle. It would be a real tragedy if the Greens did not fulfill their potential to develop an ecologically oriented Left alternative to the mystical nostrums that have made America more superstitious than medieval Europe (according to some accounts) and the Republican circus that passes for politics today. Readers who want to examine this alternative, which Walljasper barely examines in his highly tendentious article, may care to write to *Green Perspectives*, P.O. Box 111, Burlington VT 05402.