

Chapter One

Introduction: Competition and Change in Progressive Parties

Les Verts and Die Grünen: Contrasting Directions in Green Politics

When they first began to contest elections, it was clear to all that green parties were different. Their politics was “antipolitics.” They formed on the crest of a wave of protest movements, claiming to be their heirs. These movements were initiated by student revolts and the mobilization of the independent New Left during the late 1960s and early 1970s, fed by trade union militancy during the 1970s, and crowned by anti-nuclear, peace and feminist movements toward the end of that decade. The greens maintained that their fundamental allegiance was with these new social movements, and not with the parliamentary institutions of which they were formally a part. They were beholden to neither the Right nor the Left: their programs called into question the entire apparatus of material growth and international security over which the parties of the Left and Right fought to become the managers. The greens have

Copyrighted Material

since transformed their milieu by infusing environmental and other postindustrial themes into mainstream political discourse.

Yet we still do not know what makes green parties different from each other. Two major Western European ecology parties, *Les Verts* in France, and *Die Grünen* in the Federal Republic of Germany, moved in separate directions in a key domain, that of ideology. The parties' programmatic demands, and the fundamental assumptions about the nature of a just society that underlay them, diverged in significant ways. Different ideologies in turn implied different strategies. The *Grünen* and *Verts* had contrasting ideas about their own role in politics, and made distinct choices of allies and adversaries.

The crux of the distinction between the two parties lay in their view of the bridges to be built between the environmental and the social. The *Grünen*, a model for other green parties and for theories about them, advanced a left-wing version of political ecology.¹ They incorporated environmentalist themes into a comprehensive critique of capitalist society. They tried to elicit the support of economically disadvantaged social groups and trade unions, and aimed to reorganize the entire system of material production in the Federal Republic. The *Verts*, barely studied in this country, employed a strategy that is also poorly understood. It was radical, yet deliberately non-Marxist. The *Verts* insisted that the environmental crisis, and not class conflict, must be the key to understanding all other questions. Corresponding to this, their social goal has been to advance global decentralization and popular participation, and they see cultural minorities or inhabitants of natural regions as their natural allies or constituents. We refer to the German Greens' strategy as "red/green" or ecosocialist, and the *Verts*' as an ecoanarchist, or "pure ecological" type of program.² These strategic profiles hold for the period from 1980 to 1991 for the *Grünen* and 1986 to 1993 for the *Verts*.³

The European Greens have their origins in a reaction to problems in parliamentary socialist parties, and remain in their political orbit. Literature on postindustrial parties and movements notes that they tend to form in reaction to hierarchic tendencies in and political compromises of socialist or social democratic parties.⁴ We take another step, placing the phenomenon in comparative perspective, and analyzing the patterns of interaction between the two. Green parties face Left when they frame their ideas and form

their identities—even, perhaps most of all, those that insist that they are not of the Left. The greens in our two cases, however, confronted two different Lefts, and there were distinct axes of conflict. In the Federal Republic, the greens faced a conservative socialist party in a state of decline: the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD).⁵ When the SPD settled on a progrowth, neo-liberal response to a contracting economy, the *Grünen* moved to frame environmental demands in terms of themes the SPD had marginalized or suppressed, such as worker autonomy, major redistributive measures, or employment programs. In France, the greens faced a more formidable opponent. At around the same time, *Parti Socialiste Français* (PS) commanded most of the electoral resources of the French Left, and coopted the postindustrial themes of the Greens and the New Left that the SPD shunned.⁶ Consigned to political irrelevance for years, the *Verts* finally advanced by evoking the environmental movement as the symbol of popular aspirations and grassroots democracy, thus distancing themselves from the centralist tendencies of the French Left.

In the end, red and green may be enmeshed in a common predicament. While each party's strategy has advantages that respond to its situation, each choice implies certain characteristic tradeoffs. It is not just the contrasting strategies, but the limits and paradoxes that may be inherent in each one, that this book seeks to understand.⁷ Having distanced itself from the orthodoxy of the Third International and from the Soviet model, the contemporary Left—socialists, the greens and other alternative movements, and even communists—now tend to acknowledge the pluralism of complex modern societies. Indeed, while the progressive political field remains this fragmented, the notion of a plurality of goals may necessarily be elevated to a virtue. Yet the commitment to diversity comes into conflict with another essential one for the Left, both modern and postmodern: its identification with some privileged cause and the image of emancipation built around it. The Left's representatives originally derive their legitimacy from movements of alienated social actors with intense demands for change, for whom they claim to act. There is a tension between the need to stress a particular set of demands intensely, and the need to address a range of demands.

Burke grasped the problem in his remarks on the lofty aims and unjust acts of the French Revolution: To elevate any one set of

demands to the status of an absolute and overriding moral premium must come into conflict with the complexity and moral ambiguity of any society as a whole. Yet Burke's corresponding prescription for incrementalism hardly puts the problem to rest, as the history of social democracy might suggest. Socialist parties in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had to address the class interests of industrial workers, while still securing the interclass solidarity needed to attain electoral majorities.⁸ They tried to embrace political diversity, and the parliamentary institutions that foster it, while still pressing for significant change. The vague commitment to liberal rights and institutions, and the economic interests of a broad class of citizens has, with time, become associated with a loss of momentum toward change. We shall refer to the fundamental dilemma as one of "identity" versus "efficacy." The pure ecological and red/green strategies, respectively, may represent the opposed sides of this dilemma.

The underlying instability in each strategy is simply aggravated today by intramural competition within the Left, whether between socialists and communists or greens and socialists, since the limits of one strategy are corresponding opportunities for another party. Over time, individual parties may oscillate between identity and efficacy as they try to respond to their adversaries' moves or the tensions in their own choices. To account for these dynamics, we construct a model of strategic interaction based on the mutual positioning and characteristic tradeoffs in green/socialist competition in France and Germany. To suggest why such a model is needed, let us consider alternate approaches for explaining the ideologies and strategies of progressive parties.

Toward a Model of Strategic Interaction

To account for the ideological variation in German and French ecology parties, we might begin by examining their countries' cultural paradigms. As with any unalloyed culturalist formulation, however, there is a great deal of history that does not fit. French culture, supposedly antagonistic to the natural world, produced a lively environmental movement, and a more holistic, "deep ecological" image of green politics.⁹ And Ger-

actionary forest mythology, gave rise to a profoundly social constructionist and progressive variant of ecology.¹⁰

A wealth of recent literature suggests that ideas exist in symbiosis with political institutions.¹¹ Where the greens stand might be linked to where they sit within the matrix of national political institutions. French institutions are rather centralized, for example, compared to those of the Federal Republic. It may not be surprising, then, that demands for political decentralization take a more important place in the *Verts*' ideas than in those of the *Grünen*. Still, it is hard to fully explain the substantive differences in each party's programmatic agendas with reference to the institutional structure of either country. Both favored decentralization of some kind—but why did one emphasize the benefits to the environment, while the other foresaw premiums of social justice and the reorganization of work? It is true that West Germany has an enormous and well-organized working class—but portions of it were quite conservative, and little inclined to support an initiative to transform the economy in an ecosocialist direction.

Recent literature on ecology parties deal with more immediate features of the green parties' political environment, such as the preferences of their typical electorate, or the political situation they confront. Inglehart, for example, holds that ecology parties form to represent "postmaterial values," which in turn reflect changes in the occupational structure of advanced societies and the concerns of the generation born after World War II.¹² Kitschelt groups ecology parties within a larger category of "left-libertarian" parties that advocate decentralized politics along with egalitarian reforms, and notes their response to external opportunities and constraints, such as their relative electoral competitiveness or the attitude of elites toward their demands.¹³

The problem in these analyses is that parties move within a predefined space in the party system along a single unilinear ideological scale. Party ideology is thus assumed rather than explained. That preempts the possibility that otherwise comparable parties such as the French and German Greens would advance substantively different ideologies. Why were the *Grünen* as much materialist as postmaterialist? Why were the *Verts* more libertarian than left?

We cannot solve this problem by referring to the position of potential competitors within this space. If both socialist parties

allowed a "space" to open up that the greens then moved to fill, how is it that they filled it with different programmatic material? If the French Socialist Party was more successful than North European social democratic parties at coopting postmaterial or libertarian demands advanced by the French New Left, why did the *Verts* turn out to be the more postmaterial of the two in response? By the same token, it does not help to introduce additional competitors, and thus bilateral or multilateral competition into the equation. That would assume that parties as different as communist parties, at one end of the spectrum, and centrist liberal parties at the other, compete with greens and socialists on the basis of some clearly defined, single issue or set of issues for an identifiable electorate, which is not likely. We are not so omniscient that we know precisely what the crux of competition will be in advance.

Kitschelt's and Inglehart's unilinear scales also assume that some unique equilibrium is possible in which each party's strength and position adequately reflects the level of support for a given programmatic stance. The situation is actually far more unstable. Each strategy, even a successful one, has certain limitations that should become more pronounced the more the party holds fast to it. As tension mounts, adversaries may profit from defections. We do not seek equilibria, then, but a more dynamic model that can account for the unfolding consequences of any given strategy, and the parties' mutual interaction.

We propose to go beyond a single spatial dimension and consider the possibility that two distinct and contradictory rationalities govern the parties' strategies, shaping the ideological material available to them. On one side stands identity, on the other, efficacy. To move in the direction of identity, the party stresses the demands of a distinct movement constituency. To move toward efficacy, the party represents the widest possible range of causes or bases of support. The first tendency seeks to shore up the most intense and reliable support for change; the second tries to assemble the largest numbers to effect change. One implies doctrinal purity and autonomy, with the aim of portraying the party as the sole legitimate representative of a given cause. The other seeks points of programmatic convergence, in the name of forging alliances, either in a diverse coalition supporting the party, or with forces outside the party. Attributes of identity and efficacy may overlap in any given party strategy,

since all will try to reconcile the two imperatives. Yet the more they are combined, the more we should expect to observe tension mount between ideological purity and ideological range, between core commitment and coalition.

When two progressive parties compete, it is rational for them to move toward opposite sides of this tradeoff. Socialist parties, as parties of government, tend toward efficacy. The challengers should therefore have to maximize identity in order to present themselves as a clear alternative. When they lead or participate in government, socialist parties risk major threats to their identity. The SPD's management of a powerful industrial economy brought it into conflict with its traditional identity as the representative of the German working class, to a point where it could satisfy neither goal. While the SPD had a weak identity, and poor efficacy as well, the *Grünen* could fuse red and green symbolism without any danger to their own identity. Where attributes of identity and efficacy coexist in a single party, it is both politically powerful and oriented toward major reform. Thus the political space for alternative progressive parties is severely curtailed. The French Socialist Party, for example, came to power with a strikingly radical economic program, supported by a diverse coalition of progressive and left-wing forces. In that situation, the French ecologists faced strong obstacles, but they benefited from stressing identity—that is, the purity and distinctiveness of ecology—even more intensely than their German analogues did. No strategy is without tensions, as we have insisted, and a party like the PS that maximizes both may experience the strongest backlash. As the Socialist's coalition bent under the strains of holding power, the French Greens would interpret the PS's power itself, and the socialist doctrine that undergirded it, as a political liability. The limits in the greens' own strategic choices will not go unnoticed: centrifugal forces among factions in the *Grünen* would strain its identity; whereas the *Verts* had difficulty transcending the pure green identity they constructed for themselves.

Plan of the Book

The next chapter introduces the main events and actors in our empirical study, and structures the comparison between them. We consider the ways that intellectual and political history, administrative

and parliamentary institutions, and social and electoral trends might have shaped the greens' strategies. We argue that the crucial point of contrast is in the character and strength of social democracy in each country. The German industrial working class was traditionally well organized, and, by the postwar period, well integrated in the political economic regime. In France, the trade union movement has been politically divided and often antagonistic to the regime. Yet when global recession and the growth of the New Left posed strong challenges to the social democratic model that the SPD embodied, weak social democracy meant strong socialism (incarnated in the politically flexible, "modern" PS in France). That, in turn, would leave its mark on the nascent alternative movements which had initially mobilized in support of the PS and SPD, and later on the ecology parties that sought to present a more progressive alternative to them.

Chapter 3 develops a framework for analyzing the interaction between socialist and green parties. Two sets of theoretical literature speak to our concerns: works on the new social movements that inspired and supported green politics,¹⁴ and those on parties and party systems.¹⁵ Despite different political emphases, the two literatures both stress the importance of ideas and ideologies in political strategies. After taking note of their complementary perspectives, we try to synthesize them. Our model notes the strategic tradeoffs progressive parties face between the goals of movements and the imperatives of parties, and attempts to explain when and why they choose identity over efficacy, or vice versa.

In chapter 4, we look at politics inside the *Grünen* and *Verts*. An extremely diverse set of perspectives on the nature and aims of the environmental movement coexisted uneasily within these organizations. Our problem is therefore to ask how these competing perspectives can ever translate into coherent, competitive strategies. We refer to a seminal work on the subject: Herbert Kitschelt's *Logics of Party Formation*. Kitschelt explains the greens' strategies in terms of changes in their internal coalitions and corresponding changes in the set of external opportunities and constraints. In light of our application of Kitschelt's framework to a new case, that of *Les Verts*, we argue that Kitschelt's analysis does not focus sufficiently on the variations in ideological goals among characteristic factions, nor on ideological competition between established parties of the Left and ecology parties.

In chapter 5, we interpret the ideas behind the contrasting ecological strategies. Drawing from the *Grünen's* and *Verts'* campaign programs, internal party documents, and leaders' political statements or writings, we try to uncover the basic assumptions and priorities informing each one. The *Grünen's* red/green program emphasizes the material side of ecological questions, centering on the social and environmental consequences of industrial production. The *Verts'* focuses on the procedural side, highlighting the benefits of greater individual and regional autonomy, and the types of institutions that facilitate them. We discuss the parties' views of problems in market economics, the central state, and the corresponding models of ecologically and socially just societies they advance as an alternative in light of these contrasting emphases. We intend the chapter as a contribution to work exploring the intrinsic differences between the ecosocialist and ecoanarchist worldviews—though the programs are all the more significant in that they were formed and tested in practice as the greens established themselves during the last decade and a half.

The next four chapters focus on the dynamics of competition between the ecologists and socialists and the strategic tradeoffs each party has made. Each one of these chapters discusses a characteristic phase in the greens' development. In chapter 6, the status of the socialist party (i.e., the SPD in crisis, the PS on the ascendant) structures the green's strategic options and shapes their identities even as they begin to form out of a heterogeneous set of electoral lists or prototype parties. In chapter 7, the strategies undergo major tests, and major successes determine the red/green and pure green directions afterward. In chapter 8, the ecologists begin to build a stable core of electoral support around their respective strategies, while signs of the inherent limits in each one start to appear. The *Verts* built their identity very carefully around the themes of the environmental movement, but they lacked credibility when they tried to broaden their alternative program to include other issues. Further, their strategy of strict autonomy from other parties put them in a morally ambiguous position on the issue of alliances to thwart the progress of the *Front National* (FN), France's anti-immigrant party. The *Grünen's* red/green strategy leaned more toward efficacy than a clear identity. They tried to rally a diverse social constituency around opposition to capitalist industrial production. Yet that undermined

their ability to define their identity when the socialist party changed its own strategy to accommodate green and postindustrial issues.

Chapter 9 compares two major national elections in France and Germany in which the limitations of each strategy manifest themselves, leading to severe setbacks in each case. The resulting crises within the parties in turn paved the way to a change of leadership, and with that, a change in strategy. Each one now shows signs of moving toward the other's earlier position—the *Grünen* toward a pure green profile and the *Verts* even more clearly toward red/green. We argue that that, too, should be explained in terms of major strategic changes in the status of the leading Center-Left party. The final section of chapter 9 applies this framework to green/socialist relations in six other Western European countries: Britain, Austria, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Italy.

In our Conclusion, we discuss some significant new developments in green politics in France and Germany, and the two parties' prospects for the future, in light of our framework. Representatives of both parties are either members of the national government or are expected to be in the near future. The *Grünen* have made themselves the third strongest political force in Germany, and are poised to form the next government in Bonn. The *Verts* have finally entered the French National Assembly after trying for thirteen years, and placed one of their own, Dominique Voynet, in the current Socialist Government as Minister for the Environment and Regional Policy. We conclude that it is still in the greens' interest to emphasize the greens' distinct identity vis-à-vis mainstream socialist politics, and that these tentative moves toward coalition risk damaging this identity. We also ask whether the competing rationalities of identity and efficacy are relevant to other areas of study, such as the politics of European integration, transitions to democracy, or the new nationalism and xenophobic politics.