

# Thirty years of the German Green Party

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Thirty years ago today, on January 13, 1980, the Green Party was founded in the German city of Karlsruhe.

At the time, the party was regarded by many, including its founders, as an alternative to the established bourgeois parties, and even as the pioneer of a new society. Thirty years later, the Greens have found their place as a run-of-the-mill bourgeois party, politically situated somewhere between the Social Democrats and the conservatives. It is appropriate and necessary to draw a balance sheet.

The founders of the Greens stemmed from the generation that had revolted in 1968 against the malaise of the educational system, the Vietnam War, and the oppressive atmosphere of the Adenauer era. At the beginning of the 1970s, they took different directions: some joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD), others retreated into their private lives and cultivated an alternative lifestyle, others founded various Maoist groupings and worshipped Chinese-style Stalinism.

In the Greens, they joined together again, supplemented by anti-nuclear activists, environmentalists, feminists and a few “blood and soil” ideologues. The common denominator of these different currents was their rejection of the class struggle.

From the ‘68 movement they brought the prejudice that the working class was an apathetic mass, susceptible to backward ideas and fully integrated into the system by consumerism. The renewal of society therefore had to take place in another way: by changing one’s way of thinking and living, and through environmental protection, pacifism and a revitalization of bourgeois democracy.

The theoretical mentors of the ‘68 movement—Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, etc.—were the godfathers at the cradle of the Greens, even though this was not immediately

apparent. They had replaced the historical materialist standpoint, according to which “the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life” (Marx), with an idealistic outlook that regarded the individual as the driving force for social change. In place of the class struggle, they regarded the spiritual, psychological or sexual liberation of the individual as the real engine of social progress.

Rudi Dutschke, who had absorbed all of these theories and combined them into an ideological amalgam that made him the spokesman for the ‘68 movement, was intimately involved in the preparations for the founding congress of the Greens. He died three weeks in advance of the congress as a result of the long-term consequences of an assassination attempt.

While the radical airs of the Greens were enough to scare some conservatives and Social Democrats, the party’s radicalism was largely limited to external appearances such as hair, clothing and lifestyle. At bottom, they were backward looking and conservative, in the strictly literal sense.

The Greens did not criticize society from the standpoint of the working class, the existence of which is inseparably bound up with modern industry and which can resolve its social problems only by liberating the productive forces from the chains of private property. Rather, the Greens criticized society from the standpoint of the petit-bourgeois, who feels threatened by modern production and attempts to overcome the most obvious social problems by returning to older forms of production. This was most clearly evident in the party’s economic program, which called for a “turn away from the national and international division of labor” in favor of “consumer-oriented production for local and regional economic markets.”

The basically reactionary nature of this program did not prevent some purported Marxists, such as the

Pabloite leader Ernest Mandel, from enthusiastically welcoming the Greens as a “left alternative” to the SPD.

The Greens rapidly demonstrated the falseness of Mandel’s assessment. Their programmatic declarations opposing the destruction of the environment, war and other social ills proved no hindrance to reaching an agreement with the ruling elite. The party’s development was ultimately determined by its social being, rather than the utopian ideas circulating in the ranks of the founding members. The Greens based themselves on the urban, better-educated middle classes, whose standard of living rose in the 1980s and 1990s, while that of the working class stagnated and declined.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the Greens entered a number of state parliaments. In 1983 they were elected to the federal parliament for the first time, and in 1985 Joschka Fischer became the first ever Green minister of a German state (Hesse). In 1998, the Greens joined the federal government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD).

The price paid by the Greens for entering the federal government was the dumping of their avowal of pacifism. Even before the new government was formed, the Greens voted for German participation in the NATO war against Yugoslavia at a special meeting of parliament.

The former street fighter Joschka Fischer was entrusted with the prestigious office of foreign minister in order to overcome deeply rooted popular opposition to international deployments by the German army. Today, the Greens rank amongst the most aggressive proponents of German militarism. They demand the creation of a professional army and support the war in Afghanistan.

The Greens also stand on the right wing of bourgeois politics when it comes to social questions. In coalition with the SPD, they implemented the most extensive program of social cuts in the history of the federal republic.

While Schröder’s anti-welfare “Agenda 2010” provoked tensions within the SPD and led to the split-off of the Left Party, the Greens stubbornly backed his policies. They encouraged Schröder to remain firm in the face of broad public opposition and called for even more drastic cuts in public expenditure.

Today, the Greens are ready and willing to cooperate in government with the conservatives. The first Christian Democratic Party (CDU)-Green coalitions have already been established in the states of Hamburg and Saarland—in Saarland as part of a three-way coalition with the free market Free Democratic Party.

Under conditions of the deepest economic crisis in three quarters of a century, it is vital, particularly for the younger generation, to draw the necessary conclusions from the right-wing evolution of the Greens. None of the ills of capitalist society can be overcome with Green remedies limited to the alleviation of superficial symptoms. The intensification of militarism, social inequality and attacks on democratic rights can be opposed only by a party that bases itself on the class struggle, unites the working class internationally, and fights on the basis of a socialist program for the abolition of capitalism.

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