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Between Grassroots Activism and Transnational Aspirations: Anti-Nuclear Protest from the Rhine Valley to the Bundestag, 1974-1983

Stephen Milder*

Abstract: »Zwischen Graswurzel-Aktivismus und transnationalen Bestrebungen: Die Anti-Atombewegung vom Rheintal bis in den Bundestag, 1974-1983«. In the mid-1970s, French, German, and Swiss protesters jointly occupied the Wyhl nuclear reactor construction site in the Upper Rhine Valley. Even at the grassroots level, transnational cooperation allowed reactor opponents to transcend the limits of politics-as-usual and adopt "new" protest strategies. Moreover, though it was minutely local, the Wyhl occupation had significant transnational effects. Activists throughout Europe and even across the Atlantic considered this protest to influence the situation in their home countries. They were eager to build on the "example of Wyhl." Yet, as this article shows, activists beyond the Rhine had a hard time deploying transnationalism in the mass anti-nuclear protests and political campaigns that followed Wyhl. The West German Greens' 1979 European Parliament campaign is perhaps the best example of the way that activists inspired by Rhenish protests continued to emphasize transnationalism. Despite their European outlook, however, the Greens' first major political success came in Bonn, not Strasbourg. Thus, for the Greens and many others transnational thinking proved difficult to sustain beyond the grassroots level. It may have been most effective as a means of reinvigorating national politics.

Keywords: Anti-nuclear movement, transnationalism, Die Grünen/West German Greens, environmentalism.

1. Introduction¹

On 18 February 1975, hundreds of rural people streamed onto the reactor construction site at Wyhl in southwestern Germany. They remained on the site

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until 20 February, when a brutal police raid forced them to disperse. Three days after this violent confrontation, 28,000 people from West Germany, France, and Switzerland pushed their way past police barricades and re-occupied the site. As the battle over the reactor unfolded, Strasbourg's long-time Christian Democratic Mayor, Pierre Pfimlin, speculated that "the entire French nuclear program rides with Wyhl." "If the nuclear plant at Wyhl is stopped," he quipped, "it would be extremely difficult to put one in the Alsace. If you can't do it here, where can you do it in France?"²

Protesters, too, considered this local protest to have transnational significance. At a speech on the occupied site, a Luxembourger exclaimed that, "the struggle in Wyhl is our struggle, your victory will be our victory!"³ Marie-Reine Haug, a young Alsatian woman who played a leading role in the Wyhl occupation, proclaimed prophetically that, "The struggle against nuclear reactors must be a chain reaction. One victory will trigger another."⁴ In short, the remote nuclear reactor construction sites that became centers of transnational protest across Western Europe during the 1970s seemed to exemplify the environmentalists' mantra to "think globally, act locally" (Prendiville 1994, 91-3).

Yet scholars have long struggled to understand the way that anti-reactor protests in West Germany shaped politics in France, Luxembourg, or Switzerland. Far from reflecting connections between these actions, literature on the anti-nuclear movement tends to describe it as existing within isolated national boxes (e.g. Tourraine 1983; Radkau 1983; Paul 1997; Kupper 2003; Karapin 2007). The best known studies of the Wyhl protest, for example, link it solely to the development of anti-nuclear protest in West Germany (cf. Rucht 1980; Engels 2006). Meanwhile, works that do address anti-nuclear protest in more than one country tend to compare the anti-nuclear movements of Europe with one another, thus implying that they developed independently. Rather than exploring the connections between individual protests, such works tend to emphasize the specific aspects of national character and politics that have defined the movement's divergent trajectory in each state (cf. Nelkin and Pollack 1981; Joppke 1993; Kitschelt 1983, 1984; Flam 1994; Brand 1985; Dryzek 2002; Aldrich 2008). It was, this line of reasoning suggests, national opportunity structures that defined the trajectory and relative successes of anti-nuclear activism in each country.

In one sense, this focus on specific nations and the different opportunities for anti-nuclear action within each one of them is justified. By the later seventies, as police tacticians implemented new defensive measures, would-be occu-

² Quoted in John Vincourt. 1975. Two Rhine Villages Succeed in Halting Industrial Invasion, *International Herald-Tribune*, 5 March 1975.

³ Helga Weber-Zucht. 1975. Wieder ein Ostermarsch – Wyhl, *Infodienst für gewaltfreie Organisatoren* 19 (March/April 1975): 3-5.

⁴ *Ibid.*

piers failed even to get close to reactor construction sites. Reactor opponents were left searching for a new means to act. Even as occupation became untenable, however, activists were shifting the focus of their attention from individual reactor projects to nuclear energy itself. Yet, opposing nuclear energy altogether meant working to halt nuclear programs, a project that seemed best suited to the political parameters of the nation-state. After all, though the European Communities (EC) played a certain role in the financing of reactors and sought to carve out its own nuclear policy in the late 1970s, as Jan-Henrik Meyer (2014) discusses in his article in this HSR Focus, the nuclear programs protesters sought to stop were essentially controlled by national governments.

Re-focusing from individual reactor projects to national nuclear programs changed anti-nuclear activism's transnational resonance. While French politicians and protesters from Luxembourg drew consequences from the site occupation in Wyhl, it was harder for foreigners to identify with protests against the West German nuclear program in Bonn. Instead, the importance of national discourses became all the more apparent since disparate national contexts and agendas could not always be linked, as Astrid Mignon Kirchhof (2014) points out in her article in this HSR Focus. Whereas grassroots site occupations welcomed the participation of "the affected population," however that population defined itself and wherever it happened to live, protests and electoral campaigns intended to change national policy relied on people who – as citizens and voters – held the standing to do so.

Nevertheless, there is another sense in which the story of the anti-nuclear movement – even within individual countries – must be told transnationally. After all, anti-nuclear activists remained well aware that the nuclear threat transcended national borders. Thus, despite their focus on individual national nuclear programs, they strived to frame their protests transnationally. Perhaps more importantly, however, activists also continued to work transnationally because they wanted to participate in the creation of a new, more democratic Europe. This new Europe was more than just an ideal to be striven towards, since events like the 1979 direct elections to the European Parliament appeared as fleeting – but very real – moments of transnational cooperation. In order to evaluate the significance of such transnationalism for the development of anti-nuclear movements, this article will explore the ways in which activists in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) continued to think transnationally even after they moved their protests away from reactor construction sites and targeted their country's nuclear program. I will focus here on the activist careers of Petra Kelly and Roland Vogt, who became involved in the anti-reactor protests of the mid-1970s and then played important roles in the founding of the West German Green Party. Members of the Young European Federalists since the early 1970s, Kelly and Vogt were both committed transnationalists even before they became actively involved in anti-nuclear activism.

The March 1979 founding of the *Sonstige Politische Vereinigung: Die Grünen* (Alternative Political Organization: The Greens), which was specifically conceived as the vehicle for an alternative anti-nuclear campaign for seats in the European Parliament, is perhaps the best evidence of this enduring transnational approach (Mende 2011). Using papers from the *SPV Die Grünen*'s Federal Board, as well as the correspondence of Kelly, Vogt, and other "founding Greens" (Mende 2011), I will look closely at this campaign and its effects. Almost paradoxically, as I will show in this article, what at first sight seemed to be an unmistakably European political undertaking may have had less resonance across European borders than did many localized grassroots anti-reactor protests. In fact, from a material perspective, it was precisely the significant results of *SPV Die Grünen*'s campaign for the European parliament that focused its protagonists on domestic politics by enabling them to mount successful campaigns for seats in West Germany's federal and state parliaments. And yet, activists' very focus on national electoral campaigns suggests a turn away from the transnationalism that had long defined anti-nuclear activism, even at the grassroots level. Thus, anti-nuclear activists' struggles to think globally and to act meaningfully raise an important question about whether focused, localized actions may actually have more powerful transnational effects than broad campaigns engineered with transnationalism in mind.

2. Local Occupation, Transnational Ramifications

The Wyhl occupation has become by far the best known symbol of grassroots anti-nuclear protest in the FRG, yet describing it bedeviled its contemporaries and later scholars alike. Observers' difficulty in describing "Wyhl" was already evident on the morning of 18 February 1975, when hundreds of local people, most of them women (Engels 2002) from nearby winegrowing villages, descended on the reactor construction site and convinced work crews to put down their tools. Though these protesters had clearly taken over the site, the local press waffled as to whether or not their action marked the beginning of an occupation.⁵ Researchers have since shown that a great number of women were involved in the anti-nuclear movements in the FRG (Kirchhof 2013) and beyond (Wehr 1985; Adams 2002; Wittner 2003), but in 1975 rural women were not expected by their contemporaries to be involved in political protest. After all, middle-aged rural women looked nothing like the young, bearded student activists associated with public protest since 1968. Moreover, instead of calling for radical changes to society as a whole, the local people who spearheaded the protest at Wyhl were concerned about the future of their farms. Thus, this ac-

⁵ Demonstranten erzwingen den Abbruch der Arbeit, *Badische Zeitung*, 19 February 1975.

tion and its protagonists simply did not match preconceived notions of who protesters were and how they went about their business.

The important transnational dimension of the protest was also difficult for many observers to understand. French and Germans, who had long been labeled “hereditary enemies” (Lemettre 2009) by their governments, were working together against the reactor. Even if the 1962 Elysée Treaty had officially ended this longstanding enmity, local border crossings in the Upper Rhine valley still closed each night at 9pm in 1975, and transnational interaction remained rare amongst rural people in the region. For French who had survived the Nazi invasion and Germans who had lived through allied air raids, each trip across the river brought back shades of “a dark past in which we could not find a common way to benefit both the neighboring peoples” (Tittman 1976, 201). Yet at Wyhl, close cooperation across the river had brought protest strategies from the French Larzac into contact with scientific expertise from the nearby German university town of Freiburg. More importantly, cooperation allowed people from both sides of the Rhine to see themselves as a single community affected by the reactor project.

Though it relied on Franco-German cooperation at the grassroots level, the occupation was steeped in specific, regional issues that were not particularly interesting to people away from the Rhine. Local farmers were concerned about the future of their valuable grape crops beneath the trailing clouds of steam a reactor would discharge. Yet unlike earlier protests in the region, which had included tractor parades, petition drives, and disruptions of licensing hearings, the physically-rooted occupation garnered attention all across Western Europe. Why did the occupation make what had long been a regional anti-reactor campaign so significant to people so far from Wyhl?

In the “leaden” 1970s,⁶ when opportunities for popular protest appeared greatly diminished, the occupation was a notable success. While the end of the student movement had caused some West German radicals to turn to terrorism, others to retreat into lifestyle politics, and still others to grudgingly join the governing SPD, many listless activists took an interest in anti-nuclear activism after they learned about the Wyhl occupation. Even before Wyhl, a writer for the anarchist *graswurzelrevolution* (*grassroots revolution*) had advocated “an ecology campaign” as a means of reactivating “unemployed” activists.⁷ After the occupation began, the monthly magazine reported constantly on the action at Wyhl. In the summer of 1977, members of the affiliated *graswurzel*-groups

⁶ On the idea of the 1970s as a “leaden” decade see Christiane Peitz, *Die Bleikappe des Schweigens. Margarethe von Trotta über ihren Ensslin-Film, das Sympathisantentum und deutsche Kontinuitäten*, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 28. April 2007.

⁷ [Michael Schroeren], „Damit wir auch morgen noch kraftvoll zubeißen können...“ Notizen zu einer „Ökologie-Kampagne“, *graswurzelrevolution* 7 (January 1974): 2.

initiated a short-lived occupation of their own at a reactor construction site in the German town of Grohnde near Hanover, the capital of Lower Saxony.

The *Kommunistische Volkszeitung*, the official newspaper of the Communist League of West Germany (KBW), put the localized Wyhl occupation into particularly grand and universal terms. This action, the paper reported, “has inspired the masses throughout the country to take part in the struggle against the decisions of the state bureaucracy, which are directed against the people’s will.”⁸ Another Communist publication described the new grouping that had emerged at Wyhl as the vanguard of a, “solidary coalition of the millions of oppressed and exploited in our country,” who were engaged, “in a self-conscious struggle against the capitalists and their state apparatus.”⁹ As this soaring prose indicated, Communists attributed a key role in the world proletarian struggle to the fight over a single, small clearing in the Wyhl forest and thus tried to influence the Green movement early on, hoping to direct it in a clear Left or rather communist direction (Harney 2013).

There was a grain of truth behind the KBW’s inflated rhetoric. During the second half of the seventies, anti-nuclear activism became a *cause célèbre* throughout Western Europe. Protesters attempted to occupy reactor construction sites all over West Germany and beyond. Wyhl was the initial, catalytic explosion in what Marie-Reine Haug had described as a chain reaction of protests. Though protesters at Wyhl relied on transnational cooperation at the grassroots level, and though they quickly amended their slogan from “No Reactor at Wyhl” to “No Reactor at Wyhl... or Anywhere Else,” the occupation’s translocal salience was largely attributed to it by outside observers. Nor did this geographic broadening of the Wyhl struggle’s significance stop at the West German border. Transnationally motivated activists, like the members of the Brussels-based European socialist network *agenor*, focused on constructing Wyhl as a tool for their activist project (Meyer 2013). In their journal, *agenor*, they summarized and translated information about the events, strategies and activist groups at Wyhl.¹⁰ They also published grassroots anti-nuclear activists’ contact information and encouraged connections across borders. Distributed throughout Western Europe, *agenor* contributed to Wyhl’s growing stature as an important example of transnational anti-nuclear protest.

The key to the Wyhl occupation’s translocal salience, therefore, lies in the way it was interpreted by different people and groups. In this sense, the occupation reveals how local action could inspire global change. Outsiders like the *graswurzel*-groups and the KBW re-cast the grassroots anti-reactor campaign

⁸ Die Kämpfe in Wyhl haben die Volksmasse im ganzen Land ermutigt, *Kommunistische Volkszeitung* 3, No. 15/16 (April 1975): 9.

⁹ KPD Regional Komitee Baden-Württemberg, “Kein KKW in Wyhl” (23 February 1975). Archiv Soziale Bewegungen Freiburg (hereafter: ASB), Doc No. 3599.

¹⁰ Nuclear Power Stop. Wyhl, Brokdorf, Malville, *agenor.options for the left* 65 (May 1977).

as one small, unique, and authentic part of a larger social movement, comprised of numerous localized, specific actions. Such actions, outsiders had come to realize, were effective precisely because of their rootedness and the local population's deep-seated support for them. It was this efficacy that protesters hoped to maintain after they left the site. Yet, these outside activists who promoted the struggle at Wyhl as a new transnational political model were also dedicated to creating a more widespread activist movement that could affect broad social change. The tension between grassroots activism and transnational aspirations dominated their efforts as they sought to build on the "example of Wyhl."¹¹

3. The End of the Movement as They Knew It

As the Wyhl occupation became known across Europe and beyond, anti-nuclear activists elsewhere sought to recreate it – even on the other side of the Atlantic, as the article by Michael L. Hughes (2014) in this HSR Focus demonstrates. Government officials and police chiefs also learned from Wyhl, however. They developed new strategies to protect reactor sites. The result of these parallel learning processes was a string of increasingly violent confrontations between anti-nuclear activists and the police along the perimeters reactor construction sites in late 1976 and 1977. None of these mass protests resulted in a lasting occupation, and protesters were almost always kept off of fortified reactor sites altogether by well-armed police. Undeterred by previous failures, 60,000 anti-nuclear activists from all across Western Europe made their way to the village of Malville in Southern France in July 1977 in an attempt to occupy the "Super-Phénix" Fast Breeder Reactor construction site. The French government had sent five-thousand troops equipped with grenades, tear gas, helicopters, and amphibious vehicles to defend the prestigious project. In the ensuing battle, one protester was killed and several lost limbs. Hundreds more were injured (Mossmann 2009, 245).

The bitter violence at Malville did irreparable damage to the image of site occupation and raised questions about the anti-nuclear movement as a whole (Kitschelt 1984, 75; Aldrich 2008, 152-3). In the wake of Malville, Dieter Rucht has written, the French anti-nuclear movement "became disoriented and lost much of its credibility in the minds of the public" (Rucht 1994, 130). Alain Touraine considered the battle at Malville to have been even more damning for the movement. The failed protest, he wrote, "demonstrated the inability of the anti-nuclear current to organize itself into a political force" (Touraine 1983, 28). The French government was all too eager to make use of this opportunity

¹¹ Freia Hoffmann, "Was bedeutet das Beispiel Wyhl?" (Freiburg: 21 March 1975). Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (hereafter: AGG) Petra Kelly Archiv (hereafter: PKA) 2264.

to attack the anti-nuclear movement. By blaming German radicals for the violence, French officials exonerated French protesters and thus threatened their transnational cooperation. In short, the epic failure at Malville raised serious questions about the ability of localized action to foster global change.

In West Germany, activists were already searching for a means of organizing themselves into a more potent, translocal political force by the time of the Malville debacle. In May 1977, reactor opponents heatedly debated how they might organize themselves at the first Federal Congress of Reactor Opponents in Hanover.¹² This attempt, unfortunately, fell flat. The agenda was dominated by theoretical resolutions put forward by representatives of Communist splinter groups. Delegates of grassroots anti-reactor groups exited the meeting in droves.¹³ The magazine *Atom-Express*, published by an anti-nuclear protest group from Göttingen, did not even bother “detailing the many resolutions, since they will have no effect on the further struggle against reactors.” Instead, the anti-nuclear publication simply concluded that, “this Federal Conference was no step forward” for the movement (Paul 1997, 57-8).¹⁴

Yet, the meeting accomplished more than *Atom-Express*’ dispirited report acknowledged. Held shortly after Lower Saxony’s Christian Democratic Premier Ernst Albrecht named rural Gorleben as the future site of a nuclear waste processing and storage facility, the Federal Conference brought together delegates from more than 256 anti-nuclear initiatives in Lower Saxony’s capital city. This was no coincidence. Focus on the proposed nuclear waste facility offered West German activists an opportunity to go beyond localized anti-reactor struggles and to centralize their movement. Without Gorleben, after all, each of the Federal Republic’s dozen reactors would have nowhere to send its radioactive waste and thus, eventually, become inoperable. Moreover, the debacle at Malville and the pall cast over the FRG by terrorist violence of the Red Army Faction (RAF) during the “German autumn” (Varon 2004; Aust 2008) only reinforced reactor opponents’ desire to find a means of affecting change that could not be so readily dismissed as violent. Gorleben offered an opportunity to give the movement a new direction.

Nevertheless, finding a means of working against the Gorleben facility challenged anti-nuclear activists. Tensions developed at future Federal Conferences between local people who wanted to protest at the rural site and representatives of groups from across the Federal Republic who wanted centralized rallies. In 1979, the factions compromised by calling for three separate actions. First, they organized a week-long farmers’ trek from Gorleben to Hanover for March 1979. By the time the Gorleben farmers reached the state capital, they would be

¹² Bundeskongreß der Bürgerinitiativen, *Arbeiterkampf* 104 (16 May 1977).

¹³ Nach der Bundeskonferenz: Es brodelt in der Gerüchte-Küche, *Arbeiterkampf* 105 (31 May 1977).

¹⁴ Bundeskonferenz 14. 15. Mai 77, *Atom-Express* 2 (June/July 1977): 23.

joined by anti-nuclear activists from across the FRG for a mass rally and a hearing on the Gorleben project. Second, in deference to local people, they called for a national protest to be held in Gorleben three weeks after preparatory work began on the site. Finally, they planned a mass rally to be held at the Bonner Hofgarten – a park in front of the elector’s palace in the city center of the federal capital of Germany – in the fall.

The Hofgarten rally, which took place in October 1979, was the largest protest the Federal Republic had ever seen. The symbolism of both the Gorleben trek and the Hofgarten rally was clear. In their attempts to organize themselves into a powerful political force, anti-nuclear activists were – unsurprisingly – targeting the powerful people who set the FRG’s nuclear policy. Unlike site occupations, which empowered people at the local level, and were only loosely linked with national politics, rallies in centers of government called on policy makers to change nuclear programs in specific ways. Though they were centrally organized and all comers were welcome to participate, such protests lacked the openness to the transnational imaginary that had made localized site occupations so transnationally potent.

4. Off the Site and into the System

Centralized rallies were not reactor opponents’ only response to the delegitimization of site occupation. Even as the Federal Congress of Reactor Opponents met in Hanover in 1977, a 36-year old state attorney named Carl Beddermann was discussing his plans for a new political party with other members of the anti-nuclear citizens’ initiative in nearby Schwarmstedt. Like many other reactor opponents, Beddermann had been deeply frustrated by the violent occupation attempts of 1977. He felt that the movement was “being discredited by the big police interventions” and was not making any headway towards stopping the proliferation of nuclear technology (Hallensleben 1984, 50). Concerned that an occupation attempt would not stop the Gorleben project, and inspired by French ecologists who had just run candidates in the March 1977 municipal elections, Beddermann (1978) proposed the creation of an environmental party that soon became the Green List for Environmental Protection (*Grüne Liste Umweltschutz* – GLU).

Even if the idea of a Green party had originated across the border in France, German reactor opponents’ newfound interest in electoral politics seemed to suggest a step away from transnationalism and towards national politics. Yet, proposals for direct elections to the European Parliament, which were initially expected to be held in May 1978, offered anti-nuclear activists an opportunity to bring their transnational vision into the electoral arena. Accordingly, the West German hosts opened an August 1977 international seminar in Bergisch-Gladbach by imploring delegates from ten western European countries that:

It must be our task, indeed our duty, to draft an environmental program for the elections to the European parliament, to present it to the public, and to debate these issues with those who will carry out European politics. We must be there when it is time to build the Europe of the future (Schumacher 1978, 60).

To this end, West Germany's Federal Association of Citizens' Initiatives for Environmental Protection voted in November 1977 to draw up a list of candidates in order to participate in the European elections. The group's chairman, Hans Günter Schumacher, viewed the vote as a "decisive contribution to the solidarization of all environmentalists in Europe" (Schumacher 1978, 61). According to Schumacher, at least, electoral politics had significant transnational potential.

Yet, the European elections did not come as planned in May 1978. Instead of running for the European Parliament, therefore, several members of the BBU's Federal Board served as candidates the following month in state elections in Hamburg and Lower Saxony. In the Lower Saxony elections, which were contested by Beddermann's GLU, environmentalist candidates scored an impressive 3.9% of the statewide vote and notched particular successes of between five and six percent near reactor sites. In Gorleben, the new party received a remarkable 17.8% of the vote (Hallensleben 1984, 98). In both states, the new Green lists made an impact on the composition of the state parliaments. Since Hans-Dietrich Genscher's (1995, 125-38; Mencke-Glückert 1997) liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) had developed an environmental program in 1971 and presented itself as the party of the environment (Bundesregierung 1973; Uekötter 2011, 92), the Green Lists' participation in state elections cost the FDP crucial votes and contributed to its inability to jump the "5% hurdle," the minimum threshold of the vote necessary to win seats in parliament, in Hamburg and Lower Saxony. Electoral politics seemed capable of both knitting together activism at disparate reactor sites and also enabling activists to affect the composition of parliaments.

The GLU's success in Lower Saxony helped launch or invigorate environmental parties in many West German states. In Hesse, four separate Green parties prepared to compete in the October 1978 state parliament elections. In an attempt to prevent rival environmental parties from "competing for the pleasure of the three major parties and preventing each other from making a political breakthrough," the "Democratic Movement for the Protection of Life" (Demokratische Lebensschutzbewegung – DLB) called a "Strategy meeting" in Darmstadt.¹⁵ Intended to bring together these disparate Green factions, the Darmstadt strategy session led to a larger "German Environmental Meeting," which was held in June 1978 at the village of Troisdorf, near Bonn.

¹⁵ Gisela Dick (Demokratische Lebensschutzbewegung), "Liebe Freunde!" (28 December 1977). AGG Kerschgens 6.

The Troisdorf meeting was caught between the Greens' initial successes at the state level and their European aspirations. Its organizers explained that they hoped to bring together enough of "the ecological movements of EUROPE" to ensure that "they will see us and hear us [ten kilometers away] in Bonn."¹⁶ Only a handful of activists from outside the Federal Republic traveled to Troisdorf, however. Among them was Petra Kelly. A native Bavarian who had grown up in the United States, Kelly lived in Brussels and worked as an official for the Economic and Social Committee of the European Economic Communities (Milder 2010). Her hopes for the meeting were clear. With her European Federalist colleague Roland Vogt, Kelly had already published an article describing her desire for a transnationally coordinated Green campaign to take part in the European parliamentary elections. She believed that such an effort could be made into a "decisive battle against nuclear reactors."¹⁷

In a series of meetings over the following nine months, a Coordinating Committee elected at Troisdorf worked towards the creation of "uniform institutions in the German federal states and on the European level."¹⁸ Beyond Kelly and the Viennese Social Democrat Paul Blau, however, the committee was comprised solely of inhabitants of the Federal Republic. Thus, while state level Green organizations were being formed across the FRG during the winter of 1978-1979, the Coordinating Committee was unable to spur the creation of equivalent groupings abroad. Moreover, Kelly and Blau remained its only significant contacts to homegrown environmental organizations in other countries. Even Kelly's ardent transnationalism was not enough to create a truly European campaign for the European Parliament.

Despite its lack of *bona fide* connections across West Germany's borders, however, the Coordinating Committee continued to think in European terms. In February 1979, it heard a presentation on "European Currency Policy and the Political Ecology Movement" before formally voting to convene a founding conference for a political organization that would run candidates in the elections to the European Parliament, which had finally been scheduled for June 1979.¹⁹ The campaign itself appeared to offer broad vistas for international work. The 81 Germans elected to the Parliament would serve alongside 329

¹⁶ Deutsches Umwelttreffen 1978, "Die Stunde ist reif für ein großes Umwelttreffen!" AGG Kerschgens 6.

¹⁷ Petra Kelly and Roland Vogt, Ökologie und Frieden. Der Kampf gegen Atomkraftwerke aus der Sicht von Hiroshima, *Forum Europa* (January/February 1977): 15 – 18.

¹⁸ Koordinierungsausschuß des Deutschen Umwelttreffens, "Ergebnisse der Besprechung vom 9./10. September in Vlotho." AGG Kerschgens 6.

¹⁹ Koordinierungsausschuß des deutschen Umwelttreffens, "Einladung zum dritten Treffen im Collegium Humanum, Akademie für Umwelt- und Lebensschutz in Vlotho/Valdorf." AGG Kerschgens 6. Kelly and Blau were also invited to address European topics at the meeting. See: "Protokoll der 2. Sitzung des Bundeskoordinierungsausschusses (BKA) des Deutschen Umwelttreffens in Troisdorf,". AGG Kerschgens 6.

members from the eight other EEC member states. Moreover, ecology parties were also contesting the election in France, Belgium, and the UK. Kelly, Vogt, and other transnationally-minded campaigners with European contacts envisioned a parliamentary caucus comprised of these ecologists as well as the Dutch and Italian Radical parties in Strasbourg.

Like the mass rallies in Hanover and Bonn, electoral politics brought new hope to anti-nuclear activists in the late seventies. The Greens' initial successes in state-level elections offered the potential to shape policy at that level, but the European elections seemed particularly well-suited to anti-nuclear activists' political outlook and aspirations. Long before the date for the elections had even been set, environmentalists saw them as a unique opportunity to continue working in the same transnational manner that local anti-reactor protests had. The short European campaign, which was to begin in the FRG with the founding of *SPV Die Grünen* in March 1979 and end with the 10 June election, would reveal whether West German activists could use such an opportunity to cooperate across Europe's many borders and engineer a new transnational politics.

5. The Campaign for the European Parliament: Transnationalism in Practice?

Petra Kelly was particularly excited to take up the challenge of creating a new Europe on the basis of an anti-nuclear campaign for the European Parliament. In an ebullient March 1979 letter she informed friends and political colleagues across Europe that she had been elected to the "number one" position on the German Greens' list of candidates for the European Parliament. She sought "help and ideas and financial support" so that she could "speak up for a decentralised, non-nuclear, non-military and gentle Europe – a Europe of the Regions and of the People."²⁰ As the Greens' lead candidate, Kelly appeared to be in the position to make her transnational dreams for a more-integrated, non-nuclear Europe the focal point of the campaign.

Like Kelly, members of Hamburg's *Grüne Liste Umweltschutz* (GLU), one of the many small ecological parties that comprised *SPV Die Grünen*, linked together anti-nuclear activism and dreams for European integration in order to describe the transnational potential of Green politics. "For ecological forces," wrote Heinz Böhmecke of the Hamburg GLU, "there are no arbitrary boundaries. [Ecologists] feel themselves responsible for all of Europe." He went on to compare Gorleben to the French reprocessing center in La Hague and its British counterpart at Windscale. Ecologists could not allow any of these sites –

²⁰ Petra Kelly to Friends and Comrades (24 March 1979). AGG PKA 540,6.

nor “any other place on the planet” – to become “the radioactively poisoned heart of Europe.”²¹ Like Kelly, Böhmecke clearly considered environmental politics and anti-nuclear activism to be inherently transnational. The elections to the European Parliament seemed a tailor-made opportunity for the nascent German Green party to move beyond the arbitrary boundaries of national politics and to foster change across the continent.

Not everyone in *SPV Die Grünen* saw the campaign for the European Parliament as such an exciting opportunity, however. Karl Kerschgens sent a letter to fellow Greens in Hesse explaining that he understood their unease about the unusual campaign. “Many of us,” he wrote, “needed to give ourselves a little push in order to get going despite the general disinclination towards the European elections.” Yet, Kerschgens reasoned, “If we want to have a meaningful campaign in the next Bundestag election, then we need to get every possible vote this time around.”²² Other leading Greens echoed the idea that the European campaign was really just a dress rehearsal for the 1980 Bundestag elections. Helmut Lippelt, for example, described the process of drafting a program for the European elections as a valuable opportunity to begin hashing out the party’s federal election program a year early.²³ The fact that the West German government would reimburse each political party 1.40 DM per vote received in the European election reinforced the idea that the campaign was an important step in the Greens’ preparations for the 1980 Bundestag elections.

The shape that the European campaign took belied these divergent conceptions of it. In early 1979, representatives of the various minor parties and groupings that comprised the Alternative Political Association got together to begin the arduous work of drafting an election program that met its disparate membership’s approval. Kelly, who was in the midst of a campaign swing through “Kiel, Gorleben, Nijmegen, Nuremburg, Brussels, Deggendorf, Passau, etc.” and thus could not attend the deliberations, sent a perturbed letter to party headquarters. She called on the Greens to use a set of points that she and Roland Vogt had developed, and which she had already translated into English, as the basis for the program. After all, Kelly informed the program’s framers:

At the international level we simply must have platform points that everyone can accept. The ones Roland and I have worked out are in agreement with those of the French, the Dutch, and the Italians.²⁴

²¹ Heinz Böhmecke, “Antrag an die Europaprogramm-Kommission,” 4 March 1979. AGG Kerschgens 10.

²² Kerschgens to “Friends in the green and alternative movement” (6 May 1979). AGG Kerschgens 10.

²³ Helmut Lippelt to the Members of the Program Committee (9 January 1979). AGG Kerschgens 10.

²⁴ Petra Kelly to Vorstand “Der Grünen” (undated). AGG PKA 2552.

Kelly's perception of which "everyone" had to accept the program was plainly different from that of other leading German Greens. One of the key decisions facing *SPV Die Grünen*, therefore, was whether it was responsible to the diverse spectrum of German environmental groups that comprised it, in a bottom-up manner, or whether it ought to be in agreement with the other Green and Radical parties of Europe, in the spirit of transnational coordination, as Kelly suggested.

Given the enormous influence of Kelly and Vogt – who together made more than fifty stump speeches, coordinated the party's media outreach, and managed its Bonn office alongside numerous other responsibilities – one might expect that their perception of a transnationally coordinated European campaign won out.²⁵ But matters beyond their control forced the campaign to remain in many ways a specifically West German undertaking. When the European Community's Council of Ministers eventually mandated that direct elections to the European Parliament be held in June 1979, it soothed the more skeptical governments by leaving it up to the member states to set the electoral rules (Morgan and Allen 1978; Rittberger 2007). Hence, with only a few modifications and exceptions, the Federal Republic's standard electoral laws governed the Greens' campaign.

As long as national governments retained their power to set the election's rules, transnationalists' visions for the European election were unlikely to be implemented. Along with other ardent European Federalists Kelly had long advocated transnational election districts, for example. Yet, the EC member states' governments made no move to organize such districts prior to the 1979 campaign. Thus, in order to win seats in the European parliament, the Greens would have to solicit votes within the Federal Republic. Though German candidates like Kelly and Vogt could (and did) campaign in support of Green candidates in France, French voters would not have the option of voting for the German Green List. Thus, if the German Greens wished to gain seats in Strasbourg – and, importantly, to receive campaign cost reimbursement funds from the German government, which were apportioned on the basis of votes received – they would have to organize a more traditional, national campaign.

Thus, although it was aimed at winning seats in Strasbourg, the German Greens' campaign for the European Parliament, quickly adapted itself to the established framework of West German political praxis. It concluded – as the major parties' Bundestag campaigns typically did – at party headquarters in Bonn.²⁶ As he watched the results come in from across the Federal Republic, Vogt was quick to point out that had the so-called "five percent hurdle" not been in place, the "formidable" 3.2% of the vote that *SPV Die Grünen* had

²⁵ Roland Vogt, "Bericht zur Bundesgeschäftsstelle" (undated; presumably June/July 1979). AGG PKA 2553.

²⁶ Petra Kelly and Dorothea Wiczorek, "Einladung" (6 June 1979). AGG Kerschgens 10.

received would have entitled both Kelly and himself to seats in Strasbourg. Yet Vogt assessed the campaign's results beyond West Germany's borders, too. Counting ecologically-minded MPs from Italy, Holland, and Denmark, as well as the three French Ecologists who would have won seats without their own country's five percent hurdle, Vogt reckoned that a Green delegation of "certainly more than ten representatives" ought to be on its way to Strasbourg.²⁷ In reality, of course, no German Greens or French Ecologists would be seated in the European parliament. Vogt's imagined transnational Green caucus would not even begin to materialize until the German Greens won seats in Strasbourg in 1984.

Despite setbacks imposed by national electoral law and the extent to which the Green campaign had adapted itself to West German electoral praxis, a European outlook continued to shape Vogt and Kelly's responses to the campaign. Together with representatives of Europe's other ecological parties, the pair planned a demonstration that would take place as the parliament convened on 17 July. Five-hundred Greens from across Europe marched through Strasbourg's streets in a procession that evidenced Petra Kelly's love of symbolic action and clearly foreshadowed the German Greens' triumphant march through Bonn and into the Bundestag four years later (Richter 2010, 245-7, 253). Prevented from taking seats in parliament, Kelly and Vogt unfurled a banner protesting the "undemocratic and anti-European five percent hurdle" from the spectators' balcony and were promptly ejected from the opening ceremonies. The duo sought a legal remedy next, bringing an unsuccessful challenge to the German constitutional court before investigating their options at the European Court of Justice.

When *SPV Die Grünen's* Federal Board met in Kassel five days after the election, Kelly and Vogt continued their push for transnationalism. They convinced the Board to use campaign reimbursement funds supplied by the West German government to bail out the heavily indebted French Ecology party. They also solicited support for a Greens' European office in Strasbourg, which Kelly estimated would require one million DM of funding over the next five years.²⁸ The next edition of the party newsletter evidenced the success of Kelly and Vogt's efforts, trumpeting the German Greens' support for their French allies and devoting attention to the transnational protest that environmentalists had staged as the European Parliament convened.²⁹ Meanwhile, Kelly was dispatched to Strasbourg with a check for the French Ecologists and orders to find a suitable site for a European office. By the fall of 1979, office space had been rented near the European Parliament and Roland Vogt remained on the

²⁷ Stellungnahme von Roland Vogt zum Wahlergebnis, *die tageszeitung* (12 June 1979): 1.

²⁸ Petra K. Kelly, "Vorschlag für ein europäisches Aktions/Informationsbüro in Strassburg oder Brüssel," AGG Ba-Wü 109.

²⁹ Lukas Beckmann and Otto Fanger, "Rundbrief" (August 1979). AGG Kerschgens 10.

German Greens' payroll as Strasbourg office manager. Kelly was back in Brussels, working at the EEC and organizing European contacts for the party.³⁰ By dedicating the resources they had received from the West German government to European ends, the Greens seemed to have found a workable means of maintaining – if not bolstering – their transnationalism.

Yet, Vogt and Kelly were not the only Greens who had ideas for the party's next steps. Urgent letters sent to the Federal Board from Bremen requested an advance on electoral reimbursement funds owed to that state's Green List. The upcoming elections in the Hanseatic city-state, leaders of the Bremen Green List argued, presented an opportunity for the party as a whole.³¹ Georg Otto, a co-founder of the GLU, who had been hired by the Greens' Federal Board to help prepare the party for the 1980 Bundestag Elections, acknowledged the "trendsetting function" of the Bremen election and called for "federal solidarity with the Bremen Green list."³² Though no one demanded that support for the Bremen Greens be drawn from funds intended for European work, Otto's characterization of the Bremen election as a "trendsetter" suggested that the German Greens' Federal Board saw the opportunity to win seats in Bremen's state parliament as a more productive means of pursuing Green political goals than emphasizing transnational, European work.

From southern Germany came another reason for the Greens to focus on domestic politics. Activists in both Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria planned to formally organize state branches of the new party in the fall. The Federal Board was concerned that "loopholes" in the temporary bylaws of *SPV Die Grünen*, which had been specially created to contest the European elections, would prevent these proposed southern German state chapters from formally joining the organization. As a result, the Board voted unanimously to disband the "Special Political Association" and found a new federal party in the fall.³³

After the Greens won seats in the state parliaments of Bremen in October 1979 and Baden-Württemberg in March 1980, their focus on campaigning within the Federal Republic only intensified. Bundestag elections were scheduled for October 1980 and each German state would hold statewide and municipal elections at least once in the five-year interval before the next European parliamentary election. Even the most transnationally-minded Greens returned to the FRG in order to participate in domestic elections and party-building. In 1981, Roland Vogt left Strasbourg to take a seat on the Greens' Federal Board. Petra Kelly took another leave of absence from the EEC and returned to Ger-

³⁰ Roland Vogt, "Bericht zur europäischen Geschäftsstelle der Grünen" (October 1979). AGG PKA 2553.

³¹ Bremer Grüne Liste to Bundesvorstand "DIE GRÜNEN" (27 August 1979). AGG PKA 2553.

³² Georg Otto, "An alle Landes- und Kreisorganisationen der Trägergruppen der Vereinigung DIE GRÜNEN," (undated, presumably July or August 1979). AGG PKA 2553.

³³ "Protokoll der Bundesvorstandssitzung der GRÜNEN am 14./15.7.79 in Bonn." AGG PKA 2553.

many from Brussels in order to serve as the Greens' lead candidate in the 1980 Bundestag campaign, the 1982 campaign for the Bavarian Parliament, and finally the successful 1983 Bundestag campaign.

Despite her endless campaigning, Kelly continued to speak of the primacy of "questions of global survival" that transcended national borders and were decided outside of parliament by groups like "the armaments lobby." Nevertheless, she explained that she was firmly committed to domestic electoral campaigns due to her belief that for the Greens, parliament was "a site...where we can speak, where we can bring our positions in and carry information out."³⁴ The distinction between national and transnational approaches to anti-nuclear activism and environmental politics was now clearer than ever. Transnationally-minded Greens like Kelly continued to talk about anti-nuclear activism as a European project, but emphasizing electoral campaigns pushed the party ever further from the sort of open-ended transnational connections and global thinking that had excited Greens about the upcoming European elections during the late 1970s. In fact, the combination of the German Greens' successes and the setbacks faced by the French and British Ecologists made it even more difficult to effectively conduct Green politics across Europe's borders.

6. Conclusion

Despite the German Greens' growing focus on domestic electoral campaigning after the 1979 European elections, thinking beyond the nation-state remained important for proponents of Green politics and anti-nuclear activists. The French and British Greens won their first nationally contested seats in elections to the European Parliament in 1989 and 1999 respectively. In Britain, the Green breakthrough finally came only after the law governing elections to the European parliament was changed to allow for proportional representation. This targeted reform, which did not apply to elections to the British parliament, reinforces the idea that Europe could be a site of real democratic experimentation at the same time as it embodied anti-nuclear activists' most radical aspirations for a new society.

Indeed, the practical significance of Europe for the Greens and for anti-nuclear activists remained very clear during the 1970s and 1980s. In addition to the continuing significance of the European Parliament as an electoral stepping stone, Jan-Henrik Meyer (2013) has shown that non-partisan anti-nuclear activists worked to create effective lobbying organizations in Brussels. Environmentalists also continued to emphasize the transnational effects of environmental

³⁴ Spiegel Gespräch. "Wir sind die Antipartei-Partei." Petra Kelly über die politische Strategie der Grünen, *Der Spiegel* 24 (1982): 47-56.

disasters. The sheer absurdity of the French government's insistence that fallout from the 1986 Chernobyl meltdown stopped at the Rhine (Kalmbach 2011, chapter 4) only reinforced the obvious fact that the nuclear threat was particularly transnational.

Yet by the mid-1980s, a European perspective no longer seemed to shape the aspirations of Green politics in the way that leading Greens had argued that it must in the late 1970s. The sort of popular transnationalism that had captured Europeans' imaginations and thus made localized site occupations meaningful across broad swathes of territory during the 1970s proved elusive after environmental protests were re-directed to capital cities and parliamentary elections. Even the idea that transnationally-framed protests and participation in elections to the European parliament were a means of shaping a new, more democratic Europe was fading from view. Instead, the focus was on navigating each country's electoral law and gaining influence within each nation-state's existing political system.

The more that anti-nuclear activists sought to grow their movement beyond individual anti-reactor struggles and to shape nuclear policy, therefore, the more that their work lost its connection to the vision of creating a new and radically transnational Europe. Significant numbers of Europeans adopted environmental values, but as Michael Bess (2003) has shown in the case of France, the "light Green" societies that have emerged in Europe function so well because they incorporate a less radical form of environmentalism into everyday life. This normalization of environmental values is a stunning achievement in and of itself, but it is far short of the sort of the potential for the global transformation of politics and even humanity that some activists found in localized anti-reactor protests and linked to the forging of a new, more democratic Europe.

There is no question, however, that anti-nuclear activists' early transnational dreams and the headline-grabbing site occupations of the mid-seventies shaped the changes that took place throughout the continent. The excitement generated by far-flung and "unprecedented" rural reactor site occupations gives credence to the idea that localized action can – and frequently does – have global ramifications. Though the nitty-gritty work of changing policy relies on actions that function within the framework of politics as usual, localized protests can raise awareness and change the way people think across all sorts of boundaries. Truly understanding the rise of anti-nuclear politics in Western Europe and the potential that its proponents attributed to it, therefore, requires scholars to take very seriously the transnational ramifications of disparate local actions. Though the anti-nuclear movement later took on unique national trajectories, these early protests, which relied on transnational cooperation and inspired people across national borders, made nuclear energy a significant issue across Western Europe and linked this issue itself to the idea of a new Europe. The anti-nuclear movement's development from the local to the transnational to the national

level, therefore, is not so much a story of politics dictated by “opportunity structures” as it is an explanation of how anti-nuclear activists’ local actions and transnational aspirations fell short of forging a new Europe, but created important new opportunities to reshape national politics.

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