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From Movement to Parliamentary Party

Notes on Several European Green Movements

Janet Biehl

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1993

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democratic confederal basis. Discussions are ongoing in several places concerning how to begin to form a strong decentralist structure in the Greens and to work with decentralist Greens on local councils. Where a radical confederal democracy remains a potentiality, that democracy may be reawakened and expanded —and finally radicalized if movements are not to be faced with parliamentary degeneration. The cry may well be the one popularized by Bookchin in the United States: “We must democratize the republic, and ultimately radicalize the democracy.”

and city councils where existing Greens have strongholds in all the countries discussed here and elsewhere, educating those Greens in the potentialities of direct democracy and confederation.

At present, it is the right that is building on decentralist sentiment in many parts of the world. A libertarian municipalist approach would not leave this for the right to exploit. As one U.K. Green who wrote recently in *Green Line*: “While the old Labour culture is on the decline, conservatism is very much a living force. The Tory Party has by far the biggest membership, and while Labour makes a hash of centralising its membership system, the Tories continue to rule out national membership, sticking to their very successful formula of local associations. Acting more as social clubs than election machines, these associations enable people’s everyday lives ... to revolve around the Tory Party, and that is what makes them successful.” Far-right parties elsewhere have made even more effective appeals for more blatantly parochial ends. When libertarian municipalists, as part of a leftist tradition, appeal to local traditions to build a democracy, it is not to fan ethnic or local chauvinisms or to create authoritarian localist movements. Rather, they seek decentralization in a way that infuses local traditions with the best universals of the Enlightenment, especially freedom, and expand their existing institutions and diverse cultures and peoples.

To their credit, the German Greens in their original program made decentralizing demands: “Surveyable and decentralized basic units (local community, district) should be given extensive autonomy and rights of self-government... The rights of administration and self-determination for states, regions, districts, local authorities and urban districts are to be increased.” Such demands can be made again and again, calling not only for rights but for freedom for all residents but to emphasize the need for real decentralization, for the development of local institutions that are increasingly freed from the stranglehold of national institutions, and ultimately for the complete empowerment of decentralized institutions on a

Among many Greens in the United States, which has a winner-take-all electoral system, it is fashionable to praise European Green parliamentary successes and envy the systems of proportional representation that have allowed Greens to be catapulted into positions of political power at various levels in Germany, Italy, and France. Such celebrations, however, ignore a disturbing side of many European Green electoral “achievements.” In fact, to the extent that these Western European Greens have become part of parliamentary systems, their politics have most often undergone major changes for the worse, by comparison with the earlier grassroots-oriented, often revolutionary outlook of the movements upon which they based themselves. Green parties in Germany, France, Italy, and Britain have quickly adapted themselves to conventional power politics and the nation-state, variously abandoning movement ties, accountability structures, and programmatic principles in the process.

Even the American mainstream press has noticed this shift. *The New York Times* noted in 1989, “The Green groups, which once insisted on a radical overhaul of Western society, today have become more mainstream and have toned down anti-establishment language. Even the European Parliament, which they have long derided as a stodgy bureaucracy, is now looked on as an appealing forum where new power and input can be gained.”¹ The Associated Press wire service compared “the once-radical Greens” of several years ago with “today’s mellow Greens” and their “new respectability.”² Greens in many West European countries have become largely professional politicians, and their parties routine parliamentary parties with an environmentalist cast. Their radical calls for general social transformation along ecological lines have been watered down to mere environmentalism.

¹ *New York Times*, May 31, 1989.

² Associated Press, April 16, 1989.

The German Greens (*die Grünen*)

It was in then-West Germany that Greens fought out the question of the dangers of parliamentarism most thoroughly and concluded it most decisively; indeed, it was in West Germany that Greens have most notably found themselves in situations that afforded them regional- and national-level power and coalition governments. *Die Grünen* had started out perhaps more firmly base and grassroots-oriented than any other Green party in Western Europe. Back in the early 1980s they constituted themselves as the electoral arm of a mass movement whose practice was direct action and citizens' initiatives on single issues. When the *die Grünen* began to take a public political role in legislatures, they declared that the internal decision-making structure of their party caucuses in legislatures, would at all times remain subject to grassroots control. Moreover, they avowedly opposed professionalism: Both in program and in practice they were committed to a politics of collectivism, in which all members are basically equal and officeholders are merely the voice of the organization's membership who present its views on the floor of the other parliamentary bodies. "The central idea in this respect," their original program reads, "is the continuous control of all office holders, delegates, and institutions by the rank and file."

Thus, when the German Greens first entered the Bundestag in March 1983, the movement expected to control its representatives by an "imperative mandate," so that the center of political gravity would remain outside the Bundestag. Parliamentary tenure would be limited by the rotation of deputies and of other elected officials. That is, they were to surrender their posts to other Greens after a year or two, to allow as many people as possible to gain political experience. All Green deputies were to give half of their large parliamentary salaries to a special party fund for environmental and social causes and keep only the remaining portion to live on. The principle of "separation of office and mandate" prevented the

exist at all, and the possibilities for a libertarian municipalist politics may not be so obvious. In Italy, for example, each local level of government —provincial, regional, town, even neighborhood— is a replica of the national government, and the local town executive, legislative, and judicial bodies recapitulate these bodies on the national, provincial, and regional levels. In France —perhaps the most centralized of the Western republics— local governments are almost entirely powerless. The role of the nation-state is all-encompassing: Power radiates from Paris to the departments, to the arrondissements, and finally to the smallest rural hamlets. What is decided in Paris over a wide range of matters applies with incredible uniformity to every department and arrondissement, with virtually no variation on the basis of local cultures or traditions. Although the German governmental system is commonly referred to as "decentralized" because, unlike "unitary" France and Italy, the system is a "federation" of several once-independent states, "federal" legislation enjoys predominance over regional legislation in many areas.

Yet this does not mean that democratization is impossible in these republics or anywhere else. The restrictions that the Italian, French, German, British, or other central government place on its municipalities are not something that radical Greens and libertarians need passively accept or woefully lament. Quite to the contrary: these restrictions are fighting issues of crucial importance that a libertarian municipalist approach would confront in local elections throughout all the centralized states. Indeed, the local assemblies for which Greens or other ecologists may call will likely have only moral or shadow power at first. But once a moral assembly has been created and sustained, it acquires a political weight of its own, gaining a momentum that can be politically institutionalized in the form of a democratized local politics.

Democratically oriented ecologists, within or without the Greens, may explore the possibilities of developing a libertarian municipalist politics in the many strongholds in the many town

Fortunately, the political choices that lie before today's ecology and democracy movements are not limited to entering into parliamentary statecraft and becoming coopted, on the one hand, and limiting themselves to direct action and thereby going without a broader political sphere, on the other. The libertarian municipalist politics as developed by social ecologist Murray Bookchin represents an alternative approach of building on and democratizing the existing political realm at the local level, however residual or minimally existent it may be at first, but ultimately to create a new politics in a reclaimed political sphere. In this approach Greens would run candidates at the local level calling for the creation or revival neighborhood assemblies and town meetings, attempting to reclaim the local powers that have a long history of their own and that have been preempted by the nation state. Building on the tension that continues to exist between localities and the centralized government that once brought them under its control, the democratized localities could be brought into a confederation that forms a counter-power to the nation-state.²¹

In places where local democratic traditions remain within memory or where local democratic institutions are already more distinct from state, provincial, and federal levels, Greens can easily call for the expansion of local powers, for increased autonomy, and for popular participation in the control of their daily lives as the authentic locus of a new ecological politics. In Britain, for example, a fight may be fought against the Tories' plans to further centralize Britain, while the devolutionary ideas that exist around Europe now may be built upon in order to begin to form a counterpower from below.

In highly centralized nation-state systems, however, obvious tension between local and national governments seems hardly to

²¹ On libertarian municipalism, see the recent works of Murray Bookchin, including most recently *Urbanization Without Cities* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991), and "Libertarian Municipalism," *Society and Nature* 1 (1992), pp. 93–104.

concentration of power in only a few hands by barring Bundestag members from holding high office in the party itself.

The Transition to Professionalism

But access to power and money proved all too compelling. Almost as soon as *die Grünen* entered the federal apparatus, the defining democratic impulses of the movement were brought into question and even abandoned by many of the Bundestag delegates themselves. Those who became generally committed to exercising parliamentary power came to be known as "realos"; those who defended the original values, in turn, generally came to be known as "fundis" and later regrouped as the left within the movement; the also encompassed Greens who accepted the use of the parliamentary apparatus to publicize and dramatize their program. It was the realos who now rejected the principles of Green extraparliamentary grassroots-democratic radicalism and adapted to the conventional framework of the parliamentary establishment. Otto Schily, a lawyer who in the 1970s had been a flamboyant, defense attorney for the members of the Baader Meinhof terrorist group, now basked in the limelight as a Bundestag deputy and did as much as he could to professionalize *die Grünen* and eliminate rotation. (He later left the Greens and joined the Social Democratic Party.) Two former leaders of the "Spontis" (or Revolutionary Struggle, anarchistic street revolutionaries from Frankfurt in the 1970s) —Joschka Fischer and Daniel ("the Red") Cohn-Bendit— entered the party after it had achieved a measure of success and became media darlings and joined Schily in arguing that Greens should be able to hold parliamentary offices in the conventional way. Together these realos attempted to professionalize the Greens into an environmentalist and pragmatist party that would be comfortable within in the existing system rather

than remain a collectivist “non-party party” that would challenge it.

The transition to professionalism, then, can be traced back to the very beginnings of the history of Green party statecraft. Early on, the realo leaders pushed through a restructuring of the parliamentary caucus to eliminate the Greens’ mandated collectivist procedures. They gutted “working circle” procedures and strengthened the power of individual parliamentary offices. They made sure the fundis—who constituted a minority in the Bundestag party caucus, although they were in fact the majority in the party membership—got unimportant committee assignments and used the resources, access to media, and legal power that were now available to them to promote their own positions. Where the center of gravity that determined party policy had once been the extraparliamentary movement, it now shifted to elected representatives who claimed to be speaking for several million Green voters.

Needless to say, the content of realo politics shifted as well. While the fundis called for the elimination of nuclear power plants and tried to keep the peace movement going after the 1983 siting of Euromissiles in West Germany, the realos tended to concentrate on reformist, state-financed projects at best and intraparty political manipulation at worst. The realos toned down their opposition to nuclear power plants and even reversed the demand for German withdrawal from NATO (ironically, a position that they continued to hold even in 1988–89, when withdrawal from NATO became popular among many West German liberals).

The Issue of Coalition-Making

But it was the realos’ readiness to form “red-green” ruling coalition governments with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) that became the central issue of the six-year realo-fundi ideological struggle that followed. Coalition-making had been anathema to the ideals

500-pound deposit for each candidate. (It would have been reimbursed for the ones that won.) That means it now must forfeit 253 of those deposits (multiply 253 by 500), which means the party as of this writing is teetering on the precipices of bankruptcy. Sara Parkin resigned her position on the executive in the late summer of 1992. In Britain, then, the parliamentary strategy has been decisively discredited. Even if the national party survives, it may well be a long time before advocates of parliamentarism once again have their day in the British Greens.

But local Green councilors are very much to be found in Britain, numbering somewhere between 100 and 200 at the parish, district, and county levels. Their political orientations vary, and they are not necessarily decentralists—prominent Greens in Cambridge and Humberside, for example, favored the Green 2000 centralizing motion (many of its advocates are based in London). But in the localities where Greens and Green activities are strongest—at Stroud and Oxford, most notably—the affairs of the national party have been of minimal importance and the Greens tend to be more radical. They carry on with their local activities regardless of the doings of the national party.

A Democratic Alternative to Green Parliamentarism

Mindful of these and other sorry histories of Green politics, many libertarian ecologists are searching for ways to institute a democratic politics along ecological lines that will not once again undergo the fate of absorption by the very system it set out to oppose. Seeing the developments, particularly in Germany, as an object lesson—a lesson in what to avoid—the possibilities for a new beginning are being explored in some areas. The question these ecologists face is how to institutionalize democracy, mindful of what is to be avoided.

partly as a result of an intensive, slick high-priced, campaign to gain proxy votes that its supporters had waged over the previous summer. Thus, one member who showed up at Wolverhampton was able to cast proxy votes for some 460-odd party members in absentia. “Now we will get to Westminster,” the Green 2000-ites in effect exulted when the numbers showed their large victory. Now that the party has been put into shape, we will be able to convince voters that we are competent to be trusted with power, that we are not flaky radicals or —Gaia forbid! leftists! The decentralists, who were more numerous at the meeting than the vote reflected (thanks to the proxies), were left disheartened at the end of the meeting.

Come the April 1992 General Elections, the “new, improved” party structure was put to a major test. The now “efficient” Green party fielded a total of 253 candidates for Parliament. As everyone knows, in that election John Major’s Tories unexpectedly scored an astonishing victory over Labor, which in recent years Neil Kinnock had prepped and primed and moved ever more toward the right in order to come to power. Conservative pundits gloated over the dismal showing of the Labor Party (while other commentators expressed dismay at the recent demise not only of Soviet Communism but of *European social democracy*), but little attention was given to the fact that not only did the Green candidates receive an average of only 1.3 percent of the vote, but not a single Green candidate won. Noted the Oxford-based periodical *Green Line*, this was “a disaster for a party that hit 15 percent in the 1989 Euro-elections and has performed respectably in local elections over the last five years.”

In short, it was a precipitous fall into the abyss —and a massive embarrassment for the Green 2000-ites. Their parliamentary ambitions thwarted —that is, their parliamentary strategy a failure— they are now discredited and delegitimated, despite whatever excuses they may subsequently offer for the fiasco. Furthermore, in order to run for Parliament, the party had been required to pay a

of the original Green membership. It was viewed as an intolerable form of political compromise, structural unaccountability, and professional-parliamentary deal-making, not only with the center and right-wing parties but also with the SPD. When the Greens had originally organized themselves as the political arm of peace, antinuclear, and citizens’ initiative movements, they had done so in heartfelt opposition to the SPD, whose leadership had agreed to the siting of the Euromissiles, upheld German presence in NATO, and supported nuclear power. It had generally moved so far to the right that it had virtually become the junior partner of the U.S. State Department—for the Greens to make governing coalitions with it would have been unthinkable. Moreover, a coalition would mean the Greens would have to take responsibility for the SPD’s misdeeds, which would cut them off from their base. The issue of coalitions thus concerned not only the immediate strategic issue, but the whole question of compromise with the system and the very nature of the party itself, its identity as a radical political organization.

In Hesse in 1985, when the Greens received enough votes to hold the balance of power between the SPD and its conservative opponents, the Greens forged a governing coalition with the Hessian SPD. By the terms of the coalition agreement, Hesse received a Green environmental minister. Two thousand Hessian Greens—one third of the state party membership—voted 60 to 40 percent to accept the agreement. The coalition subsequently collapsed over political differences, but the precedent had been set.

For many radicals —Green and non-Green alike— the realofundi debate remains the crucial political debate of the 1980s. Although the Greens developed an international reputation as endless squabblers, this stereotype obscures the important debate over accommodation the social system and the nature of a radical movement. “The fights against NATO, for social change ... were good fights,” noted leftist spokesperson Jutta Ditfurth

in 1990. “They raised consciousness.”³ Nonetheless, after half a decade, many Green party members felt worn down by the much-publicized debate. At the end of 1989, the Greens’ second ruling coalition was formed when the Greens of then-West Berlin (known as the Alternative List, or AL) gained sufficient votes that the Social Democrats were forced to seek a coalition government with them in order to hold power in the city.

Suddenly —and shockingly— almost the whole Green party came around to the realo position and agreed to enter upon this “red-green” coalition, in flat violation of its fundamental ideals. And to do so, the AL, as the junior coalition partner, had to make major ideological concessions to the SPD in their “agreement on essentials.” Contrary to its original program, the AL now agreed to accept the state’s monopoly on violence, Allied occupation rights of the city, and the legal unity of West Berlin and the Federal Republic. Christian Ströbele (another former defense lawyer for the Red Army Fraction) acknowledged that the AL had ceded on most points to the SPD’s demands, but he exulted that the general Green congress recently held at Duisberg had enthusiastically supported his group’s coalition. Ironically, one of the justifications the AL gave for compromising with the Social Democrats was that the SPD has an admirable program in many ways —it just didn’t stick to it in practice. It would be one of their functions as Greens, they claimed, to get the SPD do so. Still, if Greens are to operate on this principle and abandon their own program in practice in order to get Social Democrats to stick to theirs, one has to wonder who will be left to get Greens to stick to their own program. The remaining Green leftists, like Rainer Trampert of Hamburg, accurately protested that for the Greens, this coalition agreement was a sellout equivalent to the old Social Democratic

³ Jutta Ditfurth quoted in “German Greens, Still Fighting One Another, Survey Election Debacle,” *New York Times* (Dec. 7, 1990), p. A6.

Still, the primary tension that remains is not between the two leaders but between the membership and the leaders. In the referendum on European union held in September 1992, Brice Lalonde and Antoine Waechter both supported the Maastricht treaty, while about a third of *Génération Ecologie* members and about half of Green Party members opposed it.²⁰

The British Greens

For the several decades that the British Green Party (under various names) has existed —which means for longer than most Green parties in the world— it has witnessed a perennial struggle between those of its members who would streamline and centralize the party, making it conventional; and the fundi-esque decentralists and counterculturalists, many of whom tend to be oriented toward “green spirituality” but all of whom are oriented toward the grassroots. These groupings have achieved various triumphs over each other at various times over many years —sometimes the manifesto would be more radical than the membership, sometimes the mentality of ex-Tory and ex-Liberal Democratic councilors dominated.

Most recently, at a party meeting in Wolverhampton (near Birmingham) in the autumn of 1991, the centralizers seemed to have achieved a decisive victory. Led by outspoken realo Sara Parkin, with the ardent support of Jonathon Porritt (currently an environmental adviser to Prince Charles), the centralizers campaigned all summer via slick circulars and succeeded in putting through a motion that transformed the structure of the party, streamlining it and bestowing upon it the blessings of suit-and-tie efficiency. There would now be a centralized speakership, a smaller number of speakers, and so on. The motion, called “Green 2000,” passed

²⁰ Alan Riding, “European Treaty Evokes Fear and Suspicion at Grass-Roots Level in France,” *New York Times* (Sept. 8, 1992), p. A12.

the March 1989 elections; when the city's Socialist mayor, Pierre Mauroy, promised the Greens they could have five of those seats if the Greens asked their eight percent of the electorate to vote the Socialist ticket, they did. Many Green leaders like Waechter enjoyed being sought after and did not want to make official alliances (invoking the Green slogan "Neither Left nor Right"), not because they were opposed to the principle of making coalitions and not because they wanted to build a new politics but in order to be free to make deals with all the parties.

Still, the party assemblies have been the stronghold of what radicalism there is in *les Verts*, much as the party congresses were in the German Greens. The membership who attended biannual party assemblies have exercised a restraining influence on the emergence of an elite leadership in the party. In 1989, when Waechter tried to reorient and professionalize the party's structure toward a centralized leadership and make it even more conventional—increasing the autonomy of party speakers by eliminating rotation—the party assembly resisted it, and it did so again in 1990. And when Cochet advocated replacing the current assembly system, in which the assemblies are open to all members, with a representative delegate assembly, the base opposed it.

Perhaps the most notorious "realo" (if the word has meaning in such a cautious, conservative party) in the party was Brice Lalonde, a one-time antinuclear activist of the Greens' socialist minority, who had entered into the Mitterand government to serve as environmental minister. In May 1990 Lalonde left to form an all-party ecologist organization, *Génération Ecologie*—using an approach that seems to echo the earlier "transversality" concept of the Italian realos. But the orientation of *Génération Ecologie* is overwhelmingly toward the Socialist Party, and indeed one of its aims is to help the Socialists get reelected in the 1993 elections. Insofar as Lalonde accuses *Les Verts* of sectarianism, and Waechter accuses *Génération Ecologie* of opportunism, perhaps one may say that a realo-fundi fight has broken out between them.

Party's 1914 sellout to the Kaiser, when it voted for war credits despite its most basic internationalist tenets.

Governing coalitions between the Greens and the SPD subsequently sprang up like mushrooms in several German states. In Lower Saxony, the Greens have been in a ruling coalition with the SPD since 1990. In North Rhine-Westphalia the party came into parliament in 1990, and it is now a realo-oriented state. For Greens in most areas of Germany, the question of whether to should form governing coalitions with other parties had long ceased to be an important dividing issue. The only point of contention on this matter was whether coalition making should be limited to the SPD, or could be made with the Christian Democrats (CDU, Chancellor Kohl's party) and Free Democrats (FDP, the liberals) as well.⁴

Hamburg was thought to be different. The home of the Green Alternative List (GAL), Hamburg was long a solid leftist stronghold within the Greens and a center of radical opposition within the Greens from the beginning. With its well-known eco-socialist spokespeople Trampert and Thomas Ebermann, the Hamburg GAL had reliably upheld its opposition to coalition-forming. The GAL's state executive committee had a leftist majority.⁵ But in elections held in December 1990, the GAL's vote fell precipitously. In response, a group of rebellious realo district politicians, calling themselves "the Wild 13," set out to topple the GAL's leftist bent. They sent out an appeal to GAL members that played upon the popular but obfuscatory stereotype of Greens as endless squabblers and complained that the trend among the Greens "toward defamation at the lowest level" had reached the point of mudslinging. While mudslinging tactics were long used by both

⁴ On CDU-Green rapprochements in Baden-Württemberg, for example, see "Mit Anzug ins Bett," *Der Spiegel* 24 (June 1990), pp. 43–44; on general preparedness for SPD and CDU coalitions, see "In der Zange," *Der Spiegel* (Mar. 11, 1991), p. 126, and "Einfach fabelhaft," *Der Spiegel* 17 (1992), pp. 24–25.

⁵ Hamburg, like Berlin, is a city that is also constituted as a *Land*, or state, with a state government and state party structures.

sides in the fundi-realo debate, this was a blatant appeal for realo hegemony—as if to say, End the squabbles by agreeing with us. Early in 1991, at a state assembly of the Hamburg GAL, the pragmatic realos succeeded in turning the leftist stronghold around. By a clear majority, the GAL assembly announced its readiness to make a coalition with the Social Democrats (who were ruling with the FDP at the time). Sixty-two leftists thereupon left the GAL. The “right-wing putsch” in Hamburg cost the radicals their last stronghold in Germany. As far as the GAL was concerned, Hamburg was now a solid realo city.⁶

Restructuring the Party

Within the party itself, when the end finally did come for the fundis, it came when it was least expected. The federal elections of December 2, 1990, precipitated the event, when the Greens failed to attain the 5 percent-of-the-vote hurdle required of any party for Bundestag representation, to the surprise of most observers. This “debacle” put the western Greens, as they were by now called, out of the Bundestag for the first time since 1983. (The Alliance 90/Greens, made up of eastern German citizens’ groups from the heady days that culminated in the fall of the Berlin wall and German unification, have been in the Bundestag since the same election.)

As befitted a conventional party, *die Grünen* generally regarded their federal defeat as a catastrophe, a “disaster” for the themselves and a disappointment to Greens worldwide. In the rethinking on the part of both fundis and realos that followed, the fundis (who by now preferred to call themselves leftists) did not offer a coherent programmatic alternative of returning to the grassroots and building a libertarian municipalist alternative, as they might have done. The realos, for their part, used the electoral defeat as an op-

⁶ See “In der Zange,” *Der Spiegel* 11 (Mar. 11, 1991), p. 126.

—even in contrast even to the French Socialist Party, with its ties to movements like SOS Racisme. When *les Verts* captured eighteen hundred city council seats in the March 1989 elections (a sixfold gain over its showing in local elections in 1983), it did not reflect roots in a strong grassroots movement. Most of the Green leadership today, despite some differences, shares alike a common orientation toward governing and give a much higher priority to it than to cultivating their potential grassroots base.

Nor have the French Greens emphasized a radical social program or seriously challenged the existing society, considering themselves beyond left and right. In France, in fact, Green votes have often been mere protest votes rather than an expression of a serious concern for environmental issues, let alone the desire to basically alter society. To be sure, they long opposed nuclear power in a country famous for its dependence on and acquiescence to nuclear power. And to be sure, party officials must adhere to the principle of rotation. But by remaining essentially noncontroversial in most respects, and especially by keeping leftist and left programs at a distance, *les Verts* have made themselves attractive to other parties as a coalition partner. Especially Greens around Antoine Waechter, the de facto party leader, favored maintaining this transcendence, while some realo members of an eco-socialist minority within *les Verts*, clustered around Yves Cochet and Didier Anger, wanted the party to have a close relationship with the Socialist Party.

As a result of their strong electoral showing in 1989, *les Verts* have been wooed by the mainstream parties of both left and right, seeking to gain the ecological vote. “The Greens found themselves the arbiter between the mainstream parties on both the left and the right, who in numerous cities were forced to bargain for the Greens’ support,” noted one observer.¹⁹ In Lille, for example, fifty-nine city council seats were up for grabs in the second round of

¹⁹ Mark Hunter, *Washington Post* (March 22, 1989).

At the same time one of the better-known and more respected of the Italian Greens, Alexander Langer (whose political orientation within the Greens is difficult to classify), published a letter of resignation not only from his positions in the federal council and in the Italian Green delegation to the European parliament but also from activity in the Green party itself. The Greens no longer had any credibility in talking about peace either with nature or among people, he said; they were self-enclosed, talking only among themselves (a complaint that reflects the failure of the strategy of “transversality”); and were ignoring the “proclaimed federalist and regionalist structure of the Greens.” He found the atmosphere in the party “suffocating,” he said, and gave up all hope of any internal change.¹⁷

The French Greens (*Les Verts* and *Génération Ecologie*)

If the French Greens (*les Verts*) have not undergone a significant transition from an original movement radicalism to a liberal or conservative parliamentary orientation, it is because they scarcely advanced a radical program to begin with.¹⁸ Almost from the beginning in 1984, their orientation has been more narrowly environmentalist than that of other European Greens, and more politically ecumenical. This continues today, when the faction with the most votes in party lists, led by Antoine Waechter, is more interested in strictly environmental issues than in social issues, as far as it can be determined.

They have had relatively few ties to social movements, in marked contrast with *die Grünen*, whose original program incorporated the whole range of 1980s radical causes and were initially heavily grounded in an antinuclear, antimilitarist, and citizens’ grassroots base. *Les Verts* seemed more like an elite than a movement

¹⁷ “Si dimette Alex Langer,” in *ibid.*, pp. 93–94.

¹⁸ This section is based in part on interviews with Daniel Blanchard and Jean-Jacques Gandini, as well as Brian Doherty, “The Fundi-Realo Controversy: An Analysis of Four European Green Parties,” *Environmental Politics* 1 (Spring 1992), esp. pp. 112–14.

portunity. Joschka Fischer, the former Sponti who was by now the best-known realo and de facto party boss, remarked that after what he thought would be a mere “historical pause” in Bundestag representation for the party, *die Grünen* should be “renewed” (read: restructured) from the ground up and find “a perspective for the post-socialist left.”⁷ Along with Antje Vollmer of the reconciliatory “Fresh Start” group (Vollmer was speaker of the party’s Bundestag *Fraktion* up until the December election and had long since attempted to move the Greens toward a centrist, more strictly environmental position), he decided that the time had come to end the ideological debates over coalition-making, the nature of the party, party organization, and other issues and to reconstitute the Greens as a regular-style party.

The Greens would shed their image as “squabblers” and show themselves to be serious governing-coalition partners. They advanced the view that the Greens, instead of the FDP, should become the coalition partner of choice when the two largest parties, SPD and CDU, needed one. They would bid farewell to their basic ideals and to their youthful horror of bourgeois conventionality. No longer dilettantes, they would now become orderly, competent politicians. No longer would they want to get rid of capitalism, but rather deliver piecemeal reforms of society. Said Fischer, “We need a party that will govern this country, from the cities to the federal level, by 1994 at the latest.”

Fischer and Vollmer prepared a drive for the “structural reform” of the Green party, which would in effect eliminate the features that had once allowed the Greens to call themselves an “anti-party party,” including the separation of office and mandate and the rotation of offices (which had largely ceased anyway). The realo “reformers” proposed that the party be spoken for by two federal party chiefs instead of the existing committee of speakers. (Fischer him-

⁷ Joschka Fischer quoted in “Dagobert vorm Fleischerladen,” *Der Spiegel* 50 (Dec. 1990), p. 28.

self preferred that there be only one party chief, with a general secretary on the side, but even his own realo ranks resisted this degree of centralization as a bit too extreme.) The “structural reforms” would also effectively shift power away from fundi strongholds and toward realo strongholds. Thus, instead of the federal executive committee (the *Bundeshauptausschuss*, long dominated by fundis), the realos proposed the establishment of a federal party council (*Bundesparteirat*), to be made up of members of the state party committees and the state legislative caucuses —both strong realo turfs. All told, the “structural reforms” would turn the Greens into what Fischer himself would call a “*stinknormal*” —stinkingly normal— party. These “reforms” were to be voted on at the Neumünster party congress at the end of April 1991. The fundi radicals, enraged, called Fischer and Vollmer “gravediggers” of the party and vowed to fight them at Neumünster as their last stand.⁸

Meanwhile, as the result of a statewide election in Fischer’s Hesse, held a month after the federal defeat, a new SPD-Green governing coalition as to be formed. Fischer and Hans Eichel (the SPD coalition partner) carved out a new hundred-page coalition treaty that, unlike the first SPD-Green coalition treaty in Hesse, allowed no room for substantial arguments such as would cause the coalition to fall apart. It was calculated to show that despite previous coalition “disasters” in Hesse and Berlin (in 1990), the SPD and the Greens could actually work blissfully together in a ruling coalition. When the ruling coalition took power in April 1991, Fischer became environmental minister (as well as Bundesrat minister, which gives him a posh Bonn office) and declared, in true realo form, that if this Hesse coalition shattered, it would be “the end of the Green experiment altogether.”⁹

⁸ See “Dagobert vorm Fleischerladen,” *Der Spiegel* 50 (Dec. 1990), p. 29; “Heller Wahnsinn,” *Der Spiegel* 16 (1991), pp. 23–24.

⁹ “Blitzfink ohne Widerspruch,” *Der Spiegel* 12 (1991), p. 30.

they’ve done nothing, spent everything,” complained one of the party’s founders.

Shortly before the European Parliamentary elections in 1989, militant members of the Radical Party and former members of *Democrazia proletariana* formed a second Green party-group. Called the Rainbow Greens (*Arcobaleno Verde*), they did not distinguish themselves from the original *Verdi* by any meaningful points of ideology. Rather, they thought a political party should have a greater degree of professionalism than the original Greens had. Burdened by few pretensions to being a movement as opposed to a party, they bluntly favored professionalism because, they said, it allows a political group to have greater “resources” to do more things. Libertarian critics felt that the older Greens responded by hypocritically when *i Verdi* piously invoked the hallowed need for a party to have movement ties, since they themselves had virtually separated themselves from the movement in becoming political careerists in their own right.

By the summer of 1992, the level of revulsion of Italians generally at their governmental system had reached a new high, and in the general elections the ruling four-party coalition around the Christian Democrats failed to attain its necessary majority. The Greens, too, suffered what was widely seen as a decisive defeat, failing to attain expected vote percentages based on previous elections. An article in the main periodical of countercultural, grassroots-oriented ecologists in Italy, *AAM Terra Nuova*, criticized the Green parliamentarians’ lack of structural accountability and their use of parliamentary stipends to advance their own careers as reasons for the debacle. It called upon Green political activists to “come back to the periphery” and undergo a process of rethinking the whole Green project.¹⁶

¹⁶ Sandra Borelli, “Una vittoria amara,” *AAM Terra Nuova* 63–64 (May-August 1992), pp. 92–94.

but should continue to work at the grassroots level. The Greens, after all, had existed for only two years by that point. But other groups had already decided to present Liste Verdi in elections, and lacking a structure that prevented them, they proceeded to do so beginning in 1987, in flat opposition to the feeling of the grassroots.

Nor were these realos bound to adhere to any clearly defined ideology or statement of principles. This too was part of a deliberate strategy: in reaction to the 1970s domination of the left by ultraradical Marxist-Leninists, many Green counterculturalists felt that ideology would lead inevitably to dogmatism and party lines. They sought to avoid this by deliberately keeping their political values and principles loose, in favor of diversity and flexibility. The “postideological” political strategy that became available to the structurally unaccountable realos was work with other parties across the political spectrum. Toni Negri described this theory of “transversalism” when he wrote in 1987:

because of their “transversality,” the Italian Greens include many different tendencies and discourses... From the political point of view, this excludes demagogy and limits opportunities for sectarian manipulation. Its *general* character as a political movement makes it unlikely ... to be swept up by minority, utopian stances. In short, in no way does it lay itself open to the trap of “fundamentalism.”¹⁵

With no accountability in terms of either structure or program, then, the parliamentary Greens—many of them from the ultraradical groups of the 1960s and 1970s—split off from the base and took control of political decision-making. They refused to rotate. Once in power, they became principally preoccupied with the management of their power. They received a great deal of funding from the government for being in parliament—the equivalent of six million dollars. “They were going to form an EcoInstitute, an Ecobank—but

¹⁵ Toni Negri, “The Greening of Italy,” *New Statesman* (Sept. 4, 1987), pp. 20–21.

The Neumünster Congress

Echoing Fischer, Hubert Kleinert, a noted realo, observed that either the Greens would put the “structural reforms” through at the Neumünster congress, “or the light will go out” of the Green party. Many of the delegates at the congress, held at the end of April 1991, were uncomfortable with the realos’ proposed “structural reform” and with the turn the party was taking generally. They were suspicious of the realo proclivity to orient the Greens toward the media and of the desire for “effectiveness.” Nonetheless, they gave the realos most of their “structural reforms” by a two-thirds majority vote. Only separation of office and mandate was not passed. Moreover, they passed a consensus paper to the effect that opposition to capitalism ambitions is *passee*, which Jutta Ditfurth observes is “farther to the right than the papal encyclical on capitalism.”¹⁰ “Realissimo” Fischer—now unrivaled as “the most powerful man in the party,” according to realo Udo Knapp, a conference boss—found “little to whine about” in this right-wing victory.¹¹ The Radical Ecology core of the leftists, including Ditfurth, thereupon announced their departure from the Green party and have since formed a new group called the Ecological Left.

In the spring of 1992, Kohl’s weakened CDU government facing the prospect of possibly losing its power in the upcoming 1994 federal elections, was toying with the idea of aiming for a federal-level ruling coalition with the Greens. One CDU caucus member said the Greens were closer to the CDU than were the Social Democrats. Kohl himself said the discussions were “not prejudiced,” while former CDU chairman Heiner Geissler said that “the Greens have become a normal party” and that a coalition, if it came about, would result “from the logic of their normality.” They are, Geissler said, “the real fourth party.” Joschka Fischer, for his part, refused to

¹⁰ Jutta Ditfurth interview, summer 1991.

¹¹ “Mühselige Wurstelei,” *Der Spiegel* 19 (Apr. 1991), pp. 20–21.

discourage the discussions, affirming that ecological construction “would be easier to bring about with the CDU” than, he seems to mean, the SPD.¹²

Under the superficial veil of their old “values” —a very thin veil indeed, now— the Greens can seek positions and make compromises to their hearts’ content. The ex-anarchists, ex-Spontis, ex-Marxists, and ex-radicals have become “practical,” “realistic,” and “power-oriented.” Leftists in Green movements worldwide ought to bid the German Greens a final farewell as a party with any pretensions either of being leftist or of having a movement base.

The Italian Greens (*Liste Verdi* and *Arcobaleno Verde*)

In other Western European countries during the 1980s, Greens repeated the basic realo-fundi struggle of *die Grünen*, albeit on a smaller scale with some important variations.¹³ The basic conflict between a popular movement and unaccountable parliamentarians also unfolded in Italy, although it was not debated in those terms, let alone with the intensity of *die Grünen*. The center of gravity of the Italian Greens nonetheless shifted rapidly from a movement to a parliamentary orientation.

Founded as Greens in Florence in 1984, *i Verdi* gathered local groups of antinuclear activists, ecologists and environmental activists, conscientious objectors, citizens’ groups, and religious groups into a loose cultural “archipelago” that ran the length of the Italian peninsula. They were linked much more by shared values than by structure; indeed, in Italy, the word “green” often simply replaced the words “counterculture” and “alternative.” As a loose archipelago, *i Verdi* had —and continue to have— no shared

¹² “Einfach fabelhaft,” *Der Spiegel* 17 (1992), pp. 24–25.

¹³ This section is based in part on interviews with Franco LaCecla (Rome), Marina Padovese (Venice), and Rosalba Sbalchierro (Tuscany).

structure of organizational accountability by which the grassroots can exert control over elites or even, beyond a few general ideas, any clear statement of principles by which parliamentarians could be guided and to which they were responsible.

Indeed, the Italian Greens are notable for their conscious and deliberate commitment to a weak party organization, as the result of their reaction against the *partitocrazia*, or “party-ocracy,” by which strong parties exert great influence over matters of statecraft in Italy, with the result that bureaucracy, patronage, and corruption are rampant. The Greens, whose revulsion to this system is felt widely in Italy, sought to avoid the development of bureaucracy in their own party by avoiding structure as such as much as possible and remaining loose and informal, to allow an alternative ecological politics to develop at the grassroots.¹⁴

The assemblies of *i Verdi* remained loose, and in the first years, they were dominated by the grassroots. But soon many libertarians among the Greens were disturbed to find that former members of 1970s New Left were entering the movement and calling for the Greens to enter into parliamentary politics. The grassroots-oriented counterparts of the German fundis rightly feared that the ex-radicals, having abandoned their former sometimes-violent revolutionary aims, were now simply using the Greens to enter the system of power politics—not unlike former radicals in *die Grünen* like Fischer.

At the 1986 Green congress in Verona, the proposal was made that slates of candidates or “Green lists” —*Liste Verdi*— be drawn up for local, regional, provincial, and national elections, which they could easily do in Italy’s relatively open electoral system of proportional representation. More than 50 percent of the groups at the congress felt that the Greens should not go to Rome at that time

¹⁴ See Brian Doherty, “The Fundi-Realo Controversy: An Analysis of Four European Green Parties,” *Environmental Politics* 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 95–120, esp. pp. 108–10.