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## The Reverse Watermelon: A Comparative View of the Environment and the Green Movement in the German Democratic Republic

Rachel Guillory

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**The Reverse Watermelon:  
A Comparative View of the Environment and the Green  
Movement in the German Democratic Republic**

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of  
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## Table of Contents

<i>Abstrakt auf deutsch</i> (Summary in German) .....	4
Introduction .....	5
1. Energy industries of the German Democratic Republic .....	7
1.1. Coal .....	7
1.1.1. Adolf Hennecke as national hero .....	8
1.2. Nuclear and uranium extraction .....	9
1.3. State ministries .....	10
2. Start of green movement in the German Democratic Republic .....	11
2.1. Organizations .....	12
2.1.1. Lutheran church .....	13
2.1.2. <i>Neues Forum</i> .....	14
3. <i>Die Wende</i> .....	15
3.1. The West German Green Party .....	16
3.1.1. History .....	16
3.1.1.1. Leaders and communist roots .....	18
3.2. The German question .....	19
3.2.1. <i>Bündnis 90</i> .....	19
3.2.2. Merging of East and West Greens .....	20
4. Post- <i>Wende</i> : rebuild, renew, recover .....	22
4.1. Equalizing standards between two former states .....	22
4.2. Non-governmental/non-profit organizations .....	24
4.2.1. BUND/Friends of the Earth .....	24

	3
4.2.2. Greenpeace .....	25
5. Germany today .....	26
5.1. Energy usage: renewable vs. non-renewable sources .....	26
5.2. Building policies .....	28
6. International .....	29
6.1. UN Climate Negotiations: Kyoto & beyond .....	30
7. View from America .....	32
7.1. Energy usage: renewable vs. non-renewable sources .....	33
Conclusion .....	35
Bibliography .....	36

**Abstrakt auf deutsch (Summary in German)**

Diese Arbeit behandelt die Geschichte der Umweltbewegung in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Weil Braunkohle und Atomkraft ein Schwerpunkt in den Industrien der DDR waren, gab es damals weit verbreitete Umweltprobleme.. In den 80er Jahren war die protestantische Kirche für viele Umweltaktivisten ein Dach, unter dem man Schutz vor dem ostdeutschen Staat finden konnte. Unter diesem Dach entstand eine Organisation namens Neues Forum, die nach der Wende eine große Rolle in der Grünen Partei des vereinigten Deutschlands spielen würde.

Das Ende der DDR kam nicht zuletzt auf Grund der Veränderungen in der Sowjetunion seit Mitte der 80er Jahre. Die zwei Deutschlands vereinigten sich 1990, aber nicht ohne Schwierigkeiten. Ostdeutschland hatte immer noch viel Umweltverschmutzung, und Westdeutschland musste den Wiederaufbau und die Sanierung der ehemaligen DDR finanzieren. Viele Umweltorganisationen wie BUND und Greenpeace halfen dabei, und jetzt kann man sagen, dass die Bundesländer im Osten heutzutage einen Schritt voran sind, weil es jetzt keine Atomkraftwerke im Osten mehr gibt.

Zum Schluss führe ich die Zahlen von Deutschlands heutigem Energieverbrauch im Vergleich zu den USA und zu anderen Ländern auf. Deutschland ist weltweit berühmt für seine Umweltpolitik und ist ein progressives Beispiel für andere Länder, die auch ihre Lebens- und Umweltqualität verbessern wollen.

## Introduction

As Thomas Rohrkrämer states, “right-wing [German] politicians saw the Greens as traditional leftists in disguise ‘like a [water]melon: green on the outside, red inside’...” (Rohrkrämer p. 47) This observation stems from the fact that many of the founders of the West German Green Party originated from the radical Marxist student movements of 1968, such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit<sup>1</sup>. The East German Greens—and their non-political community organizer counterparts—developed in an opposite manner. Despite the suppressive efforts of the socialist government of the German Democratic Republic, they formed clandestine networks of environmentally minded individuals. Thus, the East German green movement was red on the outside, but green from within.

The former German Democratic Republic (GDR) consisted of five German states in northeastern Germany and the Soviet sector of Berlin. As a socialist satellite state of the former Soviet Union, the markets and industries were managed from East Berlin, which answered to the Kremlin. One of the top industries in the GDR was the extraction of raw materials, such as coal and uranium. When it was discovered that the soil in the states of Thuringia and Saxony contained uranium (albeit a very negligible amount), the Soviet Union strip-mined the area to extract the uranium for making nuclear weapons, since the Soviets were involved in the Cold War at the time. Entire communities were

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<sup>1</sup> The son of Jewish German immigrants in France, Daniel Cohn-Bendit was best known during the turbulent years of European student revolt for his leadership in the riots of Nanterre and Sorbonne in early 1968. Contact was made between Cohn-Bendit and the German *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* in the same year, and he quickly became friends with his German counterpart, Rudi Dutschke. With both French and German citizenship, Cohn-Bendit has been able to move back and forth between the green movements of France and Germany. The details of his involvement are discussed further on pages 17-18.

destroyed for the sake of mining, due to the improper disposal of the byproducts involved with mining. I plan to examine a few very specific instances in order to demonstrate the Soviet grip on the overly dependent GDR economy and thus the lack of environmental protection during the 40-year socialist regime.

Using this uranium-mining site as my specific locality for research, I will track the changes that occurred in state-operated environmental developments as the Iron Curtain came down in 1989/1990. When the socialist system was replaced with the social democracy of West Germany, how did the new politics affect eastern environmental concerns, especially with respect to the Green Party? Particularly interesting is how the former communist states of today's Germany match up to their western counterparts in terms of the future of environmental development—i.e. renewable energy sources vs. fossil fuels, sustainable technologies, etc.

In this research, I explore the environmental struggles of the former East Germany while under Russian control, during the re-unification process of 1989-1990, and afterwards leading up to the present day as the “new states” of the Federal Republic of Germany. I seek to uncover the environmental activism that occurred in the later years of the GDR, if there ever was any to speak of, because I want to know more about what East German citizens attempted to do about the abuse of their resources by the Soviets. Lastly, I compare East German environmental campaigns to their counterparts in West Germany, as well as present-day German policies to those in America and internationally. I ask how grassroots political activism has evolved in the eastern states of

Germany in the transition from socialism to capitalism in order to understand its effectiveness in these different types of government.

## **1. Energy industries of the German Democratic Republic Industry**

A majority of the environmental issues facing the GDR in the 1970s and '80s were a result of the country's hyper-industrialized cities. For this reason, I will first examine the primary energy sources industries of East Germany and explore the dangerous impacts of each before outlining how some East German citizens reacted to these dangers.

### **1.1. Coal**

During the forty-year lifespan of the GDR, the landscape was seriously damaged by industrial waste. As the country's primary export, the raw materials industry was overworked, and production and waste thus went unchecked. The mining and burning of *Braunkohle*, known in English as either brown coal or lignite, was the most environmentally harmful practice at the time. East Germany mined more brown coal than any other nation in the world and emitted 5.6 million tons of sulphur dioxide (a byproduct of brown coal) per year. The burning of brown coal and subsequent emission of sulphur dioxide contributed to frequent acid rains and smog. Acid rain was, in fact, poisoning Germany's famed Black Forest, and this "sickness" of the trees was called *Waldsterben*. When it was discovered in the early 1980s that the emissions from Eastern Europe were affecting the environment of Western Europe (especially in the form of smog), an agreement was reached between East and West to reduce sulphur pollution from power plants and factories by 30%. Upon investigation of the plants in question,



western authorities discovered that one East German power plant was emitting more sulphur dioxide into the air than the entire country of Sweden. (Pearce p. 119) The Black Forest was not the only wild space being affected by acid rain. The forests of the Harz Mountains in Saxony were also suffering from air pollution and vegetation simply could not grow anymore in certain areas. Winds don't only blow westward either. Poland was also suffering the effects of the dirty brown coal plants lined up along the East German border—in 1991 reportedly having emitted 2 million tons of sulphur dioxide over the border. (Pearce 121)

East German coal industries were pressured by the Soviets to produce as much coal as possible and received payment only for how much they produced rather than for the hours required to produce it. East German workers resisted this because it caused wages to drop. In a desperate attempt to keep its workers but meet productivity demands, industry management set very weak productivity quotas for their workers that could easily be met and exceeded.

#### **1.1.1. Adolf Hennecke as national hero**

In order to promote higher productivity and motivate other workers, the East German coal industry management prepared a mine in 1948 so that coalminer Adolf Hennecke would mine 387 percent of his quota that day. The purpose for setting up this victory was to incite a “Hennecke activist” movement across the GDR, much in the way that Alexei Stakhanov did for the USSR in the 1930s. “Hennecke’s feat was supposed to inspire workers by demonstrating to the average person that it indeed was possible to do three and a half times the normal amount of work in a shift.” (Kopstein 407) A “Hennecke Week” (in which

workers were encouraged to put forth more effort and produce more coal than usual) was instituted at many mining locations, but the party's efforts to motivate the laborers were not well received. "In many enterprises, workers were not even aware of when or in what sorts of competitions they participated." (Kopstein 406)

## **1.2. Nuclear and uranium extraction**

Uranium mining was among the most dangerous but also most important industries in the GDR, especially because uranium was essential to the production of Soviet nuclear weapons during the Cold War. The small towns of Gera and Ronneburg in eastern Thuringia housed the mining sites of the Soviet-German uranium plant under the name Wismut. First established in 1949, this location turned out to be the largest source of uranium in all of Europe. However, the distribution of uranium in the soil was so irregular and difficult to collect that the ore contained an average of only 0.8% uranium. Waste from the Wismut factory was secretly stored underground, which contributed to soil pollution in the area. The "Wismut GmbH" is now an on-going sanitation project to clean up the pollution in the area and restore the land by 2010. As the featured locale for the *Bundesgartenschau* (BUGA) in 2007, the uranium mine was turned into a large green recreational valley for the landscaping exhibit under the name "*Neue Landschaft*", complete with gardens, playgrounds, and a bicycle path.

Uranium was not just useful for building nuclear weapons, but also for creating energy for electricity. In 1957, the GDR drafted a plan to build 250 nuclear reactors. But according to a July 1987 country study done by the US

Library of Congress: "As of 1985, East Germany possessed only one functioning nuclear reactor for production of electricity--in Lubmin near Greifswald--despite earlier more ambitious plans. In 1985 only about 10.5 percent of East Germany's electricity needs were met by nuclear energy, which represented a decline from 12 percent in 1980." (Gates ch. 3) More nuclear plants were scheduled for construction, but after the Chernobyl catastrophe of 1986, support for nuclear energy declined drastically. The accident involved a Soviet nuclear reactor in the small town of Chernobyl in the Ukraine, which unexpectedly released clouds of radioactive gas across 218,000 square kilometers, thus affecting not just the surrounding area but the entire eastern corridor, including the GDR. The East German government turned a blind eye to the growing number of cancer cases in the regions with nuclear power plants, which were oftentimes a result not only of emissions in the air but also of the practices used to store nuclear waste. These chemical byproducts were stored underground, where they leaked into the drinking water, because there were no water treatment plants in existence then.

### **1.3. State ministries**

The *Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt* (Society for Nature and the Environment—the East German equivalent of the Environmental Protection Agency) was established in 1980 and controlled by the state within the *Kulturbund* (Association for Culture) as a forum for environmental concerns. As of 1987, around 380 citizens' organizations belonged to the *Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt*. (Baukloh & Roose p. 86) It provided them an apolitical space for discussion and exchanging ideas, while the state could monitor their activities.

The East German state actually focused less on environmental protection and more on distracting small civic activist groups from their intended campaigns. This department was also responsible for the public ban on any information regarding environmental protection or problems. But despite the general lack of action or environmental accountability on the state's part, East Germany became the second European country (after Sweden) to pass holistic environmental legislation—the *Landeskulturgesetz* of 1970. However, this legislation was soft on the country's polluting industries and largely lacked implementation. The small steps being taken in the GDR to improve the state of its environment “were frequently outweighed by the exceptionally unecological organization of the economy.” (Hope p. 154)

## **2. Start of green movement in the German Democratic Republic**

Much of the environmental movements around the globe were catalyzed in 1962 by a biologist's shocking exposure of the harmful uses of DDT (or Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane). Rachel Carson's indictment of the pesticide industry, *Silent Spring*, ignited an outcry of public discontent in America. She revealed that when used to kill insects in farming crops, this synthetic chemical would end up in the soil, and then transferred to the ground water, and thus into rivers, lakes, and subsequently in fish. It was discovered that, through this process, DDT could cause cancer when humans eat contaminated fish, or even the plants sprayed directly with DDT. Carson's finding filled a hole in the environmental argument, linking it with human health and bringing it to the

public's attention for the first time. It was a criticism of the American government's inattention to public health. But it wasn't until 1972 that Congress banned the practice of DDT spraying—well after Carson herself died of breast cancer. *Silent Spring* was not necessarily received well by the governments of the eastern bloc. Despite its potential to point the blame of environmental abuse at the capitalist West, the book was banned in Hungary.

## 2.1. Organizations

Due to the constant surveillance that East German citizens were under by the dreaded *Staatssicherheitsdienst* (the East German secret police, more commonly known as the *Stasi*), environmental organizations were few and far between up until the very end of the 40-year socialist regime. There were, however, individuals known as *Einzelkämpfer*, or “individual fighters”, who opposed the state and its political party in an uncoordinated manner. The political party they were up against was the SED or *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland* (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)—the only party in the German Democratic Republic with any actual power. The SED had control over most aspects of the state, including citizens' organizations of any kind, but the one facet of East German life that the party did not touch was the church—specifically the East German Lutheran Church. Religion did not fit well together with the communist ideology of the SED, so the party essentially turned a blind eye to the Church. Here I would like to reference the work of Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski with the help of Susanne Altenburger from *The German Left: Red, Green, and Beyond*, which provides a detailed insight into the role that the

Lutheran Church played in East German environmentalism, as well as the later developments of what would become the East German Green Party.

### **2.1.1. Lutheran church**

According to Merrill Jones, over a hundred environmental groups were already in existence in the late 1980s, most with 10-30 members each. Many of these small environmental groups sprang from the congregations of the protestant church, as the members of the church often saw environmental protection as their moral obligation to care for what God had given them. The church maintained its financial autonomy throughout the GDR's regime through the funding and support of its West German sister-church. (Gorski & Markovits p. 243) The church and the East German state met in March 1978 and agreed to respect each other's independence and to avoid opposition to one another. This is one reason why the Lutheran Church became a prime location to house an opposition environmental movement in the East; the second reason being: "[...] the resistance against the degradation of the environment [...] was viewed as a sin against God's creation." It is thus that "the Lutheran Church [...] provided an existential as well as spiritual space for activism whose philosophical underpinnings were deeply steeped in the church's ethics..." (Gorski & Markovits p. 243) The church's structure also emphasized democracy and grassroots advocacy, which lent itself furthermore to foster organization and action around environmental issues.

However, the church was not a perfect safe haven for groups considered antagonistic to the state. Pastors housing such groups had to remain resolute to

*Stasi* questioning, and those holding meetings in private homes were often harassed as well. In 1987, the state cracked down on the Zion Evangelical Church in East Berlin, where an environmental library had been set up. West German media picked up the story when seven members of the library were arrested, their equipment confiscated. (Baukloh & Roose p.86) Meetings or demonstrations rarely occurred outside of the private or religious sphere for obvious reasons. At the same time, though, just as much as environmentalists tried to distract attention from themselves, the state also tried to distract attention from the environmental movement. Doing so would obviously acknowledge the mere existence of a movement of opposition in their communist state as well as the existence of environmental dangers. “Needless to say, any public protest against environmental degradation was immediately suppressed by the authorities, who claimed that socialist policies were by definition not ecologically harmful.” (Gorski & Markovits p. 245) The authors go on to hypothesize that this blatantly illogical propaganda “[...] spread the view that socialist policies—perhaps even more than capitalist one[s]—produced significant environmental damage.” (Gorski & Markovits p. 245)

### **2.1.2. *Neues Forum***

Protected for the most part by the church, networks between East and West German environmentalists were allowed to prosper, as the rest of civil society in the late 1980s grew more active and the USSR less and less Stalinist. In September 1989, just one month before the fall of the GDR (and subsequently the USSR in December 1991), a new organization called *Initiativegruppe Neues*

*Forum* (New Forum Initiative Group) was founded on the principles of “justice, democracy, peace, as well as the protection and conservation of nature.” (Gorski & Markovits p. 248) *Neues Forum* sought to break out of the confines of the church and act together with other opposition groups. They even attempted to gain official recognition from the state as a group, but their application was rejected, the organization labeled as “counterrevolutionary” and “inimical to socialism.” (Gorski & Markovits p. 249) Piggybacking on the publicity around *Neues Forum*, two other independent activist groups surfaced, that September: *Demokratischer Aufbruch* (Democratic Awakening) and *Vereinigte Linke* (United Left). The three groups joined forces, and political dissent seemed to spread like wildfire, especially as exemplified in the demonstrations in Leipzig, where several opposition protests had spawned in the last years of the GDR. What followed for the next year and beyond was a period of vast restructuring, undoing, rebuilding, and rearranging that would leave organizations like *Neues Forum* and the East German people themselves feeling disconnected, misunderstood, and without a true national identity.

### **3. Die Wende<sup>2</sup>**

When the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, all things western and capitalist came flooding into the GDR without restriction. When the socialist state dissolved, many factories and refineries that were causing so much pollution under the Soviets were abandoned, as many Easterners fled to the West as soon as they

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<sup>2</sup> A term meaning “turning point”, I use it here in the original un-translated German, because a proper English translation that would convey the amount of change that the two German states underwent during 1989 and 1990 simply does not exist.



could. In 1990, the two Germanys were then fused into one—or rather, East Germany became absorbed into West Germany. West German (and on a more globalized scale, EU) environmental policies and standards were substantially higher than those of East Germany, and now that the East was part of the West, they were forced to meet those standards within a very short timeline. Because the Eastern industry simply did not have the capacity or funding to meet these standards, many factories had to be shut down. Without the raw materials industry, the eastern states lost a large portion of their of income, unemployment skyrocketed, and the western states had to step in to manage a great deal of their economic recovery.

### **3.1. The Green Party**

In order to understand why the merging of the two German environmental political movements, just like the case of the two German nations, was so complicated, we must first look at what developed on the western side of the Iron Curtain during those forty years of separation.

#### **3.1.1. History**

At the very beginning of the 1980s a brand new political party came into power in West Germany: the Greens. Since its inception, the Green Party has spread across the Western world and enjoyed success in both America and Europe, but none like that in Germany. The party began originally in 1972 as the “*Grüne Liste Umweltschutz*” (Green List for Environmental Protection) with such founding figures as Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a leader of the student protest

movement of 1968. The summer of 1979 brought a separate organization, the “*Grüne Aktion Zukunft*” (Green Action Future) founded by Herbert Gruhl, author of *Ein Planet wird geplündert*. These two groups, in addition to several other radical leftist groups, came together to form the “*Sonstige Politische Vereinigung (SPV)- Die Grünen*”. When establishing themselves as a political party at a meeting in Karlsruhe in January 1980, the name was shortened to *Die Grünen* (The Greens), and they quickly came to be known as the “anti-party party,” as Petra Kelly, political activist and co-founding member, called them. As of that year, they had won only 1.5% of the vote for the *Bundestag* (or federal parliament) elections. By 1983, however, they had already won 5.6% of the national vote and therefore earned 28 seats in the *Bundestag*. Their membership grew from 18,000 to 40,000 in only four years, but despite this, they were not a professionally organized party. Originally founded on a platform against pollution and in favor of nuclear power and NATO action, the focus shifted in the ‘80s to anti-militarization, decriminalization of marijuana, and human rights for homosexuals. Despite their initial support of nuclear power, they soon backtracked on this issue. It was once presumed to be a likely fuel alternative to oil and gas, but the environmental effects of producing nuclear power outweighed the advantages, and thus the Green party dropped its endorsement of such an industry. Greens frequently took part in protests and experienced several factional disputes. In the mid-1980s, the Greens split into the Fundamentalists (“*Fundis*”) and the Realists (“*Realos*”). The Realists wanted to create a coalition with the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*),

but the Fundamentalists were not interested in forming coalitions but instead wanted to engage in more radical activism. This struggle cost the Greens their votes and thus their newly discovered federal influence, especially around the time of the *Wende*.

### 3.1.1.1. Leaders and communist roots

“They call German Green Party the ‘watermelon party’—green on the outside but red on the inside.” (Pearce p. 252) This statement isn’t entirely exaggerated. Many of the predecessors and founders of the German Green Party were in fact the same Marxist students of the 1968 protests just a decade earlier. Many of the former members of the dissolved *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (Socialist Student Union- SDS)<sup>3</sup> who did not follow the dangerous path of the Red Army Faction (as some of their colleagues did) instead built the foundation for the Greens and even went on to become chairs, party candidates, *Bundestag* delegates, or media spokespeople for the new Green Party. Daniel Cohn-Bendit is a prime example of a former student activist-turned-politician. Known in the ‘60s as “Red Danny” not just for his hair color but also his socialist ideology, Cohn-Bendit was a prominent figure of the Paris revolutions in May of 1968 and was also connected to the *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* (non-parliamentary opposition) student movement in Germany. Twenty year after his radical student days, he became

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<sup>3</sup> Not to be confused with the American SDS or Students for a Democratic Society. While both may have leaned toward Marxism, the American organization was much less explicit in promoting socialism in their work.

the leader of the Greens in Frankfurt, and he currently serves as a delegate to the French Greens in the European Parliament.

### **3.2. The German question**

Here we return to the story of the East German political arena. Amidst the transitional period of 1989 and 1990, neither the East German dissident organization *Neues Forum* nor their counterparts in the West were prepared for “the German question.” Both sides operated under the assumption that Germany would remain two separate countries. In fact, Gorski and Markovits suggest that “these progressive milieus, both East and West, did not even register the existence of a German question. To them, the reality of two German states was not only acceptable but in fact preferable from every point of view.” But knowing how the events of the *Wende* played out, it seems the political left on both sides of the wall misjudged the power of nationalism, as well as the will of their fellow citizens. Realizing the inevitable unification, *Neues Forum* issued a platform of stipulations upon which they would endorse such a move: a demilitarized and politically neutral Germany with an unchanging border with Poland, as well as comprehensive social welfare and a guaranteed home and job for every citizen. Gorski and Markovits point out that these very same demands could have easily come from the West German Greens.

#### **3.2.1. Bündnis 90**

As the March 1990 elections for the *Volkskammer* (East German parliament) came around, *Neues Forum* strategically joined forces with *Initiative*

*Demokratie Jetzt* (Initiative Democracy Now) and *Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte* (Initiative for Peace and Human Rights) and together formed *Bündnis '90* (Alliance '90), an electoral alliance—but not a full-fledged party—which would play a vital role in the future of green politics. The 1990 *Volkskammer* elections also saw the emergence of an East German Green Party, which had developed close to the fall of the Berlin Wall through the combined effort of the Protestant group *Kirche International*, the European Greens, *Netzwerk Arche*, and *Dritte Wurzel*. Their founding document proclaims their platform “against the freedom of profit, waste, and throw-away mentality”, but they were frequently criticized during this election process for their close ties to the SED-run *Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt*. The GDR’s first and last open elections resulted in a 93.22% voter turnout, with *Bündnis '90* winning 2.9% of the vote, and the East Greens with 1.96%. (Gorski & Markovits p. 254-255)

### **3.2.2. Merging of East and West Greens**

Just as West Germany inevitably enveloped East Germany, so did the West German Green Party absorb the East German Green Party. And following the same logic, it was equally as complicated for the two parties to merge as it was for the countries themselves. “[The East German Greens] were particularly dismayed by the Federal Republic’s *Anschluss*-like takeover of every aspect of East German life.” (Gorski & Markovits p. 238) The West German Greens experienced continuous fractioning and in-fighting, which naturally frustrated the smaller and more disadvantaged East German Greens. The East Green’s dissatisfaction with its quarrelsome Western cousins had apparently grown so

strong that the Green Party of Thuringia was seriously considering withdrawing itself from the Greens altogether until the West Greens “conducted themselves in a civilized manner again.” (Gorski & Markovits p. 261) These obvious organizational issues aside and with the *Bundestag* elections coming up in December 1990, the two parties formed a permanent alliance. The East’s *Volkskammer* had dissolved, and so the East German Greens had little choice but to comply, but not without standing up for their own electoral rights. Although uniformly called *Die Grünen*, the East Germans were allowed to run separately in their own eastern states in alliance with *Bündnis '90*. They were also granted exception from the 5% cut-off clause that kept parties with less than 5% of the vote out of the *Bundestag*. Coincidentally, since this exception to the rule was made for the East Greens, but not the West, the West Green Party was not able to send any of its delegates to the *Bundestag* that year. From this unexpected outcome, Gorski and Markovits assert:

“It is important to understand that the East German Greens became the sole representatives of the all-German Greens in the *Bundestag* following the election of December 2, 1990 precisely because they refused to be the subject of a takeover by the West German Greens paralleling the general incorporation of East Germany by the Federal Republic.” (Gorski & Markovits p. 238)

In order to regain their seats in the *Bundestag*, the West Greens officially merged with the East Greens and their outspoken partners in *Bündnis '90* in 1991 and in October 1994 won 7.3% of the votes as the new party *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*. (Blühdorn p. 108)

#### 4. Post-*Wende*: rebuild, renew, recover

On October 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall climactically came down, with travel and communication once again allowed across the border of East and West Germany. In 1990, Germany was (re)unified<sup>4</sup>, which was optimistic news for the Easterners, who could now enjoy such freedoms of democracy as freedom of choice, assembly, and travel. However, (re)unification also meant that an astounding amount of new legislation needed to be enacted in a short amount of time. The environmental standards of the former-West Germany were adopted in the former-East, and the new government started to survey the condition in which the Soviet Union had left East Germany. (Re)unified Germany now had a daunting task on its hands, as we see in a report from the *Umweltbundesamt* (from “Environmental Protection in the Federal Republic of Germany” p. 22-23):

“In 1990 the ecological balance of 40% of the total area was considerably disturbed... At the time of German unification the water in a quarter of the lakes and almost half of the rivers was no longer suitable for processing as drinking water.”

##### 4.1. Equalizing standards between two former states

After the *Wende*, every nuclear reactor in the former GDR was shut down, for a number of reasons. First, they simply could not meet the environmental and health standards of the West. This was the reason publicized by the West

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<sup>4</sup> I put this term in parentheses, since there are varying perspectives in East and West Germany as to whether what occurred in 1990 was in fact a unification or a reunification. To use “reunification” implies, per the western perspective, that the two Germanies were never truly separate entities, as West Germany had always regarded East Germans as honorary citizens of West Germany. Such an assumption can be seen as dismissive to the achievements and events that occurred during the 40 years of the GDR. I attempt to compromise these two perspectives by adding a set of parentheses to the term.

German government, but they also had other reasons that they were not so quick to disclose. West Germany was forced to foot the bill on much of the rebuilding and restoring of the former East. Simply shutting these plants down was much cheaper than paying for it to be updated. And much to the West's advantage, shutting the Eastern plants down also reduced the competition for Western industries, because, after all, the new Germany was a capitalist state.

Once (re)unified, the government of Germany aimed to have environmental standards uniformly applied across the country by the year 2000—a goal which has since been achieved. Previously government-owned industries were quickly privatized, cleaned up, closed down, or simply replaced with more environmentally friendly industries (i.e. wind and solar power). It was during this process that many secrets kept within the communist state were revealed. According to Merrill E. Jones, the Buna chemical plant in Halle (Saxony-Anhalt) dumped 20 kilograms of mercury into the Saale River every day. Many of these closed-down, recultivated areas were surprisingly turned into recreational areas, such as national parks and wildlife refuges. Germany funded sewage and air purification, refuse management, and efficient energy use projects with the support of the European Union. The funds were allocated from the European Recovery Program Special Fund—a former program of the Marshall Plan.

With the (re)unification of East and West Germany in 1990, the *Umweltbundesamt* began a thorough inspection of contamination sites in the former East, where the government-owned industrial areas once stood. Germany then committed to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of carbon dioxide by



25% by 2005, placing Germany in the lead in the global fight against climate change. Obviously, this commitment produced noticeable results, as said greenhouse gas emissions dropped by 16% by 1998.

## **4.2. Non-governmental/non-profit organizations**

After the *Wende*, what small citizens' initiatives previously housed behind the protective walls of the church could then establish themselves officially and to their fullest extent. Here I'd like to examine what became of those organizations and whether or not they were absorbed into the organizations of their West German counterparts, as was the case for much of the East German environmental movement.

### **4.2.1. BUND/Friends of the Earth**

Friends of the Earth was founded in 1969 in San Francisco by David Brower as a more radical alternative against nuclear power plants than the Sierra Club (known as the oldest and largest environmental organization in the US). In just a decade, Friends of the Earth grew to establish a branch in almost every western European country. Since 1989, Friends of the Earth International (or *Freunde der Erde*, as it is called in Germany) has served as the umbrella organization for *Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (BUND)*, which was founded in 1975 as a conglomeration of local *Bürgerinitiative* organizations, some of which actually date back to 1913. *Bürgerinitiativen*, or "citizens' initiatives" were West Germany's answer to small, localized environmental issues. For the most part, individual community members, independent of any centralized campaign, organized these initiatives in order to handle regional

problems, such as the threat of noise pollution from a proposed airport or interstate. In 1988 *BUND* was involved in a nation-wide (that is, West Germany-wide) action against un-recycled plastic bottles, which continued until 1990, when it succeeded in creating such advancements of waste-free schools and “the Green Dot”—a certification for recyclable product packaging.

#### **4.2.2. Greenpeace**

Beginning with the “Save the Whales” campaign, Greenpeace has served as a hands-on environmental organization, protecting marine life, and conducting non-governmental surveillance—all the while maintaining the public image of “God’s navy.” (Pearce p. 35)

The West German branch of Greenpeace kept its headquarters in Hamburg, as the organization primarily tackles issues of water and marine life. In the early 1980s, the German headquarters, headed by Harald Zindler, grew in popularity among Greenpeace International when deformed fish were discovered in the Elbe, the Rhine, and subsequently in the North Sea due to the dumping of chemical poisoning into these waterways. Factories producing titanium dioxide (a white pigment) were held accountable for dumping this waste, which contained sulphuric acid and heavy metals, thus destroying the wildlife. (Pearce p. 35)

Greenpeace was also known for its aggressive public displays. In 1981, members in Hamburg hung a banner from a pesticide plant smokestack that read, ‘When the last tree is cut and the last fish killed, the last river poisoned, then you will see that you can’t eat money.’ A Greenpeace hot-air balloon has even been launched and floated over the Berlin Wall in 1983, in protest of the

atomic bomb testing occurring in the US, France, the UK, and Russia. The pilot of the balloon was detained in the GDR and interrogated for five hours before he was released. (Pearce p. 36) In 1989, a Greenpeace office was opened in Moscow upon the invitation of the USSR itself. The organization's staff promised they would have nothing to do with renegade environmental groups in the outlying republics (the Estonian Green Movement had already been appointed as a member of Friends of the Earth International), and as such, the GDR didn't experience a Greenpeace presence until an office was opened in East Berlin in the spring of 1990.

## **5. Germany today**

The present-day state of the environment and environmental policy in the East is very interesting, especially in terms of the current energy crisis. I'd like to examine further how the eastern German states are shaping up in terms of general environmental policies and development, especially in terms of Germany's role in today's EU energy policies.

### **5.1. Energy usage: renewable vs. non-renewable sources**

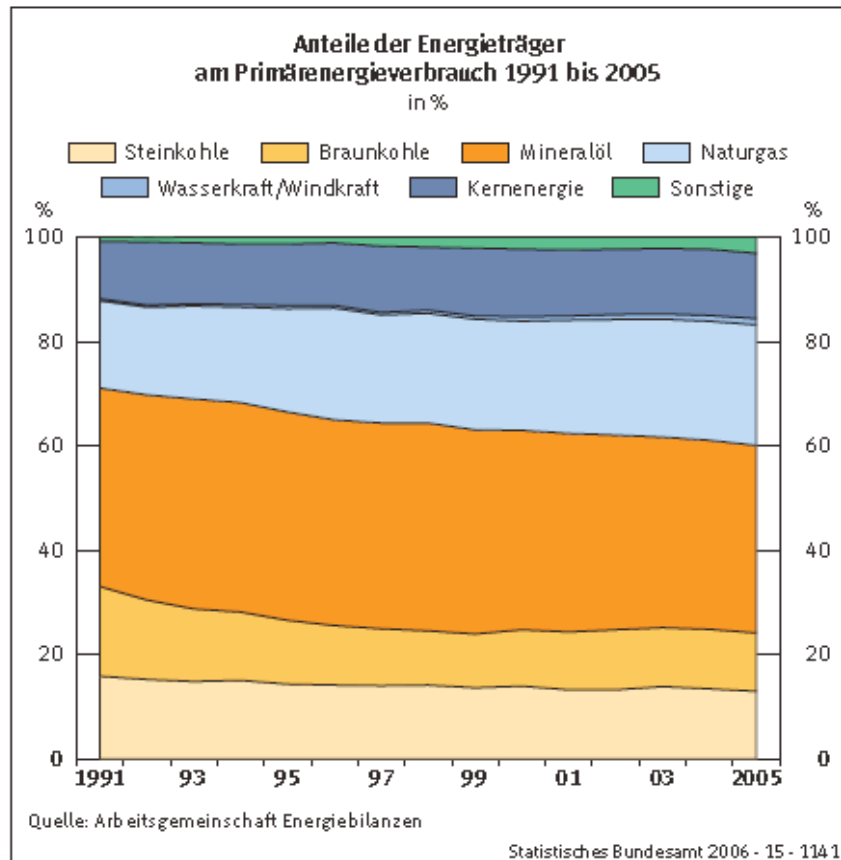
As of 2004, the breakdown of energy sources in Germany was as follows: 37.4% of the primary energy usage came from oil, 25.9% from coal, 23.4% from natural gas, 11.4% from nuclear energy, and 1.8% from hydroelectric sources. Germany was using at that time a total of four tons of crude oil per resident. (*Statistisches Bundesamt* p. 5) Wind, water, solar, and biomass energy belong to the category of renewable sources of energy. The use of these energy sources in

Germany in 2005 saw an increase of 10.2% since 1991. Wind turbines are among the strongest and fastest growing energy technologies, and also as of 2005, Germany led the world in the number of new wind turbine installations.

Other energy sources, such as natural gas or nuclear energy, are partly renewable but not nearly as clean and environmentally sound as wind. As of 2005, there were only 17 functioning nuclear power plants remaining in western Germany. There are now about 25 to date. In eastern Germany, however, the only nuclear plants that haven't already been demolished are no longer in operation.

In this diagram from the German *Statistisches Bundesamt* (Federal Statistics Bureau) we can see exactly how the demand for each energy source has grown or changed since 1991. It is clear that Germany is still dependent on the less sustainable sources such as oil, natural gas, and nuclear for a large percentage of its energy needs. Despite the fact that the use of water and wind power has obviously grown dramatically since 1991, when at that time they almost didn't exist as a power source, the percentage in 2005 is still very small.

Schaubild 2



## 5.2. Building policies

In architecture and building practices the Germans have also continued to reduce their energy usage—not to mention money as well. Every new house built as of January 1, 2009 is required by law to have a heating system that uses renewable energy. Every household must therefore collect 14% of its heating energy needs from renewable sources. This law could save the country up to 50 billion Euros in heating costs by 2020. Baden-Württemberg had already put in place an even more ambitious housing law that requires all new houses built after April 1, 2008 to meet 20% of its heating energy needs with renewable heating technologies.

„Ob die eingangs erwähnte Vereinbarung zwischen Bundesregierung und Kraftwerksbetreibern angesichts der weltweit einsetzenden Renaissance dieser Hochtechnologie und der Notwendigkeit einer CO<sub>2</sub>-Reduktion Bestand haben wird, liegt nicht unbedingt nur am politischen Willen, sondern auch an der Einstellung der Bevölkerung.“<sup>5</sup>

This statement was in a press advisory from the *Statistisches Bundesamt* concerning the future of sustainable development in Germany. The Bureau implies that the future depends on the people, because the growth of renewable energy is reliant on the economy and the market. For the most part, this statement holds true, but at this point in the global economy with the recession that most industrialized nations are currently experiencing and the government-to-industry bailouts occurring, this comment may be out of date. The issue now may be the lack of strong political leadership and bold legislation to combat climate change while simultaneously boosting the economy.

## 6. International

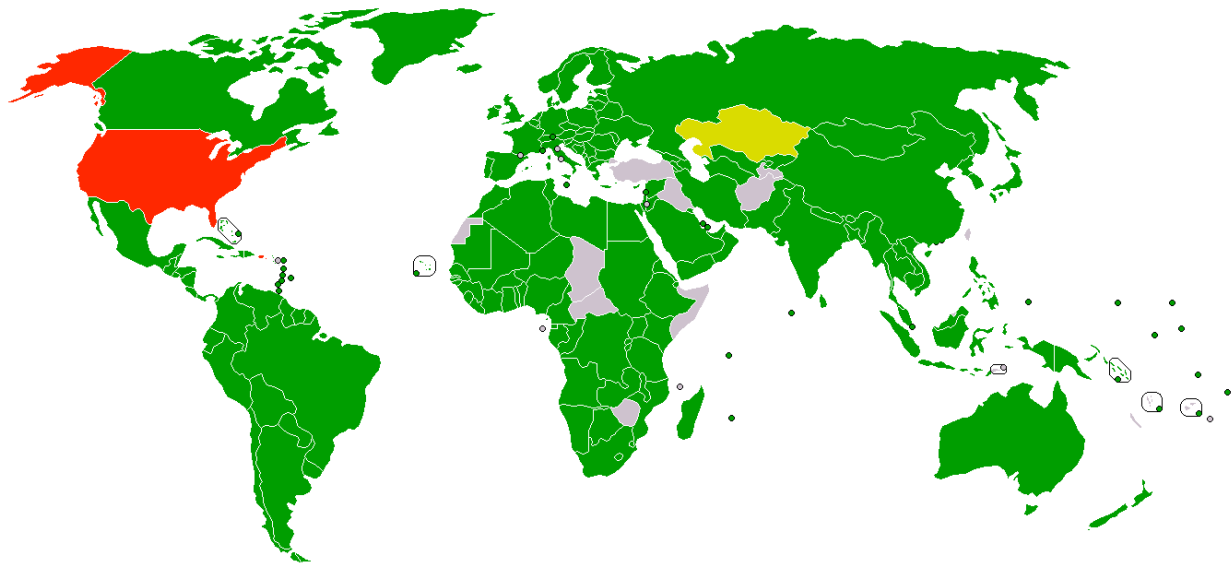
Since the age of industrialization, the earth's temperature has risen 0.76°C each year due to the amount of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere. This change in temperature can lead to dangerous shifts in the earth's weather systems, and according to an article from the European Commission: "*Die Temperatur [darf] infolge der globalen Erwärmung nicht mehr als 2°C über die*

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<sup>5</sup> "Given the globally promoted renaissance of advanced [sustainable] technology and the necessity of a CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, whether the previously aforementioned agreement between the federal government and the power plant industry would come into existence does not necessarily depend solely on political will, but also the engagement of the public."

*vor-industrielle Temperatur steig[en] – ein größerer Anstieg wird die Gefahr irreversibler und möglicher katastrophaler Veränderungen drastisch erhöhen.“<sup>6</sup>*

### 6.1. UN Climate Negotiations: Kyoto & beyond



This map indicates the signatories of the Kyoto Protocol. The countries in green are those who have signed and ratified the agreement, yellow represents those signed but whose ratifications are pending, red for those signed but ratification was declined, and gray signifies countries that have not signed on. Clearly, there is only one country that has actively refused the principles of the Kyoto Protocol—the US. I will come back to the topic of American involvement in the Kyoto Protocol in the next section.

On December 11, 1997, most of the industrial nations of the world met in Kyoto, Japan and agreed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 2012

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<sup>6</sup> “Due to global warming, the temperature may not increase by more than 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures—an increase greater than this will drastically raise the danger of irreversible and possibly catastrophic changes.”

back to an average 5.2% of what emissions were in 1990. This group thus developed what came to be known as the Kyoto Protocol. Every country included in the protocol had a relative goal in greenhouse gas emission reductions it was to reach. The EU set their goals higher than any others—8% reductions by 2010. As of December 2007, 1% had already been achieved. The so-called developing countries (i.e. China, India, and Brazil) were required only to calculate their emissions and report back to the other protocol members. The problem in this situation, however, is that countries like China and India are not in fact “developing countries,” but rather what’s known in German as *Schwellenländer* or newly industrialized countries. This means that these countries are not completely poor or dependent on larger world powers, because they have a good deal of their own successful industries.

Germany signed the protocol simultaneously with the rest of the EU nations on April 29, 1998 and ratified the protocol on May 31, 2002. The protocol now has a total of 174 nations signed on, 60% of which are already well on their way to reaching their goals. But Europe once again takes it another step further. The German magazine *Sonne Wind & Wärme* reports on Europe’s leadership on the way to a renewable energy future:

*Deutschland, Dänemark, Großbritannien und die Niederlande legen stark nach und orientieren sich bereits an den Zielen der Klimaagenda 2020, die die EU auf ihrem diesjährigen Frühjahrgipfel beschlossen hat. Das Klimapaket der Bundesregierung vom 5. Dezember soll eine Treibhausgasminderung von mindestens 36% bewirken.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> “Germany, Denmark, Great Britain, and the Netherlands are stepping it up and have their sights set on the goals of the Climate Agenda 2020, which the EU determined this year at their spring summit. The federal government’s climate package from December 5<sup>th</sup> should bring a reduction in greenhouse gases of at least 36%.”



A total of 27 countries in the EU now support the new “climate package”. The principles of this package are as follows:

- *„Verringerung der globalen Treibhausgasemissionen der Industrieländer bis zu 30% unter das Niveau von 1990 bis 2020, als Teil eines neuen weltweiten Übereinkommens zur Bekämpfung des Klimawandels.*
- *Verpflichtung der EU, ihre Emissionen um mindestens 20% zu vermindern, ohne ein weltweites Übereinkommen abzuwarten.*
- *Verringerung des Energieverbrauchs der EU bis 2020 um 20% durch eine höhere Energieeffizienz, z.B. bei Haushaltsgeräten, Autos und in Gebäuden.*
- *Ebenfalls bis 2020 Erhöhung des Anteils der erneuerbaren Energie am Energieverbrauch der EU auf 20% und des Anteils der Biokraftstoffe bei Verkehrskraftstoffen auf 10%.*
- *Eine internationale Verständigung über Energie-Effizienz anstreben.*
- *Umweltschonende CSS-(CO<sub>2</sub>-Abschneidung und – Speicherung) Technologie soll gefördert werden.<sup>8</sup>*

## 7. View from America

Let's return to the map of the Kyoto Protocol signatories. With the US as the only industrialized country in the world to have refused ratification of the protocol, this sends quite a message. At the 1998 United Nations Framework

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- <sup>8</sup>A decrease in the global greenhouse gas emissions of industrial nations to 30% under 1990 levels by 2020 as a part of a new worldwide agreement to combat climate change.
  - A requirement of the EU to reduce its emissions by at least 20% without waiting on a worldwide agreement.
  - A decrease in energy use in the EU of 20% by 2020 through higher energy efficiency standards for household appliances, automobiles, and buildings.
  - Also by 2020, a 20% increase in renewable energy for the EU's energy needs, and a 10% increase in biofuels for transportation.
  - Envisage an international understanding of energy efficiency.
  - Foster and support environmentally sound carbon capture and storage technology.

Convention on Climate Change in Kyoto, Japan, President Bill Clinton did in fact sign the Kyoto Protocol on behalf of the United States, but it has not yet been ratified. The administration under George W. Bush refused to ratify the protocol with the excuse that other high-emitting nations like China do not necessarily have to change anything about their carbon emissions, despite the fact that China is the second-highest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world. Why should the US then reduce their emissions if exceptions are made for other countries?

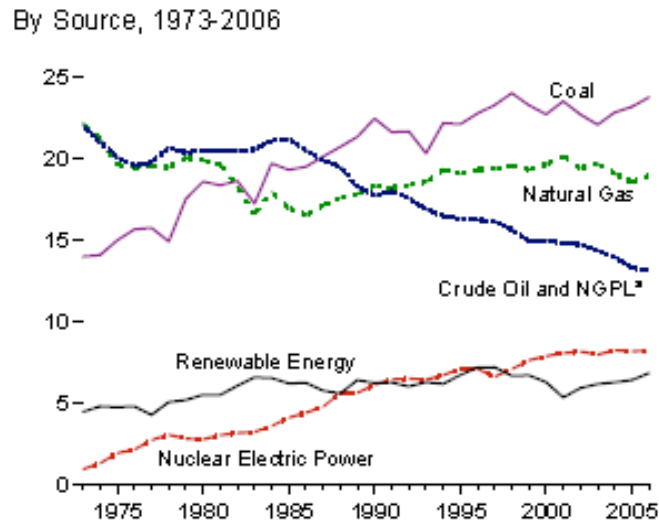
This argument holds very little water. First, the reason for the enormous amount of emissions from China is that western countries like those of the EU and the US export their dirty industries to China. China and other developing nations like it (i.e. India) are victims of a global economy and a post-colonial world. Second, the fact of the matter is that the US is still the highest emitter of greenhouse gases per capita out of all the countries in the world.

### **7.1. Energy usage: renewable vs. non-renewable sources**

To provide some perspective on the details of the US's carbon emissions, let's look at the breakdown of American energy sources. As of 2004, the energy situation was thus: 40.2% of energy usage came from oil, 25% from natural gas, 24.2% from coal, 8.1% from nuclear energy, and 2.6% from hydroelectricity. Altogether the US consumed 6.85 tons of oil per person in 2004. In this diagram from the US Energy Information Administration, it is clear that the US uses more coal power than nuclear power as a solution to the current energy crisis. Oil has

declined, while renewable energy sources have stayed almost on the same level.

The amounts of energy are in BTU, a British unit of measurement.



The US emits about 23% of the world's greenhouse gases, while Germany emits only half of that. While the US's current environmental policies may not be as progressive and forward-thinking as those of Germany, it does have its share of non-governmental organizations pushing for changes to these policies, and there is an opportunity for reform and for intergovernmental agreements to be made when the world's leaders meet again in December 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark at the next UN Climate Change Conference, where the Kyoto Protocol from 1997 will be readdressed.

## **Conclusion**

As I've mentioned before, (re)unified Germany has overcome obstacles in a way that few Western countries can boast. They essentially defeated communism and created a unified state with a stable democratic government for all of Germany in a matter of 10 to 15 years. They brought the world some of the most advanced environmental technology and policies, and when faced with the environmental disasters of the former-Eastern states, they brought (and still are bringing) each and every contamination site up to par with Western standards. Germany has provided the world with a successful political third party, the Greens, which have spread far and wide beyond the German border. While environmental problems did serve as a major division and difference between East and West Germany before 1990, these same environmental issues helped to unite the two separate governments into one productive government. They are issues that know no borders, thus allowing the two Germanys to efficiently work together once finally (re)united into the Federal Republic of Germany.

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