

OPEN LETTER TO THE GERMAN GREEN PARTY

In the midst of a war in the Gulf it is very difficult to sit calmly at one's desk and mull over the Greens' past mistakes and omissions. Besides, it is almost uncanny to hear all the reports confirming yet again that we Western Greens are no longer represented in spaceship Bonn, despite the fact that even as I write, a macabre scenario is proving the correctness of the warnings and predictions we have expressed over so many years.

After we first entered the German Bundestag in 1983, for example, we persistently denounced the unscrupulous policy of "legal" and illegal arms exports to countries all over the world. In particular, we also revealed the criminal shipments of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons components to Iraq. Yet, the responsible Federal ministries reacted with bored arrogance, and all our political demands for an immediate halt to arms exports were voted down in the German Bundestag. The same people who are now calling for similar measures in light of the current threat unfortunately voted against us then.

We also warned about the ecological catastrophes which are inevitably associated with any military activity, and about the growing danger that this kind of environmental catastrophe could be used as a weapon in war. This has now become a reality. More than 1.5 million tons of crude oil have poured into the Gulf. That is over sixty times the amount spilled during the *Exxon Valdez* tanker disaster in Alaska. According to

Written in February 1991, near the end of the Persian Gulf War against Iraq.

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Greenpeace, this is a catastrophe on a massive scale. The sensitive tropical waters of the Gulf region have been irreparably damaged for decades to come, with all the adverse consequences this will entail for the millions of people in the Gulf States who rely on this water for survival.

We took the victims' side, not only when the Iraqis marched into Kuwait, but also during the early and equally criminal acts of military intervention, such as China's rape of Tibet, Morocco's occupation of the Western Sahara, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Syrian war in Lebanon, and Israeli injustice towards the Palestinians, to name just a few violations of international law. We did so because we believe that questions of international law and human rights issues have always been and remain indivisible. They can only be judged according to immutable moral standards and must not be used by any government as instruments to further political, military, or economic interests.

In the debate about modernization of forces in the wake of NATO's dual-track decision, the Greens, as a nonviolent political party, supported the ethical principle that injustice must not be repaid with possible, even greater, injustice, and that there can be no justification for military violence. Many of us wanted to introduce a bit of the Sermon on the Mount and civility into Bonn's politics and not just save them for fine sermons at Church rallies. Yet our modest efforts to develop nonmilitary, nonviolent strategies for conflict settlement in Bonn met with nothing but weary smiles from the defence experts of the established parties. Now in these awful February days the failure of the traditional military philosophy with its hollow phrases about a "just" war and "surgical" strikes is becoming apparent in the most saddening way, and the military censorship has laid a blanket of silence over the mass murder of innocent people in a bloody slaughter which cannot solve problems but will create a host of new ones.

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What is more, in the almost prophetic peace manifesto published just after the Green Party was founded, we highlighted the devastating consequences of a lifestyle and manufacturing methods which are based on a steady flow of natural resources, squander them recklessly, and then resort to violent appropriation of foreign raw materials. Seen in this light, the Gulf crisis is a harbinger of future crises which will arise in the struggle for increasingly scarce resources.

This confirms that our ecological approach to policy, which transcends the usual definitions of Right and Left and is free from outmoded rigid dogmatism, is correct. According to this approach, only an ecological lifestyle and economic management which are based on responsible utilization of resources can reduce the danger that such crises will occur. Without this sensible approach a catastrophe is inevitable, for the exploitation of human beings by their fellows (for example, North versus South) and the exploitation of nature have already driven humankind to the brink of self-destruction.

So why did the voters turn away from the far-sighted ecological policy of the Greens in the German Bundestag on December 2, 1990, despite the fact that our position on numerous other issues (often agreed upon only after a long struggle in frustrating meetings) have also been tragically confirmed in many other problem areas? We need only think of the Chernobyl disaster, the poisoning of thousands of people by Western companies in Bhopal, the progressive destruction of the rain forests, the greenhouse effect, the toxic holocaust which is dramatically increasing the number of cancer victims, and the increasingly frequent paralysis of traffic on our roads.

Why was it not recognized that at least some, admittedly ever fewer, of us had taken nonviolent action again and again--wherever agitation and unconventional, audacious behavior were necessary--to draw attention to abuses and ills? I am thinking in particular of our protest in Alexanderplatz against human rights violations in what was then the GDR, of our appeals in the

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Kremlin and in Red Square in the winter of 1983 on behalf of Sakharov and against SS-20 missiles, of our nonviolent protest against the Turkish military dictatorship in Ankara, and of our occupation of the German Embassy in Pretoria to protest the Federal Government's policy towards South Africa. Of course I am also thinking of the countless symbolic pickets, together with many friends from other countries, of nuclear missile sites, chemical weapons storage sites, and nuclear power plants. Did the voters not notice that after all, it was almost exclusively the Greens (even when they were having to fight sections of their own party and their lack of understanding) who showed solidarity with the oppressed civil rights and ecology movements in the GDR and in Eastern Europe right up to the peaceful revolutions in those countries, whereas the established parties still gave preference to "quiet" diplomacy and attached virtually no importance to contacts with the oppressed groups?

Did the voters also fail to notice that the Greens were by far the most hard-working members of the German Bundestag, tabling many carefully researched questions, motions, resolutions, and bills which embodied a wealth of Green ideas and hopes? These are now being shifted in neat bundles from the Tulpenfeld building to some dusty archive.

What was the real reason, then, for our being thrown out of Parliament? However much it hurts to say so, it was not that the voters failed to understand us. On the contrary, we ourselves were to blame.

I believe that we failed first and foremost on a human level. And we failed even though we had enjoyed a long period of indulgence on the part of the voters. But eight years of self-destructive and fruitless infighting amongst the various factions and their "gurus" paralysed our political activities and created an atmosphere steeped in jealousy and distrust. This proved too much even for the Greenest voter. Of course we could not succeed if the way we treated each other caused more of a sensation and made the headlines more often than did the

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substance and the aims of our policies. I was involved with the Green Party right from the start. I helped found it and build it up and devoted all my energy and strength to the Green project as the anti-party party. Yet I was forced to look on helplessly as the human interaction within the Green Party degenerated into a permanent state of ideological warfare between the various political factions. No wonder the media increasingly tended to view the tussles in front of the television cameras and the continual talk of splitting the party as more newsworthy and more appealing to the viewers than the constructive, diligent political work about which the voters were given less and less information.

For someone like me, who has always been independent of the factions within the Green Party and who has every intention of remaining so, there were fewer and fewer opportunities to locate one's own political identity within the party. Nor was there much chance to get other members of the party or the general public to understand and accept the results of one's political work. The dominance of the various factions and groupings very nearly squeezed out the independents altogether. One only needs to look at the records of the national delegates conferences to see that they were nothing but a vanity fair.

Considering the situation within the Green Party, it was almost a miracle that the national conference in 1983 in Nuremberg adopted my motion to implement the "international tribunal opposing first-strike weapons and weapons of mass destruction in East and West," and that the national conference in 1988 adopted my motion to conduct a hearing on Tibet in Bonn in 1989.

The electoral defeat of December 2nd must be the starting point of a completely new phase of learning for the Greens if we want to survive at the national level with any hope of reentering the German Bundestag in four years. This means that we have to tackle our grievances and our failings, and throw out the various fetishes which I have criticized and opposed for a very long time,

much to the chagrin of certain self-styled political commissars in the Green Party.

This applies first and foremost to certain structures which the party has defended whenever they were considered necessary or expedient, despite experience showing that they make no political sense whatsoever. One example is the principle of rotation, which had devastating effects even during our first legislative term and impaired the efficiency of our work in the Bundestag. Mid-term rotation, i.e. after two years, inevitably generated a sense of rivalry between members of Parliament and their assistants who were to replace them. This placed a considerable strain on human relations in our offices in Bonn from the moment we were elected and created an atmosphere poisoned with mutual distrust. It is true that with rotation after four years the problems associated with members' replacements no longer arose, but then the point of the exercise was even more difficult to fathom, since the nomination of candidates prior to every legislative term already presented sufficient opportunity to remove candidates.

So it was quite dishonest to maintain, as many people did, that rotation would reduce the risk of power concentration, because the real power bases developed within the Green Party quite irrespective of rotation. In any case, the fact that all the party officials, including the federal party manager and the parliamentary staff, were exempt from rotation led to a calamitous level of bureaucratization and rigidity in the party and parliamentary group apparatus. I was therefore particularly pleased to hear Antje Vollmer, who was a great supporter of rotation for many years, state in Bonn on December 4, 1990:

The incorporation of the rotation principle in the statutes of the Green Party was simply the party-political expression of a pervasive climate of mistrust amongst the Greens which caused an unprecedented amount of distress to party members.

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Furthermore, the persistent abuse of the terms "grass roots" and "grass-roots democracy" must finally give way to a democratic definition of the "grass-roots" concept. "Grass roots" is not merely a collective term defining the people who are present at a particular moment and consider themselves to represent the grass roots. The grass roots of the Green Party of course encompass all those whom the Green policies are intended to help, and those who support these policies, whether or not they are party members. Anyone who still remembers the saddening document on child sex published in North Rhine-Westphalia is aware of the damage caused on the occasion by the dictatorship of a minority passing itself off as a "grass-roots democracy."

One other fetish which it is time to abandon is the favourite grass- roots sport of hounding "celebrities" within the party ranks. Having experienced this myself, I know how distressing and discouraging this can be. Some of us have acquired a higher media profile than others as a result of our experience and competence in Green affairs, and the party is quite happy to utilize this to boost attendance at its events. However, it is a shame that this is also considered a reason to punish these members for their commitment, as it were, by vilifying their "celebrity" status. This attitude is particularly short-sighted and uneconomic given that human resources within the party are notoriously inadequate. As Gert Bastian rightly stated on retiring from the Parliamentary Group, it leads to a real "dictatorship of incompetence" which no party can afford.

In this connection, I hope that some of you still remember the shameful treatment meted out to people like Heinrich Böll by certain grass-roots vigilantes. It was obviously felt that he was good enough to be included in various Green campaigns and events, but at a national party conference after his death he was denounced as a "chauvinist," a "superfather," and a "naive sentimentalist." Or, to take another example, Joseph Beuys, a pioneer of Green philosophy, was forced to endure the

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humiliation of ten ballots at a selection meeting for parliamentary candidates in North Rhine-Westphalia and was not selected. How many other valuable people capable of promoting Green issues may have been deterred by similar incidents, with the party thus being deprived of their services? How many more people will we lose if we allow this to continue?

The party has another practice which many members are reluctant to question, and that is the method used to collect "voluntary" donations from members of Parliament. It must not be allowed to continue. When mature people are working together towards a common goal and have established a relationship based on trust, there is really no need for control mechanisms or intrusion into their private affairs in order to extort "donations" for Green projects. A much more effective and dignified approach would be to collect a flat rate contribution affordable at all levels of income, thus allowing individual members to select any projects they wish to support with further discretionary donations. For example, I found it absolutely intolerable to be subjected to intrusive questioning by three members of the Greens' Commission on Remuneration for Members of Parliament who wanted to know why I supported my eighty year-old grandmother financially, and why I wanted to continue to sponsor a Tibetan family in exile in Northern India as I had done for many years. They even suggested that this sponsorship should be transferred to a Third World group so that I could contribute more to the ecology fund instead. I found it very humiliating to be forced to explain why I had been supporting my grandmother for years and why I did not want to stop sponsoring a family with whom I had developed a close relationship over many years. So even the way in which donations are collected reflects the atmosphere of pervasive mistrust in the Green Party which must finally be overcome.

The Green Party must also learn to adopt professional and efficient approaches to policy-making at all levels of political activity. In the first years following the Green Party's creation, it

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was accepted as normal that there was exploitation of and constant self-sacrifice by good-natured members who took office and had to rely on their own resources without having even the most basic professional support structure. This did us no credit. It is simply unrealistic to assume that every individual is able to do everything and that everyone is interchangeable. A clear division of labour and at least a minimum of professionalism are necessary to ensure that at long last Green politics place less strain on people. If I think of all the years when I acted as unpaid spokesperson of the federal executive committee in tandem with my full-time job in Brussels, as well as the year I had to take unpaid leave to participate in routine pre-election campaigning on behalf of the Greens, I would not wish these years on anyone. Although the party realized that this sort of thing was not very sensible, the Parliamentary Group continued to nurse its illusion of an egalitarian utopia. This was the reason why the Parliamentary Group's work was bound to fail, as Kalle Kollnegg, the person in charge of Antje Vollmer's office, pointed out in an interview in December 1990

Furthermore, the Green Party federal headquarters, currently the only administrative centre at the national level, must be completely reorganized. To achieve this there should be individual specialist sections for which various members of the federal executive committee would be responsible. An office for international contacts, particularly in the area of peace, ecology, and human rights, must be established. There is a substantial backlog of work to be done in this area because for far too long the Green Party has been too wrapped up in its own affairs, in the best tradition of German associations, to be concerned about the more important matter of international networking.

In my view, the Party's executive committee should be able to call upon some sort of "think tank" composed of competent and critical experts who are capable of telling the executive committee some fundamental truths and of assisting in working out possible solutions. The Federal Main Committee should be

replaced by a council consisting of members from the *Lander* (federal states), or, in other words, by a body in which the associations from the federal states and the parliamentary groups from the state parliaments are represented.

One of the greatest weaknesses in both the parliamentary group and in the party has been that of media relations. The party must have the courage to appoint really independent, bright, and audacious media spokespersons who are very experienced and competent in dealing with the national and international media. One thing must change very quickly in the Greens' public presentation. We have to try to brighten up our party's image because until now we have appeared unremittingly gloomy and intolerant. We are no longer able to laugh or show a bit of enthusiasm and zest for life. This is particularly evident at the national party conferences, and it is very depressing.

In this brief letter I have attempted to concentrate primarily on the party's distorted organizational structures, since those are the very things that deter or even repel potential supporters. As far as our political orientation is concerned, however, I am convinced that after the shock of December 2, 1990, the Greens in the regional and *Lander* associations will revert to the real Green priorities in all areas of policy and will continue to hold true to Green principles, to the historic cornerstones of our philosophy: uncompromising nonviolence, radical ecology, indivisible human and civil rights, civility, social emancipation, justice, and solidarity with the weak.

However, this also means freeing ourselves from dogmatism, whether it stems from the Left wing or the Realo camp. The days of factional infighting must finally be consigned to history, for today's Green Party has no room for old-fashioned Left-wing notions of cadres or even tactical coalitions with the PDS, that party which lacks credibility. Nor can we allow our party to be brought to heel, becoming the springboard for the SPD, nor should we become a sort of Green FDP.

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I have never rejected outright the possibility of coalition with the SPD. I do think, however, that my doubts about the visions of red-green cooperation at the federal level are still justified. Future voting in the German Bundestag on issues such as German participation in UN peacekeeping forces, deployment of troops in the Gulf, halting the nuclear energy programme, and the ban on arms exports will show whether the SPD seriously intends to go ahead with renewal of its peace and ecology policies in the 1990s as it has stated.

As far as I am concerned, the most important and most credible coalition partners of the Greens continue to be the committed human rights groups like Amnesty International and pioneering ecology groups such as Greenpeace. These are the people who we, the anti-party party, must be sure not to disappoint.

The term "anti-party party," which I invented, has been frequently misunderstood and many people seem to think that it is outdated. Even so, I shall continue to use it, for to me the term denotes a party capable of choosing between morality and power, which uses creative civil disobedience to combat every form of repression, which combines audacious imagination with efficient working methods, and which recognizes the link between world peace and peace in every individual. And anti-party parties do not exercise power in the old authoritarian sense; they try to transform power in order to enable people to achieve self-determination in their lives.