

Radical Greens achieve legitimacy

by Neal Watson

In a 60 Minutes feature last February, correspondent Morley Safer called West Germany's Green party a coalition of "ecological alarmists, homosexuals, feminists, vegetarians and resurrected protesters of the sixties."

Newsweek magazine, reflecting the popular bias of the Western press, calls them "radical."

And the bastion of the conservative American press, The Wall Street Journal, dismissed the Greens as "retreads of the hippie movement."

Yet despite the hostility of the Western press, the Green party has emerged as the focal point, symbolically at least, behind a new popular movement that is capable of turning out hundreds of thousands of people regularly for a single demonstration in one of the major centres in Germany. The "Peace Movement" or "Atlantic Alliance," as it is called, has a distinct ideological character that is represented in the platform of the Green party. The essential philosophy of the Green party is dedicated to the removal of nuclear arsenals from European soil and, in particular, to stopping the proposed U.S. deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles in Germany.

The German Greens have succeeded in uniting a disparate collection of ideological groups into one workable and credible political party. The "Green Coalition" consists of pacifists, ecologists, leftists, feminists and other groups fiercely committed to their vision of a nuclear free, environmentally safe world.

The Greens, although hardly posing an electoral threat to any established political party in West Germany, have succeeded, of late, in capturing the attention and respect of the Western media and political establishment. This respect reflects the

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Greens new political clout and the growing realization by decision makers in the West of the seriousness of the peace movement. Perhaps more important though, has been their success in capturing popular attention and attracting ordinary people to their movement; ordinary people afraid of the possibility of nuclear war. The Greens have focused on the most fundamental of issues, peace.

The Greens avoid technical or geopolitical comparisons of Soviet SS20s and U.S. Pershing IIs and are cynical and impatient with the arms reduction process. Rather, they have as their goal something far more radical: unilateral disarmament for Germany and the abandonment of the theory of deterrence. The influence and the sheer numbers of the peace marchers has decision makers in the West concerned. This Green-coordinated campaign to oppose the Pershing IIs has not put the deployment in doubt, but it has damaged the credibility of

NATO. Furthermore, symbolically this opposition signals to government leaders in the West the frustration of citizens with the endless debate over numbers and types of nuclear weapons and no progress at arms reduction talks. The Greens have been successful in exploiting the legitimate fears of the ordinary citizen.

Critical to the success of the Green party was their reasonable showing in this years West German national election. By electing 27 members to the lower house of the Parliament, the Greens moved from radical fringe group to legitimate political party. Certainly, with only 27 members, the Greens do not pose any threat to the majority of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Union and its coalition partners, but the Greens do represent a large and politically aware element of the German electorate that Kohl must take into account when formulating government policy.

Though the Conservative Kohl is a staunch supporter of the missile deployment and his election would seem to indicate West German voters endorsed his position, he cannot ignore the importance of the peace movement and the Green party.

Recognition for the Green party has come as a result of their success in West Germany, but the

Canadians remain skeptical about the Green party. Rightly or wrongly, the Greens are labelled radical and identified with a disquieting factor in society. Certainly some of the responsibility for the radical image lies with the press. However, there is a militant element within this movement that warrants the radical tag.

The German Greens are perceived, not correctly, as a one-issue party. This is an effective, if not new, political device. By identifying themselves with one-issue, the Greens have succeeded in attracting support from diverse elements of the population. Thus they seem more like a popular movement than a political party. In addition, the fact that the "issue" is so fundamental and urgent for all of us makes the movement seem more legitimate. It is difficult to argue against someone who simply advocates peace.

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The Canadian Greens feel that the basic principles that unite them can work in the Canadian political context. They offer five general principles: peace and disarmament, an ecologically sound economy, conservation, human rights and participatory democracy. The Greens allow that these ideas are not innovative, but they maintain that this is the first time a political party has offered them as a "unified platform." The concepts are deliberately general and meant to be defined in terms of the political context of the individual nations.

As in Germany and other European countries, the people working for the Green party in Canada are intelligent, politically aware and committed individuals disillusioned with the established political process. They are profoundly dissatisfied with mainstream political parties and the lack of answers to urgent problems. To members of the Green party, the principles the party articulates translate into sound political policy.

Although it is unlikely the Greens will achieve any electoral success in Canada, the appeal of their philosophy to many Canadians should not be underestimated. To many people they represent an attempt to rationally address the most urgent issues of the day.

The Greens appear to be a legitimate mass movement in Europe. They have stirred the emotions of many people. The Greens have appealed to our fundamental instinct for survival.

The Greens have succeeded in creating a dedicated coalition committed to eliminating the nuclear arsenals of the world. It would appear, judging by the numbers and the commitment of the members, that the Green party is a force to be reckoned with.



Green movement is becoming visible throughout the world. Formal organizations have appeared in many countries in Europe, in Australia and New Zealand, the U.S. and Canada.

The Canadian Green party is attempting to establish at the federal level. The party ran a candidate in the Mission-Port Moody by-election on August 29th. It is holding a national "founding" convention November 4, 5, 6. Spokesman Vic Yanda, a coordinator for the federal Green party in Edmonton, says that the convention will attempt to write a constitution and develop specific policy positions.

In Alberta, where provincial law requires the signatures of 0.3 per cent (4,701) of the electorate to charter a political party, the Greens are only about 1,000 signatures short. The Alberta Green party has chapters in Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge.

The party is also, believe it or not, on campus. According to Asmus Stoyke of the Campus Greens, 300 signatures have been collected on campus for the drive toward official recognition.

Despite the fact that those associated with the Canadian Greens are quick to deny any formal organizational link with the German Greens, the philosophical outlook is very similar. Consequently, the perception of the party is negative, and

GATEWAY

DINWOODIE
2nd Floor SUB

Tickets are available from the SUB Box Office (2nd Floor SUB) and various club members.

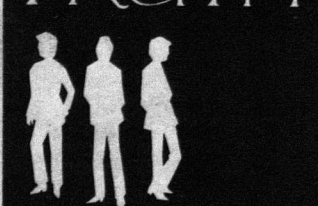
Absolutely no minors admitted.

UP & COMING:

- November 19
B-Sides
- November 25
Sound FX

U of A Women's Centre
present


TRUTH



with Special Guests

Friday, November 3, 8 PM.

U of A Golden Bears
Gymnastics Club
present




DAVID
WILCOX

with guests

Saturday, November 5, 8 PM.

U of A Electrical Engineers
& MLS present

Secret
Society



Thursday, November 10, 8 PM.

Thursday, November 3, 1983