“Today the Fish, Tomorrow Us:”
Anti-Nuclear Activism in the Rhine Valley and Beyond, 1970-1979

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ABSTRACT

STEPHEN MILDER: “Today the Fish, Tomorrow Us:” Anti-Nuclear Activism in the Rhine Valley and Beyond, 1970-1979
(under the direction of Konrad H. Jarausch)

My dissertation analyzes the growth and development of the anti-nuclear movement in Western Europe during the 1970s. The primary focus of my research is a series of anti-reactor protests that spanned the Rhine River, connecting rural villages in German Baden, the French Alsace, and Northwest Switzerland. I seek to explain how these grassroots protests influenced public opinion about nuclear energy far from the Rhine Valley and spawned national anti-nuclear movements. I argue that democracy matters played a key role in grassroots protesters’ coalescence around the issue of nuclear energy and the growth of their movement beyond the local level. After politicians repeatedly dismissed their constituents’ concerns about the proposed “nuclearization” of the Rhine, local people created a trans-national “imagined community” as an alternative to the state, and national governments that they considered dysfunctional. Thus the association of nuclear energy with democracy matters achieved by local protesters in the Rhine Valley, many of whom were conservative farmers, was a key step towards the rise of mass anti-nuclear movements and the emergence of environmental values in Western Europe during the 1970s.
Preface

The initial inspiration for this project came during the year I spent as a high school exchange student in rural Franconia. The cooling towers of the Grafenrheinfeld nuclear reactor—and the long trail of steam that they emitted—were a constant presence in Sulzheim, the village where I lived. My host mother refused to let the reactor worry her, however. “It’s best to live so close,” she told me without any hint of sarcasm, “that way we’ll go nice and quick if anything ever happens.” In Sulzheim, like many of the surrounding villages, the massive reactor was little more than an ever present reminder that the town of Grafenrheinfeld had become quite prosperous on account of the taxes it collected from the plant’s operator.

Like my host mother and our neighbors, I learned to live with the reactor. I just didn’t think about it much at all. Instead, something else captured my attention in Germany. In 1998, the year before I came to Franconia, the Green party had entered in the German government for the first time as the junior partner to the Social Democrats. I’d never heard of the Green party before, but in the summer of 2000 when I returned to the States, I found out that there was in fact a US Green party, and that Ralph Nader was running for president on the Green ticket. The discrepancy between the German Greens, who were playing a prominent role in government, and their American counterparts, who were only acknowledged in order to be dismissed as spoilers in the tight 2000 election, intrigued me. Everyone
seemed to attribute the vast gulf between the two parties’ roles to the drastic
differences between the two countries’ electoral systems.

But I wanted to understand this difference better. Why did Germany have a
Green party in the first place, I wondered. The more I learned about German
politics, the more I realized that though it was undoubtedly much easier for a new
party to enter the Bundestag than the House of Representatives, it was certainly no
mean feat to establish a new party and to overcome the Federal Republic’s so-called
5% hurdle. Understanding how the first new party to enter the Bundestag in three
decades came to be interested me in the anti-nuclear movement, as one of the key
“new social movements” from which the Green “movement party” had supposedly emerged.

Yet my study of the anti-nuclear movement revealed to me that it was not
just “environmental concerns” that motivated grassroots anti-reactor activism
during the early 1970s. Everywhere I looked, I found people who were worried not
just concerned about nuclear energy or even the environment more generally, but
about a whole host of larger issues. These worries ranged from material matters to
fears about the future of the German genetic heritage, but a great many of them
were connected to matters of democracy. Thus, this project has in many ways come
full circle, reuniting my interests in the differences between German and American
democracy and my experiences as an exchange student in the shadow of the
Grafenrheinfeld reactor.

I owe a great debt to the many remarkable people who have helped me to
find my way over the course of this long journey. Three teachers, Valerie Rousse,
Linda Cole, and Patricia Sullivan, launched me on this path even before I ever set foot in Germany or considered studying history. Andy Markovits, who guided my first attempt to research the Greens and to answer my questions about their idea of democracy, showed me that such research could be done, told me how to do it, and put me in contact with key Greens. Moreover, Andy has remained a friend and mentor over the many years since we first met in Cambridge. Through good luck (and sometimes even a little planning) our paths have crossed everywhere from Bloomington to Vienna over the past decade.

Here at the University of North Carolina, I have been fortunate to encounter a number of people passionate about the values that have motivated my research. From my comrades in SDS and in the struggle to preserve the UNC system, to a handful of colleagues in the history department, these friends have helped me to better understand the movement I am studying and motivated me to stay active outside of the library. In particular, Alex and Adrianne Jacobs, Ben Carroll and Ana-Maria Reichenbach, and Philipp Stelzel have provided both friendship and inspiration throughout my time at Chapel Hill.

I could not have carried out my research in Europe without the generosity of Susann Minter, Kurt, Edeltraud, Maxx, and Anna Werner, Geli, Jones, and Meli Thurn, as well as Dominik Thurn and Nicole Brenner. They housed Jamie and I time and again on our trips to Germany and provided remarkable warmth and friendship. Christof Mauch, who supervised my work in Munich, provided intellectual support through the Rachel Carson Center and personal support by opening up his home to us. We will not soon forget the delicious Thanksgiving dinner we enjoyed with his
family in Tutzing. In a practical sense, my research simply would not have been possible without the generous support of the DAAD, the Fulbright Program, UNC’s Center for European Studies, and the history department’s Mowry fund, which financed my research trips to Germany, Switzerland, and France.

A host of archivists not only helped me to find the collections I needed, they also made my research enjoyable and shared my excitement about this project. Robert Camp and Christoph Becker-Schaum at the Böll Foundation’s *Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis* in Berlin have aided me countless times since my first research trip to Germany in the summer of 2003. The entire staff of that archive has made each trip to the Eldenaerstraße seem like a visit to old friends. Wolfgang Hertle at the *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung* guided me through collections at several different archives in the Hanseatic city and helped me to better understand the *graswurzel* groups over several meals during a short stay in Hamburg that I wish could have been much longer. The assistance of Volkmar Vogt at the *Archiv Soziale Bewegungen* in Freiburg was absolutely essential to this project. Not only did Volkmar help me to locate important sources, keep the archive open for me on days it was scheduled to be closed, and scan documents for me after I was back in North Carolina—he also introduced me to the activists who are at the absolute center of this research.

By far the most exciting and meaningful aspect of my time in Europe was the opportunity to speak with the people about whom I have written. Walter Mossmann gave me invaluable insights and facilitated meetings with many other activists. Günter Sacherer and Ute Friedrich opened their home to me and have
remained in close contact ever since my visit to Oberrotweil in early 2010. Countless others went out of their way to tell me their stories, to share documents with me, and to introduce me to further contacts who helped me to grasp the contours of the movement I was investigating. I simply could not have understood the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement without the kindness and assistance of these amazing people.

After I returned from Europe, Evan Torner and other members of the graduate students’ writing group based in the German Department at the University of Massachusetts probably saved me from giving up on this project during a difficult year in Brattleboro, Vermont. The group welcomed me with open arms and helped to shape my dissertation in the early stages of writing. Patrick Tobin, Matt Feminella, and Emma Woelk formed the core of an incredibly productive writing group here in North Carolina. They continued to provide immensely valuable feedback despite my rising stress level and deadlines that seemed to jump ever closer.

The members of my dissertation committee have each greatly enriched this project. Since my first year at UNC, Don Reid has seemed to understand what I am trying to say better than I do myself. His research on French protest movements of the 1970s, particularly the struggles at LIP and Larzac, has greatly benefitted my work. Lawrence Goodwyn has provided tremendous moral support throughout the years I have known him, and never shied away from asking tough questions. Miles Fletcher has helped me to think transnationally and to steer me through UNC’s evolving program in global history. Karen Hagemann has been keen to add the
impressions of someone who was herself active during the 1970s. Finally, Holger Moroff agreed to join the committee and to read my dissertation on short notice and thus provided the valuable insights of a political scientist.

My advisor, Konrad Jarasch, has guided and encouraged me since August 2006, when I first arrived in North Carolina. He has supported this project from start to finish, but his guidance has been particularly useful in the later stages of my work. His close readings of each chapter were invaluable as I worked to revise and improve my dissertation. Furthermore, his sharp focus on understanding what actually happened, and his insistence that I clearly describe how it happened, has helped me to focus my research on real people and their very real and very impressive accomplishments.

My family, Sara, Forrest, and Elinor Milder, have been supportive of this endeavor since the very beginning, frequently offering comfort when the going got tough. I am indebted most of all to Jamie Snow, who gave up Seattle for Chapel Hill and then (perhaps less reluctantly) Chapel Hill for Munich. Throughout the ups and downs of six years of graduate school, she was the one constant. Even as the task in front of me seemed to grow ever more difficult, her love and support rose to meet the challenge. This dissertation would not have been possible without her.

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Introduction

Anti-Nuclear Activism as Popular Politics:
Probing the democratic potential of 1970s environmental protest

On 8 August 1974, Freiburg’s Badische Zeitung (BZ) published an open letter written by the Reverend Peter Bloch, a Protestant pastor from the town of Emmendingen. Bloch began his letter by identifying himself as a “participant in the citizens’ actions against an atomic power plant [to be built] outside the village of Wyhl.” He explained that citizens had succeeded through exceptionally dedicated work and with a substantial sacrifice of money and time...in collecting more than 90,000 signatures against the construction of the planned reactor.

The Reverend considered the government’s failure to respond to this impressive display of public discontent evidence of the “thoroughly unsettling” state of West German democracy. The licensing hearing for the Wyhl reactor, which had ended abruptly after government officials cut off debate and concerned citizens walked out, further evidenced this problematic situation. Thus, Bloch predicted, “If the licensing hearing that took place in Wyhl is allowed to serve as an example in our Federal Republic, wide circles of the population will lose their trust in the democratic order of our state.”

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Though Bloch’s concerns about the democratic order of West Germany seem far afield from protests against the construction of a nuclear reactor, they were essential to the development of the anti-nuclear movement in the Upper Rhine Valley. This rural borderland where German Baden, the French Alsace, and Northwest Switzerland meet at the banks of the Rhine River was perceived as a political backwater during the 1970s. With the development of the anti-nuclear movement, however, the region quickly became an important site of interchange between protesters from three countries. When anti-nuclear protesters occupied a reactor construction site near the village of Wyhl in February 1975, the Federal Republic focused its attention on Wyhl even though nuclear energy was not a hotly contested topic away from the Upper Rhine. The speed with which this protest attracted the nation’s interest suggests a sudden, exponential growth in public concern about nuclear energy. Accordingly, it raises significant questions about the ways that local movements spread and grow to influence national politics.

Scholars have frequently explained the rapidly growing resonance of nuclear matters during the 1970s on the basis of Ronald Inglehart’s value change hypothesis. Inglehart posits that the generation that came of political age during the 1960s and 1970s was not interested in material issues like wages and security, but rather in post-material, quality of life issues. It follows that concerns about nuclear energy, easily classified as matters related to “quality of life,” would be of great interest to the post-materially minded people of the mid-1970s.

As Bloch’s open letter on anti-nuclear activism points out, however, the protests in the Rhine Valley, though nominally directed against specific reactor
projects, actually had a wider scope. According to the Reverend, protesters’
interactions with government officials and their assessment of the functionality of
the West German democratic order motivated their ongoing political engagement.
Accepting Bloch’s contention about the place of democracy in what is typically
described as the single-issue “anti-nuclear” movement requires moving beyond
simply chalk the rise of concerns about nuclear energy up to the turn to post-
material values. Instead, thinking with Bloch necessitates a closer look at the
relationship between environmentalism and democracy in order to understand the
reasons that anti-nuclear concerns became salient during the 1970s in West
Germany.

This project, therefore, starts from the hypothesis that democracy matters,
which run like a red thread throughout the Rhine Valley anti-nuclear movement,
must be part of the explanation of the movement’s rapid growth and its powerful
resonance. References to the highhandedness of public officials and the stagnancy
of civic debate are legion in the words and writings of anti-nuclear activists. Some
of them have even described concerns about the democratic order as essential to
the cohesion of the anti-nuclear coalition, which ranged from farmers and vintners
to country doctors, village pharmacists, conservationists, non-violent activists, and
even SDS-veterans.

As Walter Mossmann, a Freiburg leftist who became a key link between
urban and rural protesters put it, the glue that held together this outwardly diverse
coalition was “the philosophical virtue of doubt.” Specifically, Mossmann continued,
the opponents of the Wyhl reactor were united in that “they doubted the dogma of
the miracle weapon nuclear energy and they doubted the infallibility of their
premier.”² At their very core then, the protests against the Wyhl reactor were also
protests against the state of West German (or at least southwest German)
democracy.

Not only did these twin doubts bring together activists of diverse political
backgrounds, they were also essential to the important connections that developed
between activists left and right of the Rhine. Shared concerns about the threats
posed by nuclear reactors—which, despite the reassurances of government experts,
certainly would not be limited by national borders—brought together people who
had spent much of the last century fighting wars against one another. The
realization that national and state governments were unconcerned about their
plight motivated these people to create their own autonomous spaces and
organizations. Geographically, this autonomy existed on occupied construction sites
in Badensian Wyhl, Alsatian Weisweil, and Swiss Kaiseraugst. The International
Association of Alsatian and Badensian Citizens’ Initiatives, which brought together a
growing number of local anti-reactor groups from both sides of the Rhine, was its
political manifestation. As we will see, the very fact that these entities considered
themselves outside the control of established government structures made them so
powerful.

Despite its obvious importance for activists like Bloch and Mossmann and for
the development the Rhenish anti-reactor campaign, the close connection between

² Walter Mossmann, realistisch sein: das unmögliche verlangen. Wahrheitsgetreu
gefälschte Erinnerungen (Berlin: edition der Freitag, 2009), 182.
concerns about nuclear energy and democracy matters has been underemphasized in most scholarly accounts of the anti-nuclear movement. In probing the perceived boundary between environmental affairs and matters of democracy, therefore, my project is intended to challenge the notion that the protest movements of the 1970s are significant primarily as markers of the oft-touted turn towards post-material values. Instead, my research is intended to help explain why democracy is so closely linked to the purportedly post-material anti-nuclear movement. This is not to say that so-called post-material values did not become more politically commonplace during the 1970s. On the contrary, I will argue here that the radical political challenges posed by the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement played an enormous part in the politicization of environmental protection.

Yet, the very idea that the anti-reactor campaign on the Upper Rhine marks a fleeting moment where environmentalism held deep democratic potential suggests

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3 By and large, these focus on the anti-nuclear movement as an ecological campaign. See, for example: Dieter Rucht, “Anti-Atomkraftbewegung” in Die Sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945. Ein Handbuch, Roland Roth and Dieter Rucht, eds. (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2008); Jens-Ivo Engels, Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik: Ideenwelt und politische Verhaltensstile in Naturschutz und Umweltbewegung, 1950 – 1980 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006). Many other accounts see the anti-nuclear movement primarily as one of the “New Social Movements” that emerged during the 1970s. Though this perspective does attribute some democratic significance to the anti-nuclear movement, it treats the movement primarily as an example of the turn to “post-material” values. See, for example: Dieter Rucht, Von Wyhl nach Gorleben: Bürger gegen Atomprogramm und nukleare Entsorgung (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1980); and Roland Roth, “Neue soziale Bewegungen in der politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik – eine vorläufige Skizze” in Neue soziale Bewegungen in Westeuropa und den USA. Ein internationaler Vergleich, Karl-Werner Brand, ed. (Frankfurt: Campus, 1985).

that taking up anti-nuclear activism was not a retreat from matters of true political significance. My understanding of the intertwining of democracy matters and anti-nuclear protest in the Upper Rhine valley takes as a starting point Belinda Davis’s path-breaking essay, “What’s Left? Popular Political Participation in Postwar Europe.” In this piece, Davis surveys the findings of several recent studies of postwar protest in order to describe the ways that a phenomenon that she terms “popular politics” has contributed to the expansion of European democracy since 1945. Davis defines popular politics as “manifestations of political expression” that occur “outside of formal channels and involv[e] broad populations.”\(^5\) Since 1945, she argues, such acts of expression have “confronted the prevailing limits of legitimate political participation, and served more broadly to redefine ‘politics’ and democratic participation.”\(^6\)

Viewing the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement as an example of “popular politics” allows for an analysis of the way that limited and specific concerns about nuclear reactors mushroomed into a critique of government structures and even democracy. In fact, the rapid spread of anti-nuclear activism in the immediate aftermath of the struggle at Wyhl suggests that this interweaving of democracy and environmentalism went hand in hand with the movement’s remarkable growth beyond the Rhine Valley. It was precisely the deep political ramifications of Rhenish anti-nuclear activism that made this grassroots movement significant elsewhere.


\(^6\) Ibid., 370.
Studying localized anti-nuclear protest, therefore, ought to offer significant insights into the oft-mentioned, but rarely analyzed relationship between “local action” and “global thinking.”

**The Rise of Environmental Protest and its Significance**

The strength and salience achieved by nuclear concerns so soon after the 1975 Wyhl occupation suggests that this event precipitated the speedy development of nuclear energy from a local issue to a leading concern for people far away from the Upper Rhine. Determining how an “environmental” issue like nuclear energy gained footing in the realm of “serious” politics has preoccupied many scholars of the movement. In so strongly emphasizing the differences that purportedly separate environmental concerns from other, earlier foci of protest, this literature has carved out a separate niche for environmentalism, and often further differentiated the anti-nuclear movement. As I will argue in this dissertation, accentuated classification schemes do not necessarily enhance our understanding of social movements. It is clear, for example, that activists with a wide range of interests and various understandings of anti-nuclear protest participated in the

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7 Rucht and Roth’s recently published handbook of German social movements exemplifies this emphasis on differentiating and classifying social movements. In this guide, Rucht defines the anti-nuclear movement as: “the individuals, groups, and organizations, who actively worked against the civil use of atomic energy, particularly through means of collective public protest within the framework of a larger, self-defined network-like relationship.” He then goes on to distinguish the anti-nuclear movement (which is only interested in nuclear matters) from the environmental movement (which is interested in nuclear matters among many other things). Dieter Rucht, “Die Anti-Atombewegung,” in *Die Sozialen Bewegungen* (see note 3), 246 – 247.
anti-nuclear movement. As we will see, their own complicated understandings of
anti-nuclear activism challenge such clean classifications.

Nevertheless, the idea that the anti-nuclear movement marked a break from
previous modes of protest was the premise of the first organized, scholarly attempt
to understand it. These initial studies viewed the anti-nuclear movement as one of
many “New Social Movements” (NSM) that appeared during the 1970s and
collectively comprised a “larger whole.” As the very name of this approach implies,
proponents of NSM theory have always emphasized first and foremost the way that
the movements that they study are decidedly different, in terms of both political
praxis and social values, from previous forms of activism. The weight of NSM
theory, therefore, has effectively driven a wedge between the activism during the
1970s and earlier mobilizations.

Accordingly, NSM theory is well matched to Ronald Inglehart’s value change
thesis, which posits that the stability and economic growth of the post-war period
meant that the generation that came of age during the 1960s and 1970s had
markedly different concerns than preceding generations. The generations that had
survived the World Wars and the Great Depression were focused on “material”
needs like food, steady employment, and shelter. The generation that came of age
during the 1960s and 1970s, however, was freed from these basic concerns, and

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8 Roland Roth and Dieter Rucht, “Einleitung,” in Neue soziale Bewegungen in der
Bundesrepublik Deutschland, ed. Roland Roth and Dieter Rucht, (Frankfurt:
Campus, 1987), 11. This text offers both a concise overview of the concept of “New
Social Movements” and descriptions of some of the key problems within New Social
Movements Theory.
instead focused on post-material matters like environmentalism and identity politics.  

On account of its experience during the Second World War and the deprivation it suffered immediately after 1945, West Germany seems to provide an exemplary case of changing values. Rebuilding from the material destruction wrought by the war, incorporating millions of ethnic German immigrants into society, and simply finding enough to eat were key concerns during the immediate postwar period. Furthermore, Adenauer’s “chancellor democracy” hardly made room for widespread political participation, let alone dissent.

In order to strongly differentiate the “New Social Movements” of the 1970s from the “conflict-shy and anti-participatory” political culture that pervaded the Federal Republic as late as the early 1960s, NSM theorists have often argued that these movements appeared out of the blue during the middle 1970s and entered fully formed into society. Karl-Werner Brand, for example, opens an article on

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9 Inglehart’s value change thesis is described in his 1971 article “The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies” (*The American Political Science Review* 65, no. 4: 991 – 1017) and laid out more fully in *The Silent Revolution* (see note 4).


12 Roth and Rucht, “Einleitung” in *Neue soziale Bewegungen* (see note 7), 9.
“Continuity and Discontinuity in the New Social Movements” with the statement that:

In the first half of the 1970s, next to no one could have predicted that in the following years a new, broad wave of protest movements would be sparked [sic] not by the traditional problems of the capitalist order, which had so recently been re-polarized by the student movement, but rather by problems of social reproduction.\(^{13}\)

Not only does Brand’s peculiar metaphor posit that the appearance of “a new, broad wave of protest movements” was completely unexpected during the 1970s, it also suggests that these movements emerged because of a whole new set of problems related to “social reproduction,” which had not been considered important by previous activists.

Brand differentiates these matters of “social reproduction” from the traditional “questions about property and distribution” that were of concern to the labor movement by defining the former as problems of “lifestyle.” The causes of these lifestyle problems, he continues, are located “in the counterproductive consequences of industrial growth...or more generally in the ‘growth cartel’ of government, unions, and capital.” Due to the dominance of this “growth cartel,” Brand argues, “non-material interests, needs for self-organization and autonomy, for non-hegemonic and non-instrumental relations between humanity and nature are structurally ruled out.” As a result, he concludes, resistance must come in the form of “fundamental opposition.”\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\) Karl-Werner Brand, “Kontinuität und Diskontinuität in den neuen sozialen Bewegungen,” in Neue soziale Bewegungen (see note 7), 30.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 32 – 33.
Yet in devoting such impressive energies to differentiating the movements of the 1970s from previous movements within West Germany, and simultaneously failing to look beyond the FRG’s borders for precedents, this approach has obstructed our understanding of the origins and thus the direction of this “new broad wave” of social movements. In his own study of the anti-nuclear movement, * Von Wyhl nach Gorleben*, the sociologist Dieter Rucht tacitly admits this shortcoming of NSM theory. Rucht asserts here that, “the fact that this opposition arose completely unexpectedly, and was initially classified as a short-lived phenomenon concerning only a small minority, points out the likelihood of mis-predicting [the movement’s future].”  

In de-emphasizing any characteristics that might link the anti-nuclear movement to a usable past or pre-existing activist traditions, NSM theorists have effectively divorced their subject from the longer narrative of West German history even as they have obscured important transnational connections.  

The ramifications of this sequestration are quite significant for our understanding of “environmentalism” as a subject of protest. First, understanding

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16 In more recent work, Roth and Rucht have stepped back slightly from this stark differentiation between the New Social Movements and their precedents and thus moved closer towards that integrates anti-nuclear activism into a longer history of protest. This new interpretation is evident in the duo’s recently published handbook, * Die sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945*, which brings the anti-nuclear movement and other supposed NSMs into a common framework with many other West German social movements. Nevertheless, even this guide is premised on the idea that various individual social movements are best understood when they are differentiated and associated only with a narrow set of goals and concerns. Accordingly, the handbook defines the anti-nuclear movement quite narrowly (see note 7).
environmental concerns as some sort of separate political realm, one that is far afield from the bread and butter issues of concern to working people, serves to delegitimize environmental protest and suggests that it lacks ramifications beyond “quality of life” for members of the established middle class. It does not explain how such matters could become issues of real political important for so many people. In other words, the extensive terminology deployed by NSM theorists simply does not explain the process of recruiting that caused so many West Germans and western Europeans to join the anti-nuclear movement. On the contrary, this approach suggests that the effects of a campaign directed against a single nuclear reactor are local and limited. Furthermore, these concerns appear to be the problems of a privileged few who are opposed to development “in their own backyards,” not matters affecting society as a whole.

The rhetoric of protesters like Bloch and Mossmann, however, suggests one important sense in which anti-nuclear activism had far broader ramifications. Rather than delimiting their environmentalism to the preservation of their own “quality of life” or the conservation of nature, these anti-nuclear protesters took actions and pushed ideas that extended far into other political realms. This dissertation starts from the premise that fully understanding how grassroots activists built the environmental movement requires taking seriously these broader ramifications of environmentalism and linking the protests of the 1970s to chronologically longer, and geographically broader histories and traditions of protest. In his informative critique of New Social Movement theory, Craig Calhoun shows that the very characteristics that supposedly define the “newness” of New
Social Movements have been present in other “old” movements, including the supposedly archetypical labor movement.\textsuperscript{17}

One of the few accounts that seeks to incorporate the anti-nuclear movement into the sort of longer historical narrative that Calhoun outlines for the concept of New Social Movements more generally is Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski’s \textit{The German Left: Red, Green, and Beyond}. For these two authors, the rise of the West German Greens is the longer narrative in which the anti-nuclear movement ought to be embedded. Beginning with the extra-parliamentary organizations that emerged from the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) during the 1950s, Markovits and Gorski trace the lineage of \textit{Die Grünen} straight through the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s.\textsuperscript{18}

Accordingly, \textit{The German Left} offers by far the best historical narrative of the anti-nuclear movement’s role in longer political processes in the Federal Republic. Yet as the title of this important work implies, it downplays the role of those who did not identify themselves as of the political “Left” in the formation of the anti-nuclear movement. As my research shows, however, many of the first anti-nuclear activists were conservative rural people and members of the urban \textit{Bildungsbürgertum}. These people were anything but radical leftists. Taking seriously their role is essential for answering important questions about the way that the movement developed and the means by which such locally focused anti-

\textsuperscript{17} Craig Calhoun, “New Social Movements of the Early Nineteenth Century” (\textit{Social Science History} 17, no. 3: 385 – 427).

\textsuperscript{18} Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski, \textit{The German Left: Red, Green, and Beyond} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 30.
reactor activism leapt to the national level and took the form of a broader anti-
nuclear movement.

Markovits and Gorski’s study of The German Left could be appended for our
purposes by the German environmental historian Jens Ivo Engels’s impressive
recent history of the West German environmental movement, Naturpolitik in der
Bundesrepublik. In this extensive work, Engels sheds much light on the ways that
the environmentalist project changed during the 1970s. In so doing, Engels has both
linked the environmental activism of that decade with longer traditions of protest
and also sought to explain just how the movement grew so significantly at that time.
Accordingly, Engels argues that it was in the 1970s that “the modern environmental
movement came to be,” but he also notes that this development “was not without
preconditions.”19 Importantly, however, Engels disputes the various theories
stating that some great social or political sea change precipitated the rise of the
“modern environmental movement” during this decade. Instead of aiming his work
at corroborating or disproving one of these theories, Engels describes his survey of
environmental politics in West Germany as a study not of “why there came to be an
environmental movement, but rather how the problem of threatened nature was
handled in Federal Republican politics.”20

Thinking with Engels and asking how environmental problems were
incorporated into politics allows for deeper insight into the meanings of anti-
nuclear activism during the 1970s. Like Markovits and Gorski’s work, Engels

19 Engels, Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik, 12.

20 Ibid., 20. Emphasis from original.
embeds the anti-nuclear movement into a longer history of social protest in the Federal Republic. In fact, *The German Left* highlights an essential corollary to Engels’s question about “how” threatened nature was handled in West German politics. Specifically, the prominent role that the book’s authors attribute to the anti-nuclear movement in the convergence of disparate political forces that preceded the founding of the West German Greens raises the question, “How did so many disparate groups and individuals come together around the topic of nuclear energy?” Using new archival research, oral interviews with anti-nuclear activists, and the periodicals of political organizations, this dissertation will seek to explain how people came together around the topic of nuclear energy. In so doing, it will also show how nuclear energy in particular, and environmentalism more generally, became such important topics in West German politics during the 1970s.

In so doing, I intend both to question and to fill out Markovits and Gorski’s long, whiggish narrative that concludes with the rise of the Greens. It is my contention that adding to our understanding of how individuals and groups coalesced around the issue of nuclear energy will also help to explain how these various activists perceived of the broader political ramifications of their project. In relationship to Markovits and Gorski’s narrative of the Greens’ rise, therefore, my investigation ought to show whether the long march from the reactor sites to the

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21 Silke Mende’s path-breaking recent study of the “founding Greens” fleshes out Markovits and Gorski’s narrative of convergence. In this important monograph, Mende masterfully describes six different political currents that came together as the Green party. Mende, however, places relatively little emphasis on the process by which these various currents came together. Silke Mende, “*Nicht rechts, nicht links, sondern vorn.*” *Eine Geschichte der Gründungsgrünen* (Oldenbourg: Wissenschaftsverlag, 2011).
halls of Parliament was really an interest of anti-nuclear protesters, or an unexpected contingency. This distinction is particularly important because it allows for the possibility that though anti-nuclear protesters played an important role in the genealogy of the Greens, they may have seen other objectives and other modes of activism as more powerful, or at least more germane to their project than those employed by the Green party. I argue here that particularly in the way they conceived of democracy, pursued democratic reform, and acted as democrats, Rhenish anti-reactor activists differed from the Greens.

**The Democratic Dimension of Anti-Nuclear Protest**

The sorts of doubts and criticisms of West German democracy articulated at the outset of this introduction by Peter Bloch and Walter Mossmann were hardly unique in the mid-1970s. Already in his classic 1962 work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas premised much of his criticism of modern society on the constricted space for public input in decision-making processes. His starting point, therefore, was closely aligned to the concerns that initially interested anti-nuclear protesters in the problems of democracy. Specifically, Habermas complained that the “exercise and equilibration of power now takes place directly between the private bureaucracies, special-interest associations, parties, and public administration.”

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22 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 176. Benjamin Barber echoes this sentiment for the American case: “As fewer and fewer Americans participate in public affairs, more and more public affairs are being relegated to the private sector.” For him, the problem is evidence of the dysfunctionality of representative democracy. “Representation,” he argues, “destroys participation and citizenship
Rhine Valley anti-nuclear protesters found themselves was an even more extreme example of such elite collusion. Premier Filbinger and Minister of Economics Eberle, the Wyhl reactor project’s two fiercest advocates in Baden-Württemberg’s government, also sat on the board of the Badenwerk utility company—which was to own and operate the proposed reactor.

Famously, Habermas attributes this short-circuiting of the democratic process to the “structural transformation of the bourgeois public sphere.” He links this transformation closely to the emergence of modern mass society from the remnants of nineteenth century bourgeois society. Locally organized discussion circles, cafes, and salons formerly created space for public political debate. In the twentieth century, Habermas finds by contrast, the “mass circulation press” and supralocally organized mass political parties have never intended to engage the citizenry in debate. Instead, these institutions have been concerned with “something like modern propaganda,” which means that they exist at the intersection “of enlightenment and control; of information and advertising; of pedagogy and manipulation.” In such a system, where “the transactions themselves are stylized into a show,” he argues, “publicity loses its critical function in favor of a staged display.”

As we will see, Habermas’s perception of the modern decision-making process as a stylized show could easily describe the Wyhl reactor licensing process.

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Each step in this process seemed precisely choreographed and appeared to function only as an opportunity for the public to contribute its acclamation to government officials’ preconceived plans. Dissenting voices were mercilessly quashed.

Habermas’s paean to nineteenth century public life, which contains within it his proposed solution to the problems of contemporary mass politics, also has important parallels with the development of anti-nuclear activism in the Upper Rhine Valley. During the nineteenth century, he explains, “under the leadership of men of the church and professors, lawyers, doctors, teachers and pharmacists, manufacturers and landowners, the educated and propertied circles founded local political clubs—occasional associations at first, voter associations held together solely by the delegates.”24 The sort of “loosely knit voter groups” praised by Habermas were reflected in the “citizens’ initiative” groups that formed in many rural villages as a means of organizing local opponents of the Wyhl reactor. Village notables, particularly Protestant pastors, doctors, and pharmacists became leaders in many of these local associations.25

24 Ibid., 201 – 202.

25 The bourgeois character of the rural citizens’ initiative groups provides a further point of comparison with Habermas’s idealistic vision nineteenth century democracy. In fact, a number of prominent scholars have criticized Habermas’s theory precisely because of whom it comprised. Nancy Fraser sums up some of these criticisms by saying that Habermas’s critics “argue that, despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility, the official public sphere rested on, indeed was importantly constituted by, a number of significant exclusions.” As we will see, the bourgeois public sphere described by Habermas—complete with its exclusions—has important parallels to the anti-nuclear “citizen’s initiatives” that developed in the rural Upper Rhine valley. Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 113.
This similarity provides space for a productive comparison of Habermas’s sketch of the transformed public sphere and the situation faced by anti-nuclear activists in the Rhine Valley. On the one hand, Habermas’s 1962 criticisms of contemporary democracy foreshadow the concerns of Rhine Valley anti-nuclear protesters like Reverend Bloch, who detested the collapse of public debate. On the other hand, the formation of local associations comprised of the bourgeois opponents of nuclear energy allows us to test whether or not the return to nineteenth century associational life yearned for by Habermas might have been viable in the postwar era. Bringing Rhine Valley anti-nuclear protesters into dialogue with Habermas, then, will allow for a new assessment of both their project’s democratic self-understanding and the potential of Habermas’s democratic ideal in the post-war era.

At the same time, bringing together these two frameworks will also provide a basis for questions about the relationship between local action and global politics. That is to say, the anti-nuclear movement’s development from a series of local protests to a national movement suggests a possible antidote for Habermas’s bleak assessment of modern-day supralocal political parties and democracy’s disconnection from local associational politics. As will be shown here, however, the anti-nuclear movement’s growth beyond the Upper Rhine valley in many ways evinced the persistent difficulties of introducing models of grassroots democratic practice into supralocal politics.
**Approaching the Movement**

Assessing Rhenish anti-nuclear protest as an example of “popular politics,” and therefore as a powerful movement with important implications for the democratic order and environmental affairs, requires understanding how Rhenish protesters constructed their movement against nuclear energy. With each step in the process of movement building, anti-nuclear activists developed alternative forms of action which, as Davis puts it, “confronted the prevailing limits of legitimate political participation.” In a certain sense, this point may seem self-evident. By speaking up against the intentions of politicians whom they themselves had proudly returned time and again to office, protesters in the conservative Upper Rhine Valley showed an unexpected level of discontent with their duly elected government. Yet the notion that a more participatory democracy in Baden-Württemberg could be an essential aspect of the anti-nuclear project seems alien to our understanding of environmentalism and environmental protest. Thus, I will seek constantly to locate the connections and disconnections between these two topics and to address them.

This dissertation, therefore, will describe in detail the slow development of Rhine Valley anti-nuclear protest and its protagonists' increasing focus on democracy matters. In contrast to many previous studies of West German anti-nuclear protest, I have been able to use oral interviews and the records of key movement organizations and individual activists in order to better narrate the story in its protagonists' own words.\(^{26}\) In drawing primarily on these activists' accounts,

\(^{26}\) During February and March 2010, I interviewed 22 activists. I also accessed important collections at the Badensian and Alsatian Citizens' Initiatives Archive in Weisweil, Germany.
it is not my intention to purposefully exclude the viewpoints of government officials or utilities executives. Instead, it is my aim to focus closely on the way that a broad coalition of local people was able to work together in order to build a powerful social movement that featured a new democratic model. While it is important to understand this movement in relation to the officials and executives that it acted against, those outsiders are not part of the mass social mobilization that I am describing here. In fact, officials’ understanding of anti-nuclear activists was framed by their own interests and their desire to paint the movement as a radical opponent of the state and the public interest. Nevertheless, I have used state and local government files, press reports, and even sources from industry where possible in order to temper or question the words of anti-nuclear activists.

As I see it, however, protesters’ outraged descriptions of their treatment at the hands of government officials, whether or not they are objectively “true,” by definition reveal these activists’ problems with the contemporary democratic order and also their idealized conceptions of democracy. After all, many of these same protesters were long-time supporters of the politicians who planned to “nuclearize” the Upper Rhine. They expected to be able to work productively with these revered public officials. At the outset of their struggle at least, local people were reticent to denounce their duly elected leaders. Witnessing these people’s remarkable transformation from ardent supporters of their Christian Democratic government to radical democrats is a central aspect of my project.

It was a disconnect between the expectations and perspective of government planners and that of the Rhenish population that shaped the anti-nuclear movement
and thus coupled democracy matters with environmental concerns. In order to explain this coupling, I will begin my dissertation by showing how government and citizens’ very different ideas about “the facts” of nuclear energy framed the conflict that developed between these erstwhile allies. This conflict was due in large part to the two competing descriptions of how nuclear reactors would affect the local economy. Government officials viewed reactor projects as a tremendous boon for an “underdeveloped” region. In addition to their role as vehicles for local economic development, reactors could also insure the energy needs of existing industrial enterprises elsewhere. Officials proudly proclaimed this potential of reactor construction projects in the most grandiose terms. At one point, government planners actually exulted that as a result of the Rhine’s impending nuclearization, “the functions ‘living,’ ‘recreation,’ etc. should be re-settled to the ‘pre-mountainous zone’ and the side-valleys of the Rhine” in order to make way for a swathe of industrial development equivalent to a “second Ruhr.” Such bombastic plans caused local people to see nuclear reactors as a clear threat to their agricultural livelihoods and to the region itself, which faced a radical transformation.

These differing interpretations stemmed from conflicting ideas of “the facts” about nuclear energy. Government officials supported their arguments with data about the need for more energy and the safety of reactors. At the same time, local people drew on the findings of meteorologists in order to buttress their arguments that reactors would damage their crops and thus hamstring the local economy, which centered on viticulture. As I will show, it was on the basis of these deep-seated concerns about individuals’ livelihoods and the region’s economy that the
first concerned citizens recruited their colleagues and neighbors to the campaign against the Rhine’s imminent nuclearization.

After describing this initial stage of recruiting, I will look at how anti-nuclear protesters began to implicate their government in the Rhine’s proposed nuclearization. Officials’ highhanded responses to their statements of concern and their pleas for assistance caused local people to begin incorporating worries about the state of West German democracy into their criticisms of nuclear reactors. This focus on the democratic dimension of the anti-nuclear struggle developed in earnest after protesters collected some 60,000 signatures against a reactor proposed for the town of Breisach. Without acknowledging public discontent as their reason, government officials decided behind closed doors to move the proposed reactor to the village of Wyhl. Not only did concerned citizens feel left out of the reactor siting process, they also believed that their concerns had not been taken into account, since re-locating the reactor to Wyhl would not protect their sensitive crops.

New groups and individuals were recruited to the anti-nuclear cause as it became clear that this movement was not directed solely against the proposed reactor, but concerned also with the behavior of government officials. A new petition against the Wyhl reactor garnered nearly 100,000 signatures. Protesters patiently participated in the bureaucratic licensing process and requested meetings with government officials. Time and again, however, their efforts were rebuffed by the very politicians whom they had until recently admired. It was on the basis of officials’ continued unwillingness to engage with them that local people began to search for alternative means of making their voices heard. It was at this juncture, in
other words, that anti-nuclear protesters turned their energy even more directly to the limits of democracy.

I describe the July 1974 public hearing on the Wyhl reactor as the tipping point when local people’s patience with the licensing process finally ran out. The hearing effectively ended when concerned citizens walked out in disgust with government officials’ decision to cut off debate on a contentious topic. Moments later, a small group of protesters returned to the meeting hall bearing a black coffin on which they had written the word “democracy.” In symbolically confirming democracy’s demise, protesters made absolutely clear that this issue was of paramount importance to them. The local newspaper’s denunciation of their action as politically “out of bounds” could perhaps better be considered a description of their movement’s new direction as local people sought to develop their own means of action outside the limits of a democratic process that they had, if only metaphorically, pronounced dead.

The idea that anti-nuclear protesters were “out of bounds” became all the more poignant as activists from Baden and the Alsace worked together to form an “International Committee of Badensian and Alsatian Citizens Initiatives.” Beginning in August 1974, this organization brought together activists from both sides of the Rhine—and therefore both sides of the boundary between France and West Germany—in order to continue the anti-nuclear struggle outside the formal licensing process. In expanding their protests beyond pre-existing administrative districts, and arguing that the “affected population” could not be contained by political boundaries, protesters challenged the limits of democracy.
Anti-nuclear activists’ determination to use actions rather than words in order to make their voices heard formed the basis for their democratic challenge. Ongoing protests against the expansion of a French military base on the Larzac plateau and the short-lived 1973 “trial squat” on a reactor construction site in nearby Kaiseraugst, Switzerland introduced the region to the idea of site occupation as a means of halting industrial construction projects. In the fall of 1974, the International Committee of Badensian and Alsatian Citizens’ Initiatives brought together protesters from both Baden and Alsace in order to occupy the construction site of a lead-stearate processing plant outside the Alsatian village of Marckolsheim. I will argue that this action came to embody protesters’ imagination of an “Alemannic community,” which used the local dialect spoken by rural people on both sides of the Rhine as the basis for deep opposition to the seemingly far-off governments in both Paris and Stuttgart. The very existence of the “Alemannic Community,” in other words, over-stepped political boundaries and represented a grassroots democratic alternative to the long-armed bureaucratic control of central government.

I will reinforce the significance of the imagined community, centered around an occupied construction site, by addressing the myriad ways in which site occupation was more than just an attention-grabbing tactic for anti-nuclear protest. When construction of the Wyhl reactor began in February 1975, the Marckolsheim construction site was still occupied. Protesters shuttled from Marckolsheim to Wyhl in order to launch an occupation there. After a brutal police action cleared the site, more than 28,000 protesters returned and re-occupied it. Though this action has
frequently been described by scholars as if it occurred in a vacuum, it is clear that the Wyhl occupation was only the latest step in a trajectory of anti-nuclear protest in the region that had been ongoing for more than half a decade. It was undertaken by local people who had already confronted many perceived limitations on public engagement in crucial decision-making processes. The Wyhl occupation, in other words, was neither tactically nor programmatically novel. It was, however, tantamount to the long-term creation of a new space for democratic debate.

As both a step towards the local realization of the democratic ideal and a local struggle with large repercussions for people all around the world, Rhine Valley anti-nuclear protest had clear, substantive effects outside of the region. To examine the effects of this rapidly expanding protest movement, I will turn to the anti-nuclear protests that took place beyond Wyhl and show how these efforts diverged from those commonly attributed to anti-nuclear protest. Whereas standard accounts of West Germany’s anti-nuclear movement described the Wyhl protests as a catalyst for further anti-nuclear actions, they do not tend to explicitly explore their broader ramifications in terms of democracy and public engagement. The trajectory of anti-nuclear protest leads from the focus on specific sites to a wider focus on stopping the Federal Republic’s nuclear program. Much of the broader significance of the anti-nuclear movement, which extends far beyond the matter of nuclear energy itself, is lost in these accounts.

By first describing in detail the development of the anti-nuclear protests in the Upper Rhine Valley, and then turning to the connections between these actions and other protests throughout the Federal Republic and beyond, I will show the
ways that the Rhine Valley anti-nuclear activism played a key role in the
development of public concern with nuclear energy. Far from serving as evidence of
a previous turn to post-material values, I argue that the Wyhl protests themselves
motivated others to take up the issue of nuclear energy because of the deep effects
that these protests had on the government of Baden-Württemberg and the state of
West German democracy. Nevertheless, as I will show, the changes affected by anti-
nuclear protest were markedly different in the Upper Rhine Valley and beyond it.

In conclusion, I will suggest the ways that Rhenish protesters’ alternative,
unbounded approach to democracy was utilized by the West German Greens in their
surprisingly successful 1979 campaign for the European Parliament. Along with
other founders of Die Grünen, Petra Kelly learned much from the anti-nuclear
movement, particularly the protests against the Wyhl reactor. Her deep
understanding of the radical democratic potential of anti-nuclear protest led her to
call for the 1979 elections to be made into a “decisive battle against nuclear power
plants.” In appropriating the ideas of the anti-nuclear movement as the ideological
underpinnings of the Green party, Kelly hoped to create a radical new “anti-party
party.” Yet the result of the Greens’ foray into electoral politics was not a radical
alteration to the democratic system itself, but rather a significant and much-needed
reform and refreshment of the Federal Republic’s existing democratic praxis. Thus,
while the Greens drew significantly on anti-nuclear activism, and while their
entrance into Bonn’s two-and-a-half party system had important consequences, they
did not fulfill the radical democratic potential of anti-nuclear politics in the mid-
1970s.
Chapter One

“The Facts” and Foul Weather:
Recruiting farmers and Freiburgers
with anti-nuclear knowledge and meteorological models

“We all grumble about the weather but—but—but nothing is done about it.”
-attributed to Mark Twain

A retrospective on “six years of conflict over nuclear energy on the Upper
Rhine” in Freiburg’s *Badische Zeitung (BZ)* began by describing a noteworthy failure.
In May 1971, a country doctor by the name of Engelhard Bühler had organized a
meeting in order to inform his fellow physicians about the dangers of nuclear
power. Apparently unconcerned about the risks to the local population and even
the German genetic heritage that Bühler and the Freiburg physicist Walther Herbst
attributed to nuclear reactors, the doctors did not “allow themselves to be
motivated to resistance.” Nevertheless, the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement later
flourished beyond Bühler’s wildest dreams. As Michael Doelfs of the *BZ* reported,
“when people began to think about wine the spark caught.”

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1 Robert Underwood Johnson, *Remembered Yesterdays* (Boston: Little, Brown, and
Co., 1923), 322.

2 Michael Doelfs, “Erst beim Wein sprang der Funke über,” *Badische Zeitung*, 26
January 1977. AGG E.4. Umweltzentrum Bielefeld, Akte 201. See also: “Wie
In a region that considered itself a “unique production area for European wines of the highest quality,” raising grapes and producing wine stood at the very heart of the local economy.\(^3\) As one proud craftsman put it, “wine-grapes are a very work-intensive, highly sensitive specialty crop. Many people can make their livelihoods working vineyards in a relatively small space.”\(^4\) Thus, describing the dangers of nuclear power in terms of viticulture was the key to attracting public interest in the topic. Because such a large proportion of the local population was dependent on vineyards and their sensitive crops for its livelihood, vintners’ concerns quickly became regional concerns. Yet this fact is often overlooked in analyses of Rhenish anti-nuclear activism; an oversight linked to the fact that vintners’ concerns about nuclear power were so different from the fears about radiation voiced by doctors, scientists, and environmentalists.\(^5\)


\(^5\) The significant role of economic motivations in early anti-nuclear activism has been overlooked, in particular, by New Social Movements theory, which places anti-nuclear activism as part of a “larger whole” of social movements that emerged early in the 1970s focused only on problems of social reproduction. See, for example, Roland Roth and Dieter Rucht, eds., Neue soziale Bewegungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Frankfurt: Campus, 1987). More recent treatments, such as Jens Ivo Engels’s important study Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik: Ideenwelt und politische Verhaltensstile in Naturschutz und Umweltbewegung, 1950 – 1980 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), buck this trend, arguing that seeing value change as a motivation for environmental activism during the 1970s explains little about why environmental concerns developed when they did and makes little sense given the increasing focus on restoring economic growth since the end of the post-war boom in the late 1960s.
In describing the slow initial development of the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement from the failed doctors’ meeting to the first successful grassroots protests, this chapter will open up some key questions about the emergence of environmental activism during the 1970s. As the Rhenish population’s story suggests, “value change” and the sudden development of an environmental consciousness cannot fully explain the rise of widespread concerns about nuclear energy.6 A long-standing respect for nature did motivate some early anti-reactor protesters, but such “environmentalism” was nothing new under the sun in the 1970s.7 It would, instead, be far better to describe Rhenish anti-reactor activism as the effective application of longstanding economic, environmental, and public health

6 Inglehart’s value change thesis, which posits that the generation that came of age in the 1970s focused on “post-material” issues because its material needs had been met by the post-war economic boom, is described in his pathbreaking 1971 article “The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies” in The American Political Science Review 65, no. 4: 991 – 1017. It is laid out more fully in his classic 1977 work The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

7 In his acclaimed environmental history of the twentieth century world, Something New Under the Sun, J. R. McNeill very clearly shows that “there has never been anything like the twentieth century” in terms of human alteration of the global environment. Yet, he argues, “environmental politics and policies, as such, began only in the 1960s.” J.R. McNeill, Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century World (New York: Norton, 2000), 3 and 349. This idea is echoed in Raymond Dominick’s impressive history of German environmentalism, where he describes the long legacies of “preservationism” and “conservationism” that preceded the emergence of the modern “environmental” movement at the beginning of the 1970s. Raymond Dominick, The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1871 – 1971 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), x – xi. I argue here that such preservationists and conservationists were present at the outset of the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement, but that it was in the course of this movement itself that the oft-touted environmentalists of the 1970s emerged.
concerns to a specific local situation. The result was the establishment of the first successful local movement against reactor construction in the Federal Republic. Yet it was the process of movement building itself that had further reaching consequences. In voicing their technical concerns about nuclear energy, the people of the Rhine Valley initiated a new protest movement that changed not only the society it confronted but its protagonists as well.

It was a cross-section of local people, from vintners and farmers to chemistry students and members of Freiburg’s Bildungsbürgertum, who built the grassroots anti-nuclear movement in the Rhine Valley. These concerned citizens faced a significant initial challenge in their attempts to motivate their neighbors and colleagues to resist government plans to construct a “pearl necklace” of reactors along the Rhine. Both the paucity of information on atomic energy production and the abstract nature of the threat posed by radiation contributed to a deep disconnect between pioneering activists and the Rhenish population at large. Knowing little about nuclear reactors, or the dangers associated with them, the region’s populace had little reason to oppose reactor construction. The certainty with which government and industry spokesmen assured the population of the absolute safety of reactor technology further diminished any impetus to question nuclear power. Simply put, at the outset of the 1970s the very fact that anti-reactor activists were concerned about nuclear energy isolated them from the vast majority of the population.

In order to overcome this isolation and recruit local people to the anti-nuclear cause, pioneering anti-nuclear activists positioned nuclear power
prominently in the local landscape and wove their concerns into the region’s economic fabric. Thus, in rural areas the recruitment effort came to focus on the potential of nuclear power stations to drastically alter the local weather, thereby threatening the region’s crops and eventually forcing farmers and vintners to give up their proud agricultural occupations. In the city of Freiburg, movement recruiters jarred their neighbors by juxtaposing reactor cooling towers with the Minster’s bell tower, an image that both shocked Freiburgers and introduced a set of problems related to the proposed reactor’s gargantuan size.

Critical scientists made a key contribution to this effort by buttressing such arguments and imagery with a critical version of “the facts” about nuclear energy. In so doing, critical scientists challenged government assurances about nuclear power’s unquestionable safety. Despite the certainty with which both sides spoke, and their willingness to invoke “science” in order to reinforce their claims, bias and a broad interpretive leeway are evident in their arguments. Nevertheless, nuclear critics’ countervailing claims became a powerful means of challenging government authority. As the divergence between government statements and critics’ assertions became increasingly clear, this scientific disagreement planted seeds of doubt in the minds of local people who had previously been convinced of government officials’ integrity.

Already in the fall of 1972, the initial successes of this recruitment effort became apparent. An anti-reactor petition drive garnered nearly 60,000 signatures during a four-week public comment period. This month-long action was punctuated by a mass demonstration carried out by hundreds of local farmers, who paraded
their tractors through a string of wine-growing villages and then held a rally in the town of Breisach. As these successes revealed, by framing nuclear concerns in terms of economic issues and backing them with their interpretations of scientific fact the region’s first anti-nuclear activists broke out of their isolation and recruited a broad cross-section of the local population to the struggle against reactors. At the same time, this process laid the groundwork for a broad social movement that challenged government practice and advocated a more democratic approach to economic development.

**Caught between the Upper and Nether Millstones:**
“Kitchen table” activism framed by ignorance and disinterest

At the outset of the 1970s, Engelhard Bühler was far from alone in toiling to convince his friends and colleagues of the dangers of nuclear radiation. Despite Bühler’s worries about the possibility that it would cause genetic damage in future generations, radiation remained a numinous topic for most Germans. Nevertheless, a small contingent of anti-nuclear pioneers dedicated themselves to warning the population of the Upper Rhine Valley about the threat posed by “peaceful” nuclear power plants and the radiation they emitted. As Michael Doelfs acknowledged in his retrospective for the *BZ*, the history of Rhenish anti-nuclear activism begins with these pioneers, even though their first efforts to raise public awareness failed to resonate with the population. It was these activists’ long struggle to overcome their isolation, highlighted by the first small-scale discussions of nuclear power and the cobbling together of the region’s first critical version of “the facts” of nuclear energy, that allowed the West German anti-nuclear movement to emerge later in the decade.
The pioneers behind the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement approached nuclear energy from a variety of backgrounds. On one end of the spectrum stood Bühler, whose genetic research during the Third Reich caused him to see reactors as a threat to the German genetic inheritance. At the University of Freiburg, a group of chemistry students interested in environmental issues and public policy excitedly took up the topic of nuclear power—though they knew very little about the subject when they first learned of plans to build reactors in the region. On the Alsatian side of the Rhine, Esther Peter-Davis traced her interest in nuclear power back to 1950, when Frederic Joliot-Curie introduced her to the topic at the People’s World Convention in Geneva. Jean-Jacques Rettig, a teacher of German in the French village of Saales, viewed nuclear power through yet another lens due to his work translating correspondence between the conservationist Weltbund zum Schutze des Lebens (World Federation for the Protection of Life – WSL) and associated Parisian groups. If this broad range of experience can be said to have a common denominator, then it was perhaps its disconnect from the everyday lives and concerns of the vast majority of the region’s inhabitants.

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8 Engelhard Bühler to Reichsführer SS, 4 August 1939. Bundesarchiv Berlin NS/21/1138. For more information on Bühler’s research during the Third Reich, see Benno Müller-Hill’s interview with Bühler in Benno Müller-Hill, Tödliche Wissenschaft. Die Aussendung von Juden, Zigeunern, und Geisteskranken, 1933 – 1945 (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993), 149 – 151.

9 Jean-Jacques Rettig, interview with the author, Freiburg, 8 March 2010. The WSL had taken up the issue of “peaceful nuclear power” in its journal Der Stille Weg during the 1960s. In 1969 (by which time Rettig was involved with the WSL), the organization dedicated an entire issue of the publication to the topic. See: Der Stille Weg 21, No. 5 – 6 (Fall 1969).
This divide between nuclear matters and everyday issues trapped anti-nuclear pioneers around what historian Lawrence Goodwyn has referred to as the “kitchen table” of social activism; a place he describes as a “domestic setting” where future activists “think together, drink coffee or wine or some other national drink, argue, interpret power, and pull their chairs closer together for comfort in their isolation.”\textsuperscript{10} Though early anti-nuclear activists earnestly stated that, “the goal of our work is to inform a broader social stratum, one which can be assumed to have little more than an elementary knowledge of these matters,”\textsuperscript{11} getting up from the kitchen table and achieving this far-reaching goal proved difficult. It was one thing to spread information to a small group of like-minded friends or a few familiar neighbors; but quite another to “inform a broader social stratum.” “To get out of the kitchen and connect with the larger society,” Goodwyn asserts, has been the “most maddening challenge” of such “private insurgents.”\textsuperscript{12}

In the case of nuclear power, the threat’s abstract nature and the lack of public information about it compounded the challenge of connecting with society. As historian Mark Cioc has argued, the ultimate collapse of the German antinuclear weapons movement during the 1950s was due in large part to the fact that “nuclear

\textsuperscript{10} Lawrence Goodwyn, \textit{Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 110.

\textsuperscript{11} Dr. B. Kromayer Rektor to Hans-Helmuth Wüstenhagen, 17 May 1972. GLA S Umweltschutz 152.

\textsuperscript{12} Goodwyn, \textit{Breaking the Barrier}, 110.
annihilation was an abstract threat to Germans.” If the bomb’s potential for mass
destruction was abstract just a decade after the devastating conclusion of the
Second World War, it seems reasonable to assume that the destructive potential of
“peaceful” reactors was at the very least equally detached from public consciousness
two decades later.

It was this conundrum that had short-circuited Engelhard Bühler’s meeting
with his fellow physicians. Bühler, who based his opposition to nuclear power in
the genetic research he had conducted during the Third Reich, was ill-equipped to
make the threat of nuclear power a pressing concern for his colleagues in 1970.
Nevertheless, Bühler and Michael Kionka, the village pharmacist in Oberrotweil, co-
founded the Oberrheinische Komitee gegen Kernkraftwerke, one of the region’s first
anti-nuclear organizations, shortly after the failed doctors’ meeting. Even the
Oberrheinische Komitee could not break Bühler and Kionka’s isolation, however.
The committee failed to attract widespread support and it remained an organization
comprised of a few elite members of village society.

Medical professionals were not alone in ignoring the topic of nuclear energy
during the early 1970s. In fact, nuclear energy was not even commonly discussed
amongst scientists at this time. In part, this was simply because nuclear knowledge
was anything but widespread. Frank Baum, a bio-chemist and conservationist who
went on to become a leader in the regional movement against reactors recalled that


in 1970, he knew only what he had "learned in grammar school" about nuclear fission. Namely that this process “set free amazing amounts of energy, that could be used for the bomb, but also for peaceful purposes." If even a socially engaged scientist like Baum knew so little about nuclear power, it is far from surprising that the population as a whole was under-informed about this apparently technical topic.

Baum’s own introduction to nuclear power came during a guided hike through the Rhine forest near Breisach in 1971. In the midst of a discussion about the forest’s flora and fauna, the ranger leading the expedition made an offhand remark about government plans to build a reactor “right here, in these very woods.” Coming as it did in the midst of a beautiful yet suddenly threatened forest, Baum’s introduction to nuclear reactors was off-putting to say the least. It was this context, rather than Baum’s grammar school recollections about the promise of “peaceful” nuclear technology, that concerned him. “To put a reactor right in the middle of the Rhine Forest,” he explained, “it was the landscape that pained me.”

Baum’s initial, emotive response caused him to act. The previous year—1970, the United Nations’ Year of the Environment—a group of chemistry students at the University of Freiburg had founded an organization intended to put their scientific knowledge to public good. To this end, the group had prepared reports on various topics for government officials, assuming that their unsolicited advice would be applied to solving significant problems in the region. Unfortunately for the

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15 Frank Baum, interview with the author, Staufen, 19 February 2010.
16 Ibid.
students, their efforts met with little success. As Erhard Schulz, one of the group’s organizers explained, politicians, for the most part, simply ignored the reports.17

Nevertheless, members of the Chemistry Students’ Association continued to inform themselves about significant environmental topics, and to seek out more effective modes of action. Each week, a different member of the group led a seminar where a new topic was discussed. Understanding was seen as a prerequisite for action, and the seminars were well-prepared and engaging. Schulz believed that chemistry professors were jealous of the quickly growing attendance at these seminars, which soon outshined official courses.18 Baum broached the nuclear subject in this forum, and the chemistry students were quick to take up the subject.19

Though information on nuclear energy remained scarce in West Germany, the students were able to take out a subscription to the nuclear industry’s trade publication Atomwirtschaft through the Chemistry Department’s student council. Each month, a different member of the Students’ Association was tasked with reading through the magazine and reporting significant developments to the larger group.20 Despite Atomwirtschaft’s unabashed pro-nuclear bent, the chemistry students used its articles in order to make a strong case for the inherent risk and

17 Erhard Schulz, interview with the author, Freiburg, 29 July 2010.
18 Ibid.
19 Baum, interview.
20 Schulz, interview.
insecurity of nuclear power. Based on these articles, they designed a brochure entitled “Information from the nuclear energy industry: Only partially intended for ‘the people’.” This publication revealed that even pro-industry experts were willing to admit that, “The negative side effects (of utilities infrastructure) are hidden from the consumer and concentrated at reactor sites, the bigger the reactor, the more noticeable the effects.” Reactors, in other words, posed a risk to the population that even Atomwirtschaft admitted had been “acknowledged in the studies of security experts.”

The chemistry students’ brochure was an attempt both to collect scarce anti-nuclear information and to make the gravity of the nuclear threat apparent to the population. Yet it stopped short of connecting the threat posed by nuclear energy to local people’s lives and their livelihoods in a tangible way. Instead, the brochure focused on the dangers of radiation, many of which were abstract or difficult to measure. For people already cognizant of the nuclear danger, the brochure’s clever use of Atomwirtschaft’s own material was a provocative jab at the industry itself. For the purposes of the uninitiated, however, the brochure failed to meaningfully link radiation with daily life.

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21 Such material may not have been as hard to come by as one might presume. As Joachim Radkau has pointed out in his magisterial study of the West German nuclear program, “During the 1950s and 1960s, even supporters of nuclear energy spoke relatively openly of its risks, even if they rarely described them in detail.” Joachim Radkau, Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Atomwirtschaft, 1945 – 1975 (Reinbek bei Hamburg Rowohlt, 1983), 411.

In the Alsace, too, where reactor construction plans were further along than in Baden, the invisible dangers of radiation dominated pioneering activists’ efforts at raising anti-nuclear awareness.\textsuperscript{23} In response to the \textit{Electricité de France’s} (EdF) plans to build a nuclear reactor at the town of Fessenheim, a team of three Alsatian women, headed up by Esther Peter-Davis, presented an assemblage of critical information about nuclear energy to the public. The group traveled to the United States in 1970 in order to visit reactor sites and speak with nuclear scientists.\textsuperscript{24} Upon their return, Peter-Davis and her colleagues published their research as a 60-page pamphlet. \textit{Fessenheim vie ou mort de l’alsace} included few editorial comments, but it was bursting with hard-to-find information, all of which challenged the public consensus that peaceful nuclear technology was clean and safe.

The Alsatians combined the rich harvest of their visit to the United States with clippings from the European press and remarks by French and German officials. Statements by the growing chorus of critical American scientists, including Nobel laureate Linus Pauling as well as John Gofman and Arthur Tamplin, played a central role in the brochure. Even Edward Teller was quoted. After all, a warning from the “father of the hydrogen bomb” that “reactors do not belong on the surface of the earth” seemed ominous indeed.\textsuperscript{25} Comments by government officials and


\textsuperscript{24} The women were E. Peter-Davis, A. Albrecht, and F. Bucher. \textit{Fessenheim vie ou mort de l’alsace} (Mulhouse-Riedelsheim: Schmitt-Lucos, 1970), 1. See also Rettig, interview.

\textsuperscript{25} Peter-Davis et al, \textit{Fessenheim vie ou mort de l’alsace}, 3.
researchers from organizations as diverse as the Swedish Atomic Energy Company and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory revealed that even nuclear power’s proponents tacitly admitted its dangers. More than anything else, this collection of materials showed that serious doubts and unanswered questions dogged the development of nuclear reactors all around the world. In bringing together the words of nuclear energy’s isolated critics and combining them with the subtle admissions of its supporters, this trio provided the region’s anti-nuclear pioneers with a valuable resource.

Despite the painstaking research that went into this brochure, however, the abstract threat that it described remained largely alien to local people’s interests. The first public protest against reactors in the Upper Rhine Valley, which took place in Fessenheim in April 1971, exemplified the disconnect between the abstract threat of radioactivity on the one hand and public interest on the other. The Comité pour sauvegarde de Fessenheim et de la Plaine du Rhin, which had published Peter-Davis’s pamphlet, organized the Fessenheim march with the assistance of three members of Lanza del Vasto’s Community of the Ark. A postcard used as an “invitation” to this “silent ceremony” described it as a protest against “insidious radioactive pollution.”

Little effort was made to communicate the nature of this menacing form of pollution to the people of Fessenheim. The fact that the Community of the Ark required participants to sign a pledge of nonviolence before entering the village, and

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ordered them to remain completely silent during the march certainly did not foster
discussion with local people.27 Thus, this strange procession’s passage through the
center of Fessenheim provided the town’s inhabitants with little incentive to
question the EdF’s guarantees of new jobs and its pledge that the facility would be
safe.28 For the nearly 1,000 demonstrators who marched in April 1971, the fact that
EdF continued unabated its construction efforts in Fessenheim and that the
townsmen showed little interest in insidious radioactive pollution must have
been particularly “maddening” and isolating. The townsmen even remained
supportive of the project after 10,000 activists marched through Fessenheim the
following May.29

Though they did not lead to a change in local opinion or a sustained
mobilization against the Fessenheim reactor, these critical versions of “the facts” on
nuclear energy were enough to spark the first hushed conversations about nuclear
energy on the Upper Rhine. In fact, activists had succeeded in organizing the protest
march in Fessenheim on the basis of this knowledge. Nevertheless, pin-pointing

27 Rettig, interview.

28 Jean de Barry, interview with the author, Strasbourg, 3 March 2010. The
 persistence of this view amongst the people of Fessenheim further supports the idea
 that spreading anti-nuclear knowledge played a key part in building anti-reactor
 sentiment and recruiting local people to the anti-nuclear cause. Unlike the
 Badensian side of the Rhine, where an entire year of information sessions preceded
 the first public protests, the Fessenheim march was organized with little such
 preparation.

29 Wolfgang Hertle, “Skizze der französischen Ökologiebewegung,” in Gewaltfreie
 Aktion 26/27 (4th Quarter 1975/1st Quarter 1976), 47. Not only did the marchers
 have trouble convincing the people of Fessenheim to join their cause, Alain Tournai
 describes this march as “without imitators in other parts of France.” Alain Tournai,
 Anti-nuclear protest: The opposition to nuclear energy in France (Cambridge: Cambridge
critical statements made by nuclear scientists and technicians simply was not enough to launch a mass movement against nuclear power in the region. Instead, anti-nuclear activists were forced to make the nuclear threat more tangible to their colleagues and neighbors in order to break out of their isolation.

All Politics is Local: From “abstract peril” to “front porch politics”\(^{30}\)

In his study of U.S. grassroots politics in the 1970s and 1980s, the historian Michael Foley distinguishes between radiation and other types of pollution, such as toxic waste. Americans, Foley argues, could see toxic waste “in the air, on the ground, and in the water” from their front porches. Movements against the “abstract peril of radiation,” therefore, were markedly different from those directed against conventionally palpable types of pollution. While the abstract threat of radiation “fell on deaf ears,” concrete concerns about detectable toxins resonated “because no Congressman or Senator wanted to go back to his district and explain how he had voted against helping families with sick children.” If Foley’s model, which links together “the front porch, the voting booth, and the halls of power,” can be assumed to hold true for West Germany, it suggests that anti-nuclear activists

\(^{30}\) Michael Foley uses the term “front porch politics” to describe the struggles of local people confronted with “real evidence of pollution” such as occurred in Love Canal, NY. See Michael Foley “No Nukes and Front Porch Politics: Environmental Protest Culture and Practice on the Second Cold War Home Front” (Paper presented at the German Historical Institute Conference “Accidental Armageddons: The Nuclear Crisis and the Culture of the Second Cold War, 1975 – 1989,” Washington, DC, November 4, 2010).
had to move their politicking from the isolation of kitchen table conversations to the visibility of the front porch.31

Just as the BZ reported in its retrospective, it was the connection to viticulture that changed the nuclear danger from an abstract concern to an existential threat. The wine-laced anti-nuclear “spark” caught after a young electrician named Dieter Berstecher heard that the Badenwerk Utility Company planned to build a reactor outside the town of Breisach. Much like the vast majority of the Rhenish population, Berstecher knew very little about nuclear power when he heard about the plans for Breisach. Due to his professional background, however, Berstecher was interested in this new means of producing electricity. He acquired a pamphlet entitled Atom Reaktoren für den Frieden – Todesfälle der Zukunft (Atomic Reactors for Peace – Causes of Death in the Future). Compiled by David S. Cooper, the painstakingly researched pamphlet deployed a series of US and German scientific studies to refute 19 pro-reactor arguments.32

As Berstecher digested Cooper’s claims about the dangers of nuclear energy, his curiosity developed into full-fledged concern.33 He decided to take action. In order to make the scientific studies cited by Cooper more relevant to his neighbors, Berstecher applied their findings to the local context. He determined that due to nuclear reactors, “local viticulture was in clear danger.” To Berstecher’s mind,

31 Foley, “No Nukes and Front Porch Politics.”


33 Dieter Berstecher, e-mail message to author, 29 April 2011.
raising the nuclear issue in relation to wine production was common sense. “One had to attack somehow,” he recalled, “and some people can only be motivated to do something when they see their own situation in danger.”

Berstecher’s proposed link between nuclear radiation and the centerpiece of the local economy hit a nerve. He appeared before the village council in his hometown of Burkheim and explained his fears about the future of local vineyards. “If a nuclear power plant or radioactive particles come into connection with wine,” he explained, “then the game will be up here.” Berstecher’s doomsday message sufficiently awed the council. The councilors quickly approved his proposal to use the municipal photocopier in order to print a flyer detailing the dangers of nuclear power to the grape crop. Together with a few “like-minded friends,” he circulated the flyer throughout the village and the surrounding areas, dropping copies in mailboxes and speaking about the subject with his neighbors.

Berstecher’s application of abstract scientific knowledge to specific local circumstances was a major step on anti-nuclear activists’ path from isolation to visibility. Pamphlets like those published by Peter-Davis or the Freiburg chemists played a great role in informing people like Berstecher who sought out information on nuclear power of their own accord. Despite their strong prose and well-researched messages, however, such works were insufficient to motivate widespread resistance to local plans for nuclear power. It was Berstecher’s

34 Dieter Berstecher and Günter Sacherer, interview with the author, Oberrotweil, 18 February 2010.

35 Ibid.
description of reactors as an inherent danger to local vintners’ prized crops that enabled him to recruit so effectively on the Kaiserstuhl.

Important as they were in the wine-growing villages of the Kaiserstuhl, agricultural arguments carried less weight amongst the urban population of nearby Freiburg. Nevertheless Margot Harloff, a Freiburg housewife, found a poignant means of incorporating her own version of “the facts” about nuclear power into the urban landscape.36 Harloff’s *Aktionsgemeinschaft gegen Umweltgefährdung durch Atomkraftwerke*, an anti-reactor group comprised of members of the city’s liberal-minded *Bildungsbürgertum*, devised a poster juxtaposing the proposed Breisach reactor’s cooling towers with the spire of Freiburg’s beloved Minster.37

Harloff described the image, which had been drawn perfectly to scale, as depicting the “small and wimpy” Minster wedged in “between those two colossuses.”38 Of course, because the reactor was to be built nearly thirty kilometers from Freiburg, its towers would not actually dwarf the Minster. Nevertheless, volunteers milked this figurative comparison for all it was worth. On the city’s marketplace—located directly in front of the historic cathedral—they explained that seven Minsters would fit inside either of the proposed reactor’s two massive cooling towers. By suggesting that the reactor would so drastically alter the cityscape,

36 Beate de Barry, interview with the author, Strasbourg, 3 March 2010.


Harloff’s poster brought the gargantuan industrial project into Freiburgers’ daily lives.\(^{39}\)

As both Berstecher and Harloff’s experiences suggest, successful recruiting efforts began with messages that targeted specific groups within the local population, causing them to view nuclear power as a threat to “their own situations;” that is, as a matter of “front porch politics.” It was on the basis of the concern engendered by such communications that the first public conversations about the region’s future in the shadow of two massive cooling towers began.

“\textit{To the Village Square:}”
\textbf{Sharing “the facts about atomic energy,” growing the movement}

Our representatives in New York, in Paris, or in Moscow depend ultimately on decisions made in the village square. To the village square we must carry the facts about atomic energy. From there must come America’s voice.

-Albert Einstein, 1946\(^ {40}\)

In the early 1970s, anti-nuclear pioneers in the Rhine Valley seem to have taken heed of Albert Einstein’s 1946 appeal to “carry the facts about atomic energy” to the “village square.” By adapting abstract scientific concerns about nuclear power to the situation in the Upper Rhine Valley, these activists had left the kitchen table and stepped out onto the front porch. The path ahead led to the village square,

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\(^{39}\) Though the cooling towers in Breisach would not even have been visible from Freiburg’s \textit{Münsterplatz}, Harloff’s comparison hit a nerve by juxtaposing the reactor and the cathedral.

where a debate on the merits of nuclear power was taking shape. In this context, spreading information about the nature of the nuclear threat, not planning protests, came to dominate the agenda of anti-nuclear activists in 1971 and 1972.

Informing the population about the ins and outs of nuclear power production was far from idle work. Voicing and circulating a critical version of the facts was key to contesting the assurances of nuclear safety made by government and industry. These two sides' conflicting accounts—each of which claimed for itself the mantle of science—provided the backdrop for a fierce debate; the local weather was the hottest topic. Based on data shared by meteorologists, vintners came to conceive of nuclear power as a threat to their livelihoods due to heat emissions, not radioactivity. In fact, concerns about the weather became so predominant that a 1972 newspaper article reported that reactor opponents were “not principally against the use of nuclear energy to produce electricity. What they do not want is a technologically second-class solution for the disposal of excess heat.”

Beginning in the summer of 1971 meeting halls, village pubs, and even school auditoriums and gymnasiums became the key sites of the struggle over nuclear energy on the Upper Rhine. Both government officials and opponents of nuclear power organized “information sessions” to describe their version of the facts to anyone who would listen. Political foundations, churches, and community groups came together to host open forums including speakers for and against reactor construction. Remarkably, even these nominally neutral events quickly took on an

anti-nuclear bent. Opponents of nuclear power came to dominate the proceedings because their version of the facts of nuclear energy served the argument that reactor construction in the region would cripple local agriculture, a prospect that daunted the region’s farmers and vintners.

By describing “the facts” as they related to local people’s livelihoods, anti-nuclear pioneers created a situation where “interested vintners and citizens” reached out to professional scientists and university students in order to get anti-nuclear information. As a result of citizens’ outreach to these “informants,” informational meetings took place in town halls and village public spaces throughout 1971. “From day to day,” one vintner reported, “more and more negative facts [about nuclear power] came to light.” By the end of the year these informal get-togethers had grown into “proper meetings of more than 100 persons.”

Hans von Rudloff, a meteorologist at Freiburg’s state weather office and the author of a 450-page book on European climate trends since 1670, played a leading part at these meetings. Von Rudloff’s concern about the effects of nuclear reactors on the local climate had its basis in his research about the effects of volcanic eruptions on global climate. He feared that engineers’ plans to discharge excess heat from the Breisach reactor in the form of steam would mimic the effects of an

42 Ernst Schillinger “Breisach – Der Kampf beginnt,” in Wyhl (see note 4), 29 - 33. Also: Gerd Auer, interview with the author, Emmendingen 22 February 2010. Although Auer, a student in Freiburg and Emmendingen native, did not consider himself particularly familiar with the topic of nuclear energy, he was asked by rural Citizens’ Initiatives to speak on various aspects of it.

43 Schillinger, “Breisach.”
ongoing volcanic eruption, blocking out the sun and thus negatively affecting local agriculture.  

The problem that concerned von Rudloff, therefore, could be traced to reactor cooling techniques, not radiation. Similarly to coal, gas, and oil-fired power stations, nuclear reactors produce more heat than their turbines turn into electricity. In the early 1970s, the latest nuclear reactors managed to convert only one quarter of the heat they produced into energy. Getting rid of copious quantities of excess heat was essential to preventing meltdowns and maintaining safe operations. In the Rhine Valley, it was proposed that this excess heat be emitted from reactors in the form of steam. As a result, long, trailing clouds of steam would be vented through massive cooling towers.

Dealing with the excess heat produced by reactors had been a significant issue on the Rhine since the “race for nuclear energy” began there in the 1960s. Swiss, French, and German engineers’ desire to exploit the river as a source of cooling water fueled this race. Before long, however, experts argued that the concentration of reactors planned for the Rhine had the potential to “bring the river past the point of no return,” killing plants and animals and leaving Father Rhine

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“biologically dead.” Economic interests also spoke out against direct cooling with Rhine water. Authorities in both Germany and Switzerland worried that a warmer river would create fog and make navigation more difficult along this important shipping lane.

Luckily, there was a straightforward solution to both problems. Using massive cooling towers, Rhine water could be run through reactors and then released in the form of steam rather than being returned directly to the river. Such a process would cool the reactors even as it preserved the Rhine’s temperature, prevented fog from forming on the river’s surface, and protected the last remnants of its fragile eco-system. Nonetheless, the Badenwerk explained to the Freiburg Water and Shipping Office that even cooling towers might create fog over the river. In order to prevent steam discharge from affecting visibility on the river, the utility company noted that cooling towers would have to be between 110 and 160 meters high.

In contrast to invisible radiation, the long trailing clouds of steam to be released by the enormous cooling towers planned by the Badenwerk were quite easy to envision. More than anything else, the suggestion that dense fog might soon


49 Wirtschaftsministerium Baden-Württemberg to Staatliche Weinbauinstitut (20 November 1972). Staatsarchiv Freiburg, G1115/1 Nr. 7.

50 Badenwerk to Wasser und Schifffahrtsdirektion Freiburg, 17 August 1972.
block out the valley’s precious sunlight turned the abstract peril of radiation into the concrete threat of damp, dark days. Steam discharge was quantifiable, as well. One report stated that the cooling towers of a 1,200 Megawatt nuclear reactor would release an amount of steam equivalent to that emitted by “one tenth of the surface area of Lake Constance” into an area with a circumference of only 100 meters.51 Because the Rhine Valley was surrounded by the slopes of the Black Forest to the east and the Vosges mountains to the west, meteorologists predicted that this great cloud of steam would be trapped, magnifying its effects on the Rhine valley.52

Local vintners and farmers saw this fog as an “existential threat.” Ernst Jenne, a tobacco-grower from the village of Weisweil, explained that:

We have here not only the warmest region in Germany, but also the most humid one and we have the most foggy days...the cooling towers would have the following effect: more fog and thus more fungal diseases, more hail and thus more damage to the tobacco, corn and wheat crops.53

In addition to the fungi and hail that Jenne feared fog would bring with it, vintners were convinced that the fog itself would damage their crops. One report shared with local vintners by the Chemistry Students’ Association stated that a 30% reduction in light intensity could lower the amount of sugar in grapes by ten degrees on the Öchsle scale; yet many locally produced wines were so close to the cut-off


that a loss of even one Öchsle would degrade them from “fine wine” status to “table wine,” drastically reducing their value.\textsuperscript{54}

As Jenne suggested, other seemingly less sensitive crops were endangered as well. A firm that purchased local corn threatened to stop buying the crop if it was exposed to less sunlight. Such corn, the firm’s director explained, would have an “inferior ripening process and thus an inferior quality.”\textsuperscript{55} Given cooling towers’ potential to damage and devalue the fruits of their labor, vintners and farmers quickly came to equate the massive towers—and the heat they would emit—with the demise of local agriculture.

The reactor’s supporters did not hesitate to challenge the assertions of critical meteorologists like von Rudloff. Yet government statements did little to allay fears because they seemed to contradict both a growing spectrum of critical meteorological studies and farmers’ common sense. At times, government statements even contradicted themselves. While French officials asserted that steam from the Fessenheim reactor would blow eastward into Baden, German officials maintained that steam from the Breisach reactor would be carried westward by the winds, and end up in Alsace.\textsuperscript{56} Fears unleashed by critical studies of steam discharge created an overbearing burden of proof for reactor supporters


\textsuperscript{55} Albert Bär (LC Nungesser, KG) to Siegfried Göpper, 8 June 1974. ABEBl Göpper Siegfried 107GS15.

\textsuperscript{56} Wolfgang Beer, \textit{Lernen im Widerstand}, 89.
and gave the impression that "the facts" presented by government officials were open to question. Moreover, the patronizing manner in which government spokesmen addressed the public further decreased local people’s willingness to take seriously government arguments. The course of events at a January 1972 public hearing on the Breisach project revealed this dynamic quite clearly. Farmers entered the hearing ready to debate the project’s potential effects on their livelihoods; they left outraged and determined to take action.

As Ernst Schillinger, a vintner and poet from the village of Ihringen artfully put it, the words of one speaker at this meeting succeeded in doing “what no silver-tongued spokesperson against these eerie, insane projects had yet achieved.” When Professor Sigel from the Agricultural Meteorology Department at the University of Mainz explained in a “brash and impertinent manner” that “wine certainly could not be considered a ‘sun crop’ since the potato requires more sun to flourish than does the grape,” vintners were incensed.57 The idea that Sigel, “simply because he was a professor...had to tell the dumb people where the wind came from, when the sun shines,” was just too much for vintners to bear.58 The attempts of the president of the Wine Growers’ Association to quiet their “scornful laughter and chorus of whistles” and to chastise the vintners for their “emotional derailment” of the proceedings revealed to them “what they ought to think about such expert blather in

57 Schillinger, “Breisach.”

58 Berstecher, interview.
the future.” And suddenly, Schillinger said, “the majority of the population was mobilized.”

Professor Sigel’s comments may well have played a decisive part in mobilizing the population, but Schillinger’s description of the event reveals the overarching importance of the months of informational meetings that preceded Sigel’s appearance on the Kaiserstuhl. A single lifetime growing grapes provided more than enough experience to acquaint the average vintner with this delicate crop’s need for sunlight. Yet, as one Kaiserstuhler noted, vintners’ knowledge of the local climate often stretched back centuries, having been passed down through the generations because such knowledge was so essential to successful viticulture.

The information about the local climate that vintners had discussed with meteorologists for much of the past year bolstered this knowledge, and created a set of concerns linked to the reactor project. Now that farmers believed their livelihoods were in jeopardy, it was much more difficult for government and industry spokesmen to convince them that reactors were harmless. Moreover, it was due to the “new perspectives” that this scientific information offered the vintners that they had flooded the Badensian Winegrowers’ Association with complaints and “pushed [the Association] finally to take a position on this issue.”

These demands resulted in the Winegrowers’ Association joining with the state government in order to schedule the January hearing at which Sigel spoke.

59 Schillinger, “Breisach.”

60 Berstecher, interview.

61 Schillinger, “Breisach.”
Things changed on the Kaiserstuhl following Sigel’s brash commentary. Whereas the Winegrowers’ Association could previously have been classified as slow in responding to vintners’ concerns, it was now unclear that the Association really even shared its members’ fears about the future of local viticulture in the shadow of a nuclear reactor. Vintners turned their backs on their trade association and turned to the languishing *Oberrheinische Komitee gegen Atomkraftwerke* which, Schillinger reported, was now “gaining new members from every village on the Kaiserstuhl.”62 In the villages and also in Freiburg, the information sessions continued, and turnout continued to grow. It was at these events that the scope of local nuclear concerns expanded and the anti-nuclear consensus solidified.

Given the significance the nuclear issue had taken on as a threat to local agriculture and the Badensian *Heimat*, warnings about the dangers of radiation were welcomed with open arms by local people, who now saw them as further anti-nuclear ammunition. At one event in Freiburg, the physicist Walther Herbst addressed a “capacity crowd in the city library’s lecture hall.” Herbst explained that exposure to radiation could cause liver and kidney diseases in future generations and cancer in the current generation. These same warnings, which had failed to stir local doctors to action at the meeting organized by Engelhard Bühler one year previously, now instigated a “lively discussion that proved the listeners’ interest in the topic.”63

62 Ibid.

Those gathered at information sessions soon showed that they were not just interested in learning about the dangers of nuclear power. Following the run-in with Sigel, local people began to raise the concerns about the threat they believed reactors posed to their livelihoods and the region as a whole. Though they were willing to raise their voices, they did so within the factual, scientific context of the information sessions.

In March 1972 a public debate on the Breisach project sponsored by the Protestant and Catholic churches, the Department of Adult Education, the Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation, and the State Central Office for Political Education became a forum for anti-reactor activists to voice their concerns. During the debate Erhard Schulz, an Emmendingen native and leader of the Chemistry Students’ Association in Freiburg, spoke for those opposed to the reactor. Rather than mounting an all-out attack on the Breisach project, Schulz appealed for more time so that an informed decision could be made. The “majority of those present” supported this position, signing a resolution that called for a delay in the project until the risks it posed for the local population were better understood and there had been time to coordinate plans for the Rhine’s nuclearization with French officials.64

Those present at an information session in the village of Weisweil went one step further, writing out their concerns and submitting them to the government. Entitled “The Future of Weisweil in the shadow of a nuclear power plant,” the event featured the retired atomic physicist Dr. Hans Klumb, who had studied under the “father of nuclear chemistry,” Nobel laureate Dr. Otto Hahn. Given Klumb’s

64 “Kernkraftwerk im Kreuzfeuer,” Badische Zeitung.
association with Hahn, not to mention his own status as a renowned scientist and retired University Professor, his closing statement that, “the risks of nuclear power...are so large that one can only warn against using this technology to create electricity,” had particular resonance.65

Just a month later, the citizens of Weisweil acted on Klumb’s warning, sending a letter to none other than West German Chancellor Willy Brandt. The Weisweilers’ missive left little doubt that the information session’s scientific framework had shaped their position on the issue. The villagers began by explaining that, “at numerous public debates on the topic, the builder of the Breisach reactor, the Badenwerk Utility company, has not succeeded in dispelling the serious concerns of well-known nuclear scientists.” Because Weisweil stood within the planned reactor’s “closest circle of danger,” the villagers were turning to their Chancellor for help and in hopes of receiving a statement of his position on the matter.66

A resolution attached to the letter presented Brandt with a laundry list of demands related to the reactor project—all of them technical and specific. The Weisweilers were against an “accumulation of reactors” in the region. Instead, they asked the Chancellor to take up negotiations with the French about German involvement in the Fessenheim reactor project, which was already under construction. They pleaded for the protection of the nearby “recreational


landscape” from the “big settlements and big industries” that would follow reactors. They were against both the “warming” of the Rhine and the release of steam on a scale that remained unique and unstudied. They stated their opposition to the release of additional radiation into the atmosphere. And finally they stood against the project because they saw it as a “financial adventure” with potential costs that would “far exceed those of normal insurance” in the case of a disaster.

Just as Albert Einstein had predicted in 1946, learning the facts about atomic energy brought the Weisweilers’ voice roaring back to their representatives in Bonn. Their letter revealed the villagers’ familiarity with the project’s technical aspects and the significance that the reactor issue had taken on in the region. But the appeal to Brandt also showed citizens’ continued faith in their government. In Weisweil, a protestant village in the midst of a largely Catholic region, there were no supporters of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) to speak of. Thus villagers bypassed the state government, which was comprised solely of CDU politicians, and turned to “their” elected officials: the top of the SPD-headed federal government. Furthermore, the people of Weisweil took a measured approach in their appeal to Brandt, forgoing an uncompromising anti-nuclear stance and calling instead for solutions to specific technical problems. This willingness to compromise was perhaps most clear in the Weisweilers’ suggestion that Germany support the Fessenheim reactor as an alternative to an “accumulation” of reactors in the region.

Even as public sentiment against the proposed Breisach reactor continued to grow over the next several months, the region’s citizens remained focused on voicing their concerns to their representatives, expecting them to be addressed. At
the same time, incidents like the one sparked by Professor Sigel’s inflammatory comments at the Breisach hearing raised doubts that elected officials and organizations like the Wine Growers’ Association actually had local peoples’ interests in mind. At the same time as government reassurances became more difficult for local people to swallow, critical interpretations of “the facts” became easier to accept. Nevertheless, local people held out hope that their elected officials and trade organizations would take action once they fully understood the extent of the threat posed by reactor construction. It was in this atmosphere of continued hope, on the one hand, and steadily mounting fears, on the other, that farmers and vintners took to the streets, and began publicly voicing their concerns about the Breisach reactor project.

“He who builds here a cooling tower
Will sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.”67
From the village square to the streets

On Saturday 16 September 1972, more than 500 farmers and vintners paraded their tractors through the villages of the Kaiserstuhl. Though the tractors were bedecked with colorful signs and posters, this was no celebratory procession. Using slogans like “He who builds here a cooling tower / Will sow the wind and reap the whirlwind” the rural population warned of the foul weather headed for the Upper Rhine Valley. In response to the fog that they believed would destroy their crops, local farmers predicted a veritable storm of ill-will directed at the government and the Breisach reactor’s operator, the Badenwerk Utility Company.

The tractor parade and a concurrent petition drive that gathered some 60,000 signatures during a four-week window in September 1972 were local people’s first public challenge to the nuclear ambitions of the Badenwerk and the government of Baden-Württemberg. Couched in technical and scientific language, these protests revealed the changes wrought by the anti-nuclear information campaign on the Kaiserstuhl and in nearby Freiburg. By focusing on specific matters and remaining measured in form and appearance, the September protests introduced an interesting new political dynamic to the Rhenish anti-reactor struggle. While the heartfelt concerns of local farmers and vintners moved rural CDU chapters to support the protests, Freiburg’s radical Left looked on with derision.

After months of spreading information rather than promoting protest, the parameters of the reactor permitting process facilitated local people’s turn towards activism in September 1972. West German law provided just four weeks of public access to documents related to reactor construction. During this brief window of time, the public was also allowed to comment on the available materials and pose questions.\(^{68}\) When the state government announced that the comment period for the Breisach reactor would begin on 28 July 1972, opponents of the reactor were outraged.\(^{69}\) They saw the decision to hold the comment period during August, the traditional vacation month, as little more than an attempt to “exclude the

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\(^{69}\) “Chronik Breisach.” ABEBI Göpper Siegfried 95GS3.
population” from the permitting process.\textsuperscript{70} An effort to move the comment period, headed up by Freiburg chemistry students, caused the government to reconsider. It was pushed back several weeks and began instead on 2 September 1972.\textsuperscript{71}

Though September, sandwiched between August vacations and the October wine harvest, was also far from ideal, reactor opponents went to work within this window. A document prepared by the Chemistry Students’ Association detailed a set of strategies for the comment period. Far from advocating the cancellation of the Breisach project, this paper argued that expected advances in reactor technology made beginning construction of the Breisach reactor a foolish endeavor at present. Within three years, the document noted, five German reactors of the size proposed for Breisach would be online and their operating experience would be available for review. Furthermore, detailed climatological data for three harvest seasons on the Kaiserstuhl would exist and new cooling tower technologies would have been tested. Rather than being scrapped altogether, the Breisach project should simply be delayed.\textsuperscript{72}

This technical, scientific approach was also evident in the “collective complaint” that the reactor’s opponents soon began circulating in Freiburg and on the Kaiserstuhl. The wording of the complaint’s four points echoed the concerns that had been raised time and again at the informational events of the past year. The

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
first two points dealt with the size and number of the reactors planned for the Upper Rhine. Not only was there “no operating experience” for reactors on the scale of those planned for the region, there was also no way that the copious quantities of energy they would produce could be consumed within the Upper Rhine Valley—unless further industrial development followed the reactors and destroyed the bucolic, rural nature of the region.

Points three and four got to the heart of local concerns. They dealt with the excess heat that the region’s many reactors would soon be discharging into the environment. While point three stated that the effect of steam discharge on the region’s crops remained unknown and was thus of great concern to local farmers and vintners, point four described the threat to the Rhine posed by cooling water discharge and called for coordinated planning between German and French officials in order to safeguard the river.

These specific points of contention bespoke a clear understanding of the way in which reactors might immediately and tangibly affect local people’s lives and their livelihoods. And yet the demands associated with these concerns were far from radical. Omitting the German genetic heritage and even the “abstract peril of radiation” from its purview preserved the collective complaint’s front porch political style. Despite—or perhaps precisely because of—their concrete themes and their measured nature, the four concerns comprising this complaint resonated with the valley’s inhabitants, even moving local CDU chapters to criticize their party’s government in Stuttgart.
On the Kaiserstuhl, the electrician Dieter Berstecher and his childhood friend Günter Sacherer, a vintner in the village of Oberrotweil, went door-to-door and asked their neighbors to sign the complaint. On Saturdays, the pair brought the petition to local soccer games and collected signatures from spectators. The results were impressive. In Oberrotweil, 1021 of the village’s 1090 eligible voters signed; in Burkheim, Berstecher’s hometown, 889 of 891 voters added their names. In several neighboring villages, as well, public officials reported that upwards of ninety percent of eligible voters had signed the petition. In Freiburg, Harloff and her colleagues in the Aktionsgemeinschaft gathered signatures in front of the Minster, around the city hall, and at a series of informational meetings held at the Kolping-Hall. Altogether, close to 60,000 citizens of the Kaiserstuhl and Freiburg signed the complaint during the four-week comment period.

Despite the remarkable success of the signature drive, some observers were dismayed. They bemoaned reactor opponents’ continued willingness to work within the legalistic framework prescribed by the licensing process and to petition government officials for aid. Freiburg’s Bund Kommunistische Arbeiter (Federation of Communist Workers – BKA), for example, was particularly unimpressed by the tractor parade that punctuated the comment period. In a special edition of its


76 “Fast 60 000 Unterschriften gegen Kernkraftwerk Breisach,” Badische Zeitung.
journal, *Klassenkampf*, the group attacked the farmers who had participated in this peculiar demonstration for failing to tackle both the government and the nuclear industry head on. Instead of fighting back against the reactor project, the BKA argued, protesters had resorted to meek pleas for help. The article reported with dismay that tractors bore posters begging the minister of economics for aid and that protesters managed to send only a “moralizing letter” to Breisach’s mayor.⁷⁷

While the rhetoric behind the tractor parade and the collective complaint ought not to be seen merely as kowtowing to government authority, there was a kernel of truth behind the BKA’s critique of the protest. After all, according to their own statements, anti-Breisach protesters were neither opposed to reactors as such nor willing to take radical action against the government. Instead, they were working within the established political process and advocating a “better reactor,” that is, one to be built only after new technologies had been tested elsewhere. Indeed, the very specificity of anti-Breisach activists’ demands does suggest that a “better reactor,” or at the very least, one further from their homes and vineyards could have assuaged their opposition to the project.

While the radical BKA remained less than enamored of these moderate, specific demands, this limited argumentation garnered reactor opponents another, far more powerful ally. At a meeting late in September, the Kaiserstuhl’s CDU chapters surprisingly expressed their solidarity with anti-reactor activists. In an official statement, local Christian Democrats instructed their district chairman to file

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a formal complaint against the Breisach project. The basis for their complaint was twofold. Not only did local CDU members claim that “the necessary requirements [in terms of public information] of the atomic law have not been met” by the Badenwerk and the state government, they also noted that, “public opinion is overwhelmingly against the selection of Breisach as a location for the project.” In basing their protests on specific arguments, reactor opponents had attracted widespread support in the region and thus enticed local CDU chapters to stand up against a decision made by their own party, which ruled in Stuttgart.

In fact, by the end of the comment period, many towns, a broad cross-section of the region’s organizations, and even local celebrities had come out in support of anti-reactor protesters. The Freiburger Wochenbericht reported on 5 October that “24 municipalities, including the city of Freiburg, have [now] joined the formal complaint.” Additionally, the weekly newspaper noted, local chapters of the SPD and Free Democratic Party (F.D.P.) had echoed the local CDU by voicing concerns about the project. The BZ noted that the Badensian Agricultural Association and the Winegrowers’ Association had submitted specific, formal complaints of their own, echoing protesters’ calls for complete scientific studies of reactors’ effects on the local climate. Even the wrestler Adolf Seger, a Freiburg native and 1972

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Olympic medalist, used his star power to support the effort, “gathering signatures and passing out autographs.”  

The broad coalition that came out in support of the September 1972 signature collection drive reveals the efficacy of the anti-nuclear information campaign of 1971 and 1972. By replacing nebulous statements about “insidious radioactive pollution” with specific explanations of the threat reactors posed to local agriculture and the Rhenish population, the region’s first anti-nuclear activists developed a far more effective means of reaching out to their colleagues and neighbors—and even mainstream political parties and municipal governments. It was the very specificity of these technical indictments of nuclear power that brought home the threat that reactors posed to the local economy and thus enabled a broad cross-section of the population, from university students, to farmers and vintners, to CDU members to come out in support of the anti-nuclear cause. Expressing specific, limited reservations about the Breisach project was a means for politicians, town governments, and civic organizations to support the reactor’s opponents without setting the stage for militant confrontation.

**Conclusion**

The broad yet confusing anti-nuclear coalition that was developing on the Upper Rhine during the early 1970s speaks directly to historian Belinda Davis’s questioning of the usefulness of the traditional Left-Right framework in postwar

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politics. Due to the “sheer multiplicity of voices engaged in grassroots politics,” Davis has argued that historians must look “beyond national boundaries but also across more conventional cultural barriers” in describing postwar “popular politics.” The Rhenish anti-nuclear movement, which brought vintners and farmers together with students, scientists and middle-class Freiburgers as well as Alsatians and even rural CDU members clearly exists within the new trans-national and trans-cultural political space defined by Davis.

The importance of this unique coalition should not be overlooked. It was, after all, local people’s interactions with their neighbors and colleagues that led to the success of the September 1972 protests. By forming anti-nuclear groups, sharing critical information about nuclear technology, and finally by reaching out for petition signatures, local people used personal connections and common interests as a frame for political action. Though the movement never quite expanded to encompass the majority within each of the many social groups that comprised it, its diverse base did allow its members to equate their concerns with those of “the population.” As the struggle against reactors intensified during the mid-1970s, this label became an increasingly important one, differentiating the anti-nuclear movement from protest campaigns supported only by certain subsections of the population.

In a further divergence from the political norm, the transnational dimension of anti-nuclear protest in the Rhine Valley played a significant role in ordering early

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opposition to nuclear power in the region. The three-way race to nuclearize the Rhine made reactor construction an even more salient issue for the local population, which was confronted by not just one power station in its collective backyard, but rather an “accumulation.” The staggered starting dates of these reactor construction projects offered their opponents the chance to test and refine protest strategies—as the examples of the Fessenheim and Breisach protests attest. Finally, coupled with the idea that the movement expressed the will of “the population,” transnational engagement opened up space for the creation of a regional identity that transcended national borders. As the movement continued to grow during the mid-1970s, this regional identity took on increased importance.

Despite these novel aspects, it would be incorrect to classify the protests of September 1972 as wholly “new.” The emphasis on the fate of the region’s most significant cash crop, which dominated the protests, provided them with an obvious materialist framework. These protests should not, in other words, be taken as an example of “value change” or the widespread adoption of “post-material” concerns. While non-material concerns clearly motivated some pioneers of the anti-nuclear movement in the Rhine Valley, apprehensions about the German gene pool and the peril of radiation failed to mobilize the region’s population. Instead it was quite clearly in terms of the threat to local agriculture that opposition to nuclear power became a salient issue in the Rhine Valley.

In standing up for their own economic self-interest, the farmers and vintners of the Rhine Valley were not exactly post-materialist political trailblazers. Nevertheless, their action created the foundations of a protest movement concerned
with environmental issues that took on important dimensions during the 1970s. In this sense, the relentless information campaign that built on the salience of agricultural concerns in the region brought with it a new vernacular of protest. Not only were the technical issues with which local people familiarized themselves and which they used to frame their protests a powerful means of challenging would-be reactor operators and the government, they also served to unite a diverse coalition around a concrete set of political demands capable of bridging typical political divides and thus creating a new coalition that was neither Right nor Left. As shall be seen in the following chapters, it was in the very course of building the anti-nuclear movement that new political combinations and new values came to the fore.
Chapter Two

Nuclear Fears and Democracy Matters: How reactor opponents began to doubt their government and leftists began to think about their environment

In January 1974, an article in the anarchist publication *graswurzelrevolution* opened by describing a problem facing its activist readership:

One cannot say that the *graswurzel* groups are unemployed; but it would be just as difficult to say that they are—at the moment, at least—bubbling with activity. They are all searching for a field of political work that transcends anti-militarist busywork at the local level and leads to trans-regional initiatives.¹

The way out of this dilemma, the article’s author suggested, was an “ecology campaign.” Environmental activism became attractive to the *graswurzel* groups at this time both because of their own activist “unemployment” and because of changes in their perception of environmentalism. It was not a coincidence that leftists, like the *graswurzel* groups, first became interested in environmental issues just as anti-nuclear activists were adding serious concerns about the state of West German democracy to the core of their own political project. In a sense then, the Left and anti-nuclear activists grew towards one another in the mid-1970s.

This peculiar rapprochement between two distant political groups was by no means predetermined. As we saw in the previous chapter, the first grassroots anti-

nuclear protests in the Rhine Valley focused closely on specific, technical problems. The coalition of scientists, middle class Freiburgers, and vintners opposed to nuclear power expressed their concerns by way of public forums, legalistic challenges to reactor projects, and a handful of well-organized, orderly demonstrations. Reactor opponents, in short, placed an implicit faith in West Germany’s democratic system and earnestly believed that “what we’re doing has nothing to do with politics.” This approach markedly differentiated them from the 68ers, whose activism was famously guided by the belief that “the personal is political.” Accordingly, early anti-nuclear protesters also appeared disinterested in the 68ers’ exploration of democracy through “revolt and experimentation” and the rebellious, anti-government attitude that had characterized the West German student movement.²

The different approaches of anti-nuclear activists on the one hand and leftists on the other frame the idea that the movement against nuclear power was a “single issue movement.” That is, a movement devoted solely to the issue of nuclear power and therefore lacking the revolutionary potential that the 68ers attributed to their own radical democratic aspirations. As an American radical feminist put it in 1970, “Single-issueism” is the process of crossing class lines and watering program down to a broadly acceptable minimum plank in order to


construct an all-inclusive coalition that can achieve a particular demand or reform... The single issue is the dead-end issue.⁴

On the surface, this characterization seems to make sense. The initial protests staged by opponents of nuclear power in the Rhine Valley at the outset of the 1970s focused almost exclusively on the damage that reactors might inflict on local agriculture. Yet, the longer they protested against nuclear power, the more anti-nuclear activists became concerned with other related issues. Most significant among these were matters of democracy.

It was through the very experience of speaking up about specific nuclear problems that protesters came to link newfound concerns about the state of West German democracy with their fears about nuclear reactors. The opacity of decision-making processes and government officials’ lacking trustworthiness and respect for the public deeply disappointed anti-nuclear protesters. Though their democratic expectations were far from the radical brand of “participatory democracy” envisioned by the 68ers, the very fact that democracy matters had become so important to reactor opponents marked a significant departure for people “who had previously found the world in order and praised their Christian Democratic Premier.”⁵


Despite the different ways that the two groups spoke and thought about democracy, the growing weight that anti-nuclear activists attributed to criticisms of West Germany’s political system made their movement more accessible to former 68ers. The editorial staff of *graswurzelrevolution* were among the first leftists to see anti-nuclear activism in this light; a perception that led them to propose an ecology campaign of their own. The *graswurzelrevolution* team’s newfound interest in ecological politics stemmed from their observations of a grassroots movement led by farmers on the desolate Larzac plateau in southern France. Because the Larzac farmers’ struggle was directed against government plans to expand a military base, it was easily recognizable as an “anti-militarist struggle.” As we will see in this chapter, Larzac’s parallels to Rhenish anti-nuclear protest eventually turned *graswurzelrevolution* on to that movement as well.

Anti-nuclear activists’ heightened concerns about matters of democratic process, and their increasingly rebellious, anti-government attitude easily held the attention of the *graswurzel* groups once they had become aware of Rhenish anti-nuclear protests. The idea that the “citizens’ initiatives” founded by rural anti-nuclear activists were, in fact, an alternative way of doing politics captured the imagination of a small group of Freiburg leftists, as well. The fleeting and limited interactions between these few urban leftists and rural anti-nuclear protesters did not have immediate results. They did, however, transform both groups in the long term and set the stage for a productive and powerful collaboration.

Thus, anti-nuclear protesters’ turn to democracy matters and leftists’ “unemployment” during the early 1970s, as well as their observations of the Larzac
movement, set the stage for a noteworthy political collaboration that affected both partners. This chapter will explore the process by which these two politically distant groups first engaged with one another. In doing so, it will reveal the ways that anti-nuclear activists transcended a narrow focus on technical matters through protest experience and also describe how and why leftists took up “post-material” environmental concerns during the mid-1970s.

Unlikely Advocates: Rural Badensians take up democracy matters

Voicing their concerns about nuclear power radically changed rural Badensians’ attitudes and their behavior. One well-to-do “butcher and cattle dealer” exemplified the larger shift by which CDU loyalists, who had balked at radical criticisms of West German society during the 1960s, came to rebel against ‘their party’ and ‘their government’ in the 1970s. The butcher had “threatened a member of the DKP with his carving knife during an earlier election in order to protect his property.” Due to the ongoing controversy over nuclear power, however, the butcher had shifted his focus. Now he “threatened the CDU-led government” in order to safeguard what was his.  

6 Before long, this rebellious, anti-government attitude was closely associated with the Rhine Valley anti-nuclear movement as a whole. This attitude, and the doubts about West German democracy that accompanied it, were significant because they revealed the transformation of concerns about a specific, technical matter into a deep-seated critique of West German politics.

Concerns about the efficacy of West German democracy seemed far afield in this rural region because the Badensian countryside had long been a stronghold of the Christian Democrats, who had consistently scored more than 70% of the vote there. Since the CDU led the West German government without interruption from the country’s founding in 1949 until 1969 and never lost control of the state government in Baden-Württemberg, local people had little reason to feel disenfranchised or embittered by their democracy. On the contrary, their strong and steadfast support for the ruling party suggests that they were quite content with the government and the democratic processes by which it maintained its power.

The older generation of vintners, in particular, identified with Baden-Württemberg’s CDU-led government. They were especially enamored of their Landesvater, premiere Hans Filbinger, a charismatic politician who had attended the university in nearby Freiburg during the 1930s and made southern Baden his home ever since. Given their faith in Filbinger and his government, winegrowers assumed as a matter of course that concerns about their precious crops would be resolved. The state government’s awareness of Kaiserstuhl wines’ significance was,

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7 Landesarchivdirektion Baden-Württemberg and Landkreis Emmendingen, Der Landkreis Emmendingen (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1999), 406 – 407.

after all, evident in the subsidies that vinters received in order to ensure this
renowned product’s future.9

The pedagogue and scholar of social movements Wolfgang Beer uses the
concept of experiential learning in order to explain how the very process of
opposing nuclear power might turn even such proud supporters of the CDU against
their Landesvater. It is through “interactions with the administration, with parties,
unions, corporations and associations,” Beer writes, that activists’ “learning
processes and the resulting changes in attitudes and behaviors” take place.10 His
theory is well-suited to Rhine Valley anti-nuclear protest, where protesters clearly
learned from taking autonomous action and from the increasingly harsh
government reactions that rained down on them in response.

Beer himself cites anti-nuclear protesters’ signature drives as prime
eamples of this dynamic. He explains that:

citizens were forced to learn that the signatures of 100,000 affected people
cannot impress the state governments...they were forced to learn that
politicians tricked and lied to them as much as possible in speeches,
addresses, and discussions.11

Precisely this type of “forced” learning followed the “unprecedented success” of the
September 1972 signature drive in Baden.12 Reactor opponents assembled a broad

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morgen radioaktiv (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1976), 36.

10 Beer, Lernen im Widerstand, 7.

11 Ibid., 22.

12 “Fast 60 000 Unterschriften gegen Kernkraftwerk Breisach,” Badische Zeitung, 3
coalition that included rural people, chemistry students, and middle class Freiburgers. They collected 60,000 signatures, but government officials and *Badenwerk* representatives barely reacted. The government’s refusal to address this impressive effort or even to take seriously citizens’ concerns about nuclear power set a powerful learning process in motion amongst the population. The back-and-forth between anti-nuclear protesters and government officials that occurred during the fall and winter of 1972 revealed this “experiential education” and its fruits.

The learning process began with the government’s long awaited official response to the September signature drive, which finally came on 31 October 1972. On that date, a public hearing was held at which officials were expected to explain themselves and the Breisach project to local people. Baden-Württemberg’s Minister of Economics, Rudolf Eberle, whose ministry was responsible for the project, seemed at long last to respond to the public outcry against it. Speaking to reporters following the hearing, Eberle announced that construction would have to be delayed due to public concerns—or so the local press reported. The *Freiburger Wochenbericht*, for one, explained that Eberle had said that his ministry, “would take the necessary time to study the issues.” The *Wochenbericht* interpreted this statement to mean that, “it now seems certain that construction will not be permitted to begin too hastily.”

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Yet the *Wochenbericht*’s optimistic assessment of Eberle’s vaguely reassuring comment failed to take local people’s experience at the public hearing into account. From their point of view, it had been clear from the meeting’s outset that public concerns were of little interest to government officials. By scheduling the hearing during the grape harvest, officials had further provoked a segment of the population that already considered itself gravely affected by the reactor project. The few vintners who did manage to attend the hearing’s morning session were further put off by the “arrogant and overbearing behavior” of Mr. Blickle, an official from the Ministry of Economics who presided over the meeting. The comportment of public officials and the procedural aspects of the hearing—not the issue of nuclear power itself—came to dominate anti-nuclear activists’ perception of the event.

The struggle about openness and public respect began in earnest at the hearing’s afternoon session, which was devoted to the airing of popular complaints about the project. After several farmers utilized this forum to passionately attack the project in local dialect, the audience microphone was abruptly switched off, preventing many more reactor opponents from speaking. Incensed farmers held Minister Eberle responsible for this curt conclusion to the discussion. Local people revealed that they had come prepared for such an outcome by lobbing rotten tomatoes at government officials as the audience stormed the podium. The

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government, too, was prepared for such a turn of events. State police troopers, who had been waiting on standby, were called in to halt the ensuing melee.\textsuperscript{16}

To the extent that local people shared the \textit{Wochenbericht’s} optimistic assessment of the meeting’s outcome, then, they did so only because they felt that “the operating company’s side seemed shaken” by the turn of events.\textsuperscript{17} Although they had not been shown any modicum of respect by government officials or really even been allowed to voice their concerns, local people had at least made the stridency of their opposition to the Breisach reactor project crystal clear. Despite this minor victory, however, the mistreatment that they believed they had suffered at the hands of Minister Eberle and his colleagues left a lasting impression. Experiencing politicians’ trickery and their lies firsthand was, if nothing else, a learning experience.

In Freiburg, the \textit{Aktionsgemeinschaft gegen Umweltgefährdung durch Atomkraftwerke}, which had worked together with vintners to organize opposition to the Breisach project issued an angered response to the hearing. Its open letter to “Those responsible in our democracy,” minced few words elucidating the group’s lack of trust for public officials. In order to describe the position in which reactor opponents now found themselves, the \textit{Aktionsgemeinschaft} recounted the events of the last several months. The signatures of some 60,000 concerned Badensians had been submitted to the regional government in Freiburg in September. A letter signed by 30 Freiburg scientists raising further technical concerns about the project

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
had been delivered to the state government in Stuttgart in mid-October. Farmers and vintners had reiterated these concerns at the aborted public hearing. Despite this plethora of formal complaints, however, the Aktionsgemeinschaft remained unconvinced that the government would act. Even the pledge that Minister Eberle had made at the hearing, which the Wochenbericht had touted as tantamount to the government’s capitulation, meant little. Eberle’s comment, the Freiburgers explained in their open letter, provided “no certainty that all necessary scientific data will actually be collected and published.”

In order to remedy this situation, the Aktionsgemeinschaft demanded written assurances from the government on four counts. Added to several now typical technical demands about the reactor project, including a delay in construction and the collection of independent scientific data, was one new demand. Specifically, the Freiburg anti-nuclear group called on the government to give “independent citizens’ groups... the right to participate in the decision-making process in all aspects (environmental protection, zoning and energy distribution planning, information, etc.).” This thinly veiled reference to the open debate that had not occurred at the Breisach hearing, and the role that the Aktionsgemeinschaft expected to play in future nuclear decision-making, was a clear sign of the growing significance of democracy matters alongside technical issues.

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19 Ibid.
A series of further snubs at the hands of government officials only furthered local people’s insistence that they be accorded respect and that democratic processes be upheld. Perhaps the most incendiary of these perceived snubs was an article published in the *Staatsanzeiger für Baden-Württemberg*, a publicly-funded weekly newspaper read mainly by state employees.20 On 23 September 1972 an opinion piece in the *Staatsanzeiger* described “the Upper Rhine Valley between Frankfurt and Basel” as the European Economic Community’s nascent “primary economic axis.” Thus, the article concluded, the region’s “lowlands should be held free for commercial and industrial use while the functions ‘living,’ ‘recreation,’ etc. should be re-settled to the ‘pre-mountainous zone’ and the side-valleys of the Rhine.” The *Staatsanzeiger* prefaced this article with a note that it came from the “viewpoint” of “the sws Press Service, which has close connections to industry.” Yet this disclaimer was overlooked or considered immaterial by local people, who were infuriated that such an inflammatory piece had appeared in a state-sponsored publication.21

Unsurprisingly, this bombastic article quickly circulated far beyond the newspaper’s normal readership.22 It was particularly upsetting for inhabitants of the Rhine Valley who had endured the Second World War in the region. The

20 Gerhard Auer, interview with the author, Emmendingen, 22 February 2010.


22 Auer, interview.
reference to the “pre-mountainous zone,” struck a traumatic and eerily familiar chord. As Ida Tittmann, who had grown up in the village of Weisweil during the war explained it, “we were evacuated three times: the first time to Württemberg, and the second and third time—and I would like to emphasize this—to the so-called pre-mountainous zone of the Black Forest.”23 The thought of becoming “West wall gypsies” once again and being forced to return to their former evacuation site was quite unsettling for the likes of Tittmann.24 As she succinctly put it, “They say that ‘Children who have been burned fear the fire!’ and we still fear it today.”25 The fact that it was now their own government holding the matches and threatening all that they had “toiled for and achieved—one’s own four walls and a roof over one’s head” was quite startling to those rural Badensians who revered the Filbinger government.26 Thus, government actions eroded even the trust of the older generation of farmers and vintners who had long supported the Christian Democratic Union.

The close relationship between the state government and the quasi-public Badenwerk utility company elicited further critique from reactor opponents. In

23 Ida Tittmann, quoted in Auer and Reich, “Gebrannte Kinder,” 96.

24 Memories of the evacuation were coupled, of course, with memories of returning to bombed out villages after the War. Weisweil was 90% destroyed. Heinz Ehrlcr (director, Museum der Geschichte von Weisweil), interview with the author, Weisweil 23 February, 2010. See also “Wir protestieren mit Nachdruck’ Offener Brief der Weisweiler Frauen an Filbinger,” Badische Zeitung, 19 July 1974. HSAS EA 1 / 107 Bü 764.


26 Ibid., 96.
particular, the fact that state Premier Hans Filbinger chaired the utility’s board of
directors, on which Minister Eberle also sat, was seen as an obvious conflict of
interest. At the 31 October Breisach hearing, members of the public even proposed
that Eberle recuse himself from the proceedings due to his position with the
Badenwerk.\textsuperscript{27} The motion, needless to say, was not acted upon by the official
chairing the meeting. Nonetheless, even the slogans that protesters inscribed on
their signs and banners revealed changing attitudes towards Eberle. Whereas signs
used at early protests, such as the September 1972 tractor demonstration, bore
phrases like “Help us Eberle!” later slogans were quite critical. One popular turn of
phrase called out the Minister for his complicity with the Badenwerk at the expense
of local people’s interests by deriding him as, “Eberle – Profitstreberle!” [Eberle –
Profit-seeker!].\textsuperscript{28} As these changing slogans suggest, problems with particular
officials only bolstered Rhenish anti-nuclear activists’ growing dissatisfaction with
their treatment at the hands of the government.

After getting organized, taking thoughtful action, and building widespread
public support for their demands, local people expected action from their
government. Instead, they were ignored, mistreated, and even provoked by
government officials, the Badenwerk, and the publicly-funded press. All this caused
local people to become increasingly disillusioned with the democratic processes
that governed nuclear politics. As one slogan had it, “Germany is a democracy –

\textsuperscript{27} Schillinger, “Breisach,” 29 – 33.

\textsuperscript{28} Beer, \textit{Lernen im Widerstand}, 92.
Baden-Württemberg a DICTATORSHIP”29 By singling out the state government, which had authority over local nuclear projects, protesters closely linked their new preoccupation with democracy matters to their original concerns about technical nuclear issues. At the same time, however, this new focus allowed the movement to grow in new directions, drawing in even those who had previously been critical of the movement.

Going the Distance: Approaching the Rhenish movement via Larzac

Despite the university town of Freiburg’s seeming geographic proximity to the winegrowing villages of the Kaiserstuhl, a significant ideological divide and a surprising psychological distance separated urban leftists from rural anti-nuclear activists. Unlike the middle-class Freiburgers who had been early supporters of Rhenish anti-nuclear activism, the urban Left had been at best silent and at worst openly critical of anti-nuclear protesters’ aims and their tactics.30 For the most part, however, Freiburg leftists were simply oblivious to the goings-on in surrounding rural communities.31 Even after becoming deeply involved in the movement, the Freiburg singer/songwriter and freelance journalist Walter Mossmann continued to


emphasize the significant distance between the city and the rural centers of anti-nuclear activism. “Joining in,” he explained, “meant a lot of work because we don’t live there, but rather thirty kilometers away.”\(^{32}\)

Given this concern about distance it was, ironically, a detour to the far-off Larzac in Southern France that made the first Freiburg activists aware of the anti-nuclear protests taking place just thirty kilometers away in southern Baden. Visiting the Larzac, a desolate plateau inhabited almost exclusively by farmers and shepherds who earned their livelihoods selling sheep’s milk to be made into Roquefort cheese, was an eye-opening experience because of the powerful and resilient campaign that the Larzacians were waging against government plans to expand a nearby military base.

The Larzac movement took off in late 1970 soon after rumors began to swirl that the government intended to purchase farmland on the plateau in order to expand the base.\(^{33}\) Larzac farmers and urban leftists in nearby Millau began spreading awareness of these plans and discussing their significance with their neighbors. At the same time, Roquefort producers raised the issue with consumers of the renowned cheese throughout France. On account of this information campaign, 6,000 people protested in Millau within a week of the government’s formal announcement about the base expansion in October 1971. The movement continued to grow at a rapid pace. Throughout 1972, numerous small-scale non-


violent protests took place on the Larzac plateau and in Millau. In January 1973, Larzac farmers drove their tractors more than 700 kilometers to protest in Paris. That August, they welcomed 80,000 people to a harvest festival on the Larzac plateau.34

Few German activists were aware of what was happening on the Larzac. For those who did know about it, however, the dynamic Larzac movement became a powerful example of the possible at a time when the Left seemed unsure of itself and activists considered themselves “unemployed.” Wolfgang Hertle, the Berlin-based editor of graswurzelrevolution, had turned to Larzac as early as 1972, using it as a lens to re-interpret environmental activism and thus make the subject more palatable to his fellow activists. “Environmental protection is only non-revolutionary at first glance,” he suggested in the magazine’s inaugural issue. In reference to Larzac, he pointed out that,

French pacifists were forced to realize that the upsurge of the environmental movement was also a strengthening of their own movement, because militarism is the single biggest destroyer of the environment.35

34 Ibid., 264 – 267.

35 [Wolfgang Hertle?], Untitled, graswurzelrevolution (No. 0), 1972, 7. This article was presumably written by Wolfgang Hertle, one of graswurzelrevolution’s founding editors, and an enamored observer of the struggle in the Larzac. Hertle spent much of the decade writing his doctoral dissertation about the Larzac struggle, in large part because he was convinced of the need to bring foreign examples of non-violent activism into German activist circles, since he believed that German history suffered from a lack of such examples. Wolfgang Hertle, in conversation with the author, Hamburg, July 2010.
It was this instrumental interpretation of environmental protest as part and parcel of a larger, more radical struggle that helped Hertle to interest his *graswurzel* colleagues in anti-nuclear activism.

In order to make the connection between environmentalism and leftists’ political goals, Hertle described environmental protest as an exciting alternative for nonviolent activists who were “seeking out a field of political activism that transcends typical anti-militarist work in the local context.”\(^{36}\) It was for precisely this reason that the Larzac struggle was so significant as an introduction to grassroots environmental protest. The Larzac farmers were fighting for their homes and their livelihoods, just like the Badensian vintners. Yet, the simple fact that the Larzacians’ livelihoods were threatened by a military base, not a power plant, made it easier for non-violent activists who were ardently opposed to militarism to interpret the Larzac struggle as part of their own political project.

The involvement of Lanza del Vasto and his Community of the Ark further cemented the Larzac movement’s anti-militarist status and its appeal for nonviolent activists, like the *graswurzel* groups. As a former student of Gandhi’s and a dedicated pacifist, del Vasto’s name had a certain cachet among these activists. With the aid of the Community of the Ark, an alternative communal society that he had organized in 1948 as part of an attempt at “starting a Gandhian order in the West,” del Vasto was able to integrate his ideas about non-violence into the farmers’

\(^{36}\) “Damit wir auch morgen noch kraftvolle zubeißen können...’ Notizen zu einer ‘ökologie-kampagne,’” *graswurzelrevolution* (No. 7), 1974, 2. Hertle is quoted as the source of this idea, so he probably did not write this article.
actions. 37 In fact, Hrtle noted that del Vasto’s fourteen day fast against the base expansion, which he undertook during the last two weeks of Lent in 1972, “was considered by the Larzac farmers...as the decisive moment in their unification and their final decision to adhere to the principle of nonviolence.” 38 In short, del Vasto’s part in shaping the protests imbued the Larzac struggle with a sort of intellectual pacifism in the eyes of non-violent activists. To them, del Vasto’s engagement coded the protests as more than simple NIMBYism from the outset.

The more familiar observers like Hrtle became with the Larzac movement, the more significant they perceived its grassroots nature to be. Hrtle’s graswurzelrevolution sought overcome the perceived paucity of non-violent protest in Germany. To this end, the journal carried reports on non-violent activism, “especially from abroad,” and featured “model actions and concrete action plans, which may not be universal, but will offer new ideas for the struggle here in the FRG.” 39 The Larzac became one such exemplary struggle. Reports in graswurzelrevolution analyzed it, described key actors and important influences, and kept readers abreast of the latest developments on the plateau. 40


38 Hrtle, Larzac, 62.

39 Untitled [Editorial Statement], graswurzelrevolution (No. 0), 1972, 1.

What is more, adapting Che Guevara’s 1966 call to “Create one, two, many
Vietnams!” contributors to the journal researched little known “environmental
actions” in the FRG and grouped them together under the rubric “Two, three, many
Larzacs!” The upshot of this approach, of course, was the exciting idea that a whole
series of Larzacs were already in the making in Germany and that such localized
protests had the potential to rock the German political system. It was clearly time
for the graswurzlers to get involved in this exciting new movement.  

The example of Larzac also inspired Freiburg leftists who had previously
overlooked the Rhine Valley anti-nuclear struggle despite their proximity to it. The
Freiburg radio-journalists Freia Hoffmann and Walter Mossmann first stumbled
upon the Larzac movement during a rambling trip to France in the summer of 1973.
On a whim, the pair decided to visit Hoffmann’s sister and her husband in the town
of Millau. During their visit, Hoffmann’s brother-in-law informed his guests about
the Committee of the 103’s struggle against the French military. Mossmann was
enchanted by the story and particularly the “numerical magic” that for him linked
the 103 farmers with the Chicago 7 and even 99 Red Air Balloons. This fascination
was more than enough to convince Hoffmann and Mossmann to make the short trip
from Millau up to the Larzac plateau.

Their visit to the Larzac deeply affected the two Freiburgers. Hoffmann
recalled that her “lack of confidence in the types of political engagement that were

41 “Zwei, drei, viele Larzacs,” graswurzelrevolution (No. 4 / 5), 1973, 6 – 8.

42 Mossmann, realistisch sein, 176 – 177.

43 Ibid., 179.
possible through parties” caused her to see the Larzac movement as an alternative means of doing politics. Upon their return to Freiburg, the duo decided to produce a radio program that discussed grassroots “citizens’ initiatives,” like the one they had encountered at Larzac. Their intent was to portray these groups as “an alternative form of political action.”

Taking a similar tack to graswurzelrevolution, the two Freiburgers searched for other local organizations similar to the one they had encountered in France. In the process, they realized that there were citizens’ initiatives active all over the Federal Republic—even in their own backyard. In August 1973 Mossmann requested information from the Aktionsgruppe Umweltschutz Weisweil-Wyhl for the program. After checking with the Südwestfunk in order to verify that Mossmann was indeed associated with the broadcaster, Lore Haag of Weisweil sent Mossmann a variety of pamphlets and flyers. In September, Mossmann and Hoffmann traveled out to the Rhine, and recorded a meeting of a well organized and highly active citizens' initiative, the Bürgerinitiative Weisweil [Weisweil Citizens' Initiative] for their program. After the meeting, the journalists interviewed several villagers. It was through this visit and the interviews, Hoffmann later recalled, that she first “learned the details of this problem” with nuclear power.

44 Freia Hoffmann, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 June 2010.

45 “Am 28.8.73 in Gemeindehaus Weisweil,” ABEBI Haag Lore 2HL2. See also “Informationsmaterial an Walter Moosmann [sic], Freiburg,” ABEBI Haag Lore 2HL2.

46 Hoffmann, interview.
Hoffmann and Mossmann’s lack of familiarity with the burgeoning anti-
nuclear movement and the issues that inspired it was hardly unusual among the
Freiburg Left at the outset of the 1970s. What is more, an unmistakable level of
distrust and animosity precluded a deeply cooperative relationship between the
Freiburg reporters and the citizens’ initiatives in Weisweil. This tension endured
even after Haag had established Mossmann’s credentials and the journalists had
visited the Kaiserstuhl for the first time. In October 1973, the pair returned in order
to listen to the broadcast of their program “Citizens’ become an initiative” with the
rural people they had interviewed. After this meeting, Haag complained about the
behavior of Mossmann, “the little Frau Hoffmann, and their chubby companion from
Freiburg.” In fact, she went so far as to advise her colleagues in Weisweil to be on
guard “that we are not stabbed in the back from different sides.”

Following their detour to the French Larzac plateau, Hoffmann and
Mossmann became deeply interested in citizens’ activism. Yet, the Larzac struggle
in far-off France remained, in some ways easier for the Freiburgers to relate to than
the goings-on in their own backyard. Larzac excited them because it was directed
against a military base, and because it featured the involvement of del Vasto, whose
writings and connection to Gandhi lent a certain intellectual rigor to the movement.
Moreover, the successful grassroots organizing by which local farm families had
created an autonomous political organization also excited leftists. Yet all of this

47 Mossmann, interview.

48 “Am 7.8 [sic—it has to be 10.8] trafen wir uns in dem Fischerinsel,” Lore Haag.
ABEBI Haag Lore 2HL2.
seemed quite alien to West German politics.\footnote{The German Left’s difficulty in understanding what was going on in Larzac was made evident in the reporting on this struggle by Informationsdienst zur Verbreitung unterbliebener Nachrichten (Information Service for Repressed News – ID). In an August 1973 article on a festival held there, \textit{ID} reported that “the small village of Larzac in the province of Occitania was previously only known because a group of farmers [from Larzac] traveled to Besancon out of solidarity with the LIP workers.” Rather than explaining why the festival was held in Larzac or what farmers there were concerned about, the \textit{ID} report went on to describe which groups from elsewhere (i.e. the far Left and not the PCF) had come to Larzac. In later issues, \textit{ID} continued to report frequently on the LIP struggle, in which workers had occupied a watch factory, but it rarely reported on the Larzac protests, where farmers played the lead role. “Larzac/F: derselbe Kampf, dasselbe Fest,” Informationsdienst zur Verbreitung unterbliebener Nachrichten (No. 3), [August?] 1973.} Indeed, within the harsh reality of the domestic context, which seemed to lack the imaginative creativity of Larzac, it was much more difficult for the Freiburgers and the members of the anti-nuclear citizens’ initiatives to reach an understanding with one another. Instead, both sides allowed their pre-conceptions about one another to diminish their cooperative potential.

This reciprocal distrust contributed greatly to the lack of nonviolent “action models” in West Germany perceived by leftists. Turning to international events and experiencing Larzac, however, inspired the \textit{graswurzel} team and caused the Freiburg journalists to make more out of the smaller-scale German protests, which they re-interpreted in its light.\footnote{Wolfgang Hertle, in conversation with the author, Hamburg, July 2010.} Traveling to the Larzac plateau, whether through alternative press reports or in person, allowed leftists to leave the confines of their daily political reality, within which local citizens’ initiatives seemed too focused on trivial matters, too oblivious to the issues that concerned leftists and too politically distant.
Thus, Larzac gave many on the Left room to re-imagine the significance of environmentalism in general and anti-nuclear activism in particular. On this basis, leftists like Mossmann and Hoffmann came to see anti-nuclear protests taking place near their homes as part of a larger struggle for a more participatory democracy and for increased social justice. Accordingly, the Freiburg journalists concluded their radio program on citizens’ initiatives by clothing these groupings in the radical democratic mantle of the student movement:

As dismissively as a large portion of the population once viewed the spectacular actions of the student movement, they have taken hold of one of the movement’s ideas and developed it further: the consciousness that active politics can be conducted outside of institutionalized politics, outside of the political parties and beyond the act of voting.51

Coming from dedicated proponents of alternative politics, this was high praise indeed. Yet, the journalists’ infatuation with citizens’ initiatives and therefore anti-nuclear activism did not immediately bridge the expansive divide between these two groups.

Weisweil: Hometown of the movement

At 7:15 pm on 19 July 1973, a radio newscaster reported that government officials and Badenwerk executives had determined to build a nuclear reactor some 20 kilometers downriver from Breisach, near the village of Wyhl. The announcement came as a complete shock to the local population, which knew

nothing of plans for the reactor until they heard the broadcast.\textsuperscript{52} It was not even clear whether Wyhl was intended as a replacement for the controversial Breisach project, or if it was to be yet another pearl in the river’s nuclear necklace. In short, the shocking announcement was seen as yet another instance of government disrespect for local people.

Nowhere did villagers react more rapidly or with more venom to this startling announcement than in the village of Weisweil, Wyhl’s closest neighbor. The Weisweilers’ response to this perceived provocation further cemented anti-nuclear activists’ primary emphasis on democracy matters. Within half an hour of the broadcast, “all those who were willing to help” had met at Weisweil’s town hall to “take the first steps.”\textsuperscript{53} By 11 pm, they had drafted an incredulous telegram to State Premier Hans Filbinger, explaining their shock and outrage at what they considered mistreatment by the government.\textsuperscript{54} They had been “alienated by the manner in which planning for this mass project had proceeded,” the Weisweilers said. They closed their brief message by demanding more information about this “major reactor” and announcing their “protest against [Filbinger’s] undemocratic behavior.”\textsuperscript{55} The next day, the group responsible for this letter would become the

\textsuperscript{52} Bernd Nössler, “Die Auseinandersetzung um das Kernkraftwerk Wyhl,” in Wyhl (see note 14), 34 – 44.

\textsuperscript{53} Balthasar Ehret, quoted in Hoffmann and Mossmann, “Bürger werden Initiativ.”


\textsuperscript{55} Quoted in Ibid.
core of the newly founded Citizens’ Initiative Weisweil, the same group that Mossmann and Hoffmann would visit the following month.\textsuperscript{56}

As Wyhl’s closest neighbor, Weisweil’s location alone was certainly one reason that such significant opposition to the reactor project developed there. The proposed construction site, located in the dense woods that separated the two villages, was barely any further from the center of Weisweil than it was from Wyhl. Yet as the reactor’s official host, Wyhl alone would receive increased local tax revenues and other benefits. Thus, the Weisweilers’ scathing response to the announcement of the new reactor project focused first and foremost on what was, from their perspective at least, a problematic and undemocratic site selection process that had shortchanged their hometown. Because of the village’s location as well as the villagers’ emphasis on backhanded political dealings and democracy matters, Weisweil became both a center of the movement against the Wyhl reactor and also an important point of entry for outsiders who wished to become engaged in anti-nuclear activism.\textsuperscript{57}

The Weisweilers’ particularly fast and furious response to the Breisach reactor’s relocation had several causes. As one of only a handful of Protestant villages in an overwhelmingly Catholic region, the Weisweilers had developed an oppositional attitude towards many of the neighboring villages. As Lore Haag explained it, this attitude went at least as far back as villagers’ strong opposition to the Catholic Center Party during the Weimar Republic. “Everything around us was

\textsuperscript{56} Balthasar Ehret, quoted in Hoffmann and Mossmann, “Bürger werden Initiativ.”

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
Catholic, Haag recalled, “and for that reason we had to vote against Catholicism.” As a result, she said, the villagers turned to the SPD despite their misgivings about socialism. While local support for the SPD vanished in Weisweil “from one day to the next” in favor of the NSDAP during the 1930s, the SPD regained its previous strong support in the village after the war, making Weisweil a political anomaly in a notorious CDU stronghold.

The rivalry between Weisweil and its neighbors—including Wyhl—extended far beyond confessional politics. Each of the villages was something of a “closed unit” during the early 1970s. Friendships and even contacts that transcended village boundaries were limited. What few relationships did exist were strongly influenced by each village’s reputation, which was based on the sort of crops it grew and its level of economic prosperity. A flyer composed by reactor supporters in Wyhl described the project as a means of reviving the local economy and thus vaulting the village ahead of its neighbors. The text denounced the comparatively wealthy village of Endingen for “uninviting” Wyhl’s brass band from an upcoming music festival, referring mockingly to that village’s mayor as “King Eitenbenz.” Less affluent Weisweil was denounced as a village of long-bearded Communists. Gleefully, the Wyhl reactor supporters concluded, neither rival could stop the

58 Lore Haag, quoted in Auer and Reich, “Gebrannte Kinder,” 88.
60 Auer, interview.
reactor from being built. “Our mayor and our village council, not the Communists of Weisweil” still rule here, the flyer exulted.\(^{61}\)

Despite the deep contrasts drawn between the two villages in the Wyhlers’ text, Wyhl and Weisweil had much in common. Standing just northwest of the Kaiserstuhl, a striking outcropping of volcanic rock where some of Germany’s most renowned wines were grown, the two “Rhine villages” were less well to do than their winegrowing neighbors. The lack of agricultural opportunities in Wyhl meant that many villagers were forced to commute to the town of Emmendingen, or even further to Freiburg in order to work industrial jobs.\(^{62}\) Though Weisweil, too, lacked steep terrain suitable for viticulture, the village still had 100 full-time farmers, many of whom had taken up tobacco-growing.\(^{63}\) Weisweil’s small fishermen’s guild had also managed to persevere, despite the Rhine’s ongoing degradation.\(^{64}\)

The proposed reactor stood to markedly change Wyhl’s place in the regional pecking order. The project would provide 700 new jobs right in Wyhl. What is more, it would dramatically increase the village’s tax base, adding 10 million Marks

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\(^{61}\) Interessengruppe KKW Ja Wyhl, “Wyhler – habt Ihr eigentlich noch Ehre im Leib?” StA-EN III. A 842. The attack on Weisweil referenced that village’s one Communist, Balthasar Ehret.

\(^{62}\) Auer, interview.

\(^{63}\) Siegfried Göpper, quoted in Hoffmann and Mossmann, “Bürger werden Initiativ,” 9.

each year to a municipal budget that stood at only 1.8 million Marks in 1975.\textsuperscript{65} Luring the reactor project to Wyhl was a game-changing move in the villages' ongoing contest of economic one-upmanship.

Though regional politics and village pride influenced local attitudes towards the Wyhl reactor, it was the people of Weisweil who turned their village into a center of anti-nuclear resistance. Several prominent Weisweilers led the way, acting quickly in response to plans to nuclearize the Rhine. The miller Siegfried Göpper, the fisherman and \textit{Fischerinsel} proprietor, Balthasar Ehret, and the village's Protestant pastor, Reverend Günter Richter, were all active opponents of nuclear power well before July 1973. Together with a handful of other villagers, these three men began recruiting their neighbors to the anti-reactor movement long before the Wyhl project left the drawing board. As the movement grew Ehret’s \textit{Fischerinsel}, became a gathering place for protesters. The Protestant parish hall, under the aegis of Richter, served as a hub of planning and activity. Meanwhile, the Weisweil \textit{Jagdgenossenschaft}, which was chaired by Göpper, provided generous financial support for the villagers’ anti-nuclear activism. In these local notables’ anti-nuclear actions were clear echoes of the nineteenth century bourgeois political circles admired by Habermas.

Siegfried Göpper, Weisweil’s largest landholder and the owner of the local grist mill, played the ringleader’s role during the first stage of anti-nuclear protest in

the village.\textsuperscript{66} In fact, his work against the Wyhl reactor began already in December 1971—long before such a project really even existed. Early on Christmas morning that year, Göpper received a mysterious telephone call. The caller, who refused to identify himself, informed Göpper that Mayor Zimmer of Wyhl had written a letter to Minister Eberle in which he “had offered Wyhl as an alternative site for the contested reactor planned for Breisach.” According to his mysterious informant, Göpper was to discuss this information with no one, save Zimmer himself. Before hanging up, the caller informed Göpper that he was “working under the assumption that [Göpper] already knew what he could do and how to do it in regards to this matter.”\textsuperscript{67} Göpper, who had been suspicious of nuclear energy since he first learned about it at a lecture in Karlsruhe during the 1950s, was unsettled by this call and the task he now saw before him.\textsuperscript{68}

After uneasily celebrating the Christmas holidays with his family, Göpper wasted little time following up on this mysterious phone call. He called the town hall in Wyhl at 8 am on 27 December 1971 and scheduled an immediate meeting with Zimmer. At the meeting, Göpper cut right to the chase, asking the Mayor point


\textsuperscript{68} Göpper attended the lecture with his cousin, who was studying at the University of Karlsruhe at the time. After the lecturer explained the tremendous amount of energy that a nuclear reaction would set free, Göpper raised his hand to ask whether a small reactor could be built to replacement the energy that the Mühlbach creek supplied to his family’s mill. After the class broke into laughter and the lecturer responded that nuclear technology was so dangerous that it would never be safe to install such a reactor, Göpper knew he wanted nothing more to do with nuclear energy. Siegfried Göpper, interview with the author, Weisweil, 16 February 2010.
blank “whether he had written a letter to the Ministry of Economics in Stuttgart offering the Wyhl forest as an alternative site for a nuclear reactor.” Gopper recalled that Zimmer “sprang up” from his chair in response to this question and asked indignantly how Gopper had come upon this information that “no more than five people in all of Baden-Württemberg knew about.” Gopper was, of course, unable to name his source to Zimmer, but he did pledge “absolute confidentiality” in the matter before ending the short interview and brusquely exiting the mayor’s office.69

Once his information had been confirmed by Zimmer’s response, Gopper did not allow his promise of confidentiality to stop him from working discreetly against the potential Wyhl reactor. He personally invited Mayor Zimmer to attend an information session on nuclear energy held at Weisweil’s parish hall on 8 February 1972. This meeting, organized by Reverend Richter and the church elders, featured the retired nuclear physicist Dr. Hans Klumb.70 Though Weisweil was a good 20 kilometers from Breisach, where government and industry still intended to build the reactor, Klumb’s talk was rather ominously entitled “Weisweil’s future in the shadow of a nuclear reactor.”71 Zimmer only remained for half of the program and when he left, Gopper followed him out to his car. As the Mayor climbed into the driver’s seat, Gopper asked him if he would still have sent his letter to Minister

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71 For more about this event, see Chapter One.
Eberle had he known then what he knew now. “His answer, given over the hum of the running motor, was ‘perhaps not,’” Göpper recalled.\(^{72}\)

Zimmer was not the only one who left Klumb’s lecture with doubts about nuclear technology. Many Weisweilers present at the meeting were moved by Klumb’s testimony, as well. Anti-nuclear sentiment spread rapidly in the village following the event, and the parish hall soon became a hub of anti-nuclear activity.

As Walter Mossmann put it in a popular protest song,

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In Weisweil, in the parish hall,
That’s where the struggle began.
It’s not just prayer within those walls,
It’s a place for taking action.\(^{73}\)
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Of course the parish hall’s significance as a place of action went beyond the fact that it was a convenient meeting spot for Weisweilers. In a village whose identity was strongly shaped by its Protestantism, the parish hall was a symbolically significant location.

That such events were welcomed in the parish hall was important evidence of Reverend Richter’s support for anti-nuclear politics. In fact, Richter described his support in moral and religious terms and used Biblical imagery in order to emphasize the necessity of taking action against the reactor project. He explained that during the mid-1970s, the proposed reactor “began to rip open old scars” that had slowly healed after Weisweil’s long experience with Rhine floods and the


village’s almost total destruction by phosphorous grenades in the final days of the Second World War. Thus, Richter referred to the reactor project as the return of the “terrors of fire and water.” He and other “pastors and employees of the Church district Emmendingen could no longer look on neutrally at what was being planned in the Wyhl Forest.”

Mobilizing the personnel and resources of the church against the proposed reactor project became, therefore, a moral imperative for Richter and a boon for anti-nuclear protesters in Weisweil.

The first anti-nuclear action taken by the citizens of Weisweil came shortly after the church-sponsored information session featuring Dr. Klumb, when villagers drafted an open letter to Chancellor Willy Brandt. In this missive, the Weisweilers explained their opposition to the Breisach project and urged Brandt to come to their aid and to publicly state his position on the matter.

The letter was perhaps more significant as a sign that Weisweilers were willing and able to act than it was likely to garner a meaningful response from the Federal Republic’s highest authority. Thus the infrastructure that supported this effort was quite important. Officially, the missive had been drafted by Weisweil’s Jagdgenossenschaft, an organization of all the village’s landowners that had been formed in order to allow them to collectively lease the hunting rights to their property. As chairman of this organization, Göpper had used his influence in order to push it to oppose the Breisach project.

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75 See Chapter One for details.
76 Kaul, “Die Wunden von Wyhl.”
Figure 1. Siegfried Göpper (center). AEBEL. Reprinted with permission.

Because almost every Weisweil family owned some land within the village and because leasing local hunting rights generated a good deal of income, the Jagdgenossenschaft served almost as a town meeting, attracting widespread participation. The Jagdgenossenschaft’s handsome revenue stream made the organization’s support of anti-nuclear politics even more valuable. Göpper calculated that the organization spent some DM 50,000 on the anti-nuclear campaign.77 This sum was all the more significant because of the paramount importance villagers placed on the appearance of their organizations and the materials that they produced. As Mossmann observed, earning respect in the villages meant drafting anti-nuclear flyers that “look good.” He explained that

77 Göpper, interview.
readers of such materials were meant to “notice immediately that citizens’
initiatives with money—not poor student groups—stood behind the flyers.”78

The logistical support provided by Göpper and Richter through the
Jagdgenossenschaft and the parish hall was further augmented by Balthasar Ehret,
the owner of the village’s Fischerinsel restaurant and the inheritor of his family’s
professional fishing license. As a fisherman, Ehret had spoken up in order to protect
the Rhine some twenty years previously. In 1951, he wrote an article protesting
French plans to divert much of the Rhine’s current into the Rhine Lateral Canal, a
move that he believed would have been disastrous for his livelihood.79 Though
Ehret and his fellow fishermen had had some success in convincing the French to
scale back their plans for the canal, numerous species of fish had been forever lost
from the Rhine during his career. In a river that had once contained fifty or sixty
species, there were now, according to Ehret, only twenty.80 Prized species of game
fish like salmon were gone, leaving the eel and the tench as fishermen’s “bread and
butter.” Ehret attributed the dramatic loss of piscine life in the Rhine to the “more
than 6,000 different poisons” in the river. He was, therefore, well attuned to the
dangers of further industrial development on the Rhine and capable of describing
the threat such development posed to his own livelihood as a fisherman and


(see note 14), 134 – 144.

80 Balthasar Ehret, “Fischerei am Oberrhein,” Wyhl (see note 14), 22 – 24. Cioc
writes that the river hosted 47 species of fish in 1880 but just 23 species in 1975.
Cioc, The Rhine, 158.
restaurateur. At a gathering of some 1,000 reactor opponents in Weisweil on 26 July 1973, Ehret pledged to serve fish “born in polluted water, cooked in cooling water, and garnished with atoms” to the Badenwerk’s shareholders should the reactor be built.

His fisherman’s license was not the only thing that Ehret had inherited from his family, however. Ehret’s father had been a leader in the local branch of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) during the Weimar years. After losing everything in the war, Balthasar Ehret decided to join the youth branch of the KPD. When the KPD was banned in West Germany, he became a member of the Deutsche

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81 Ehret, “Fischerei am Oberrhein,” Wyhl (see note 14), 22 – 24.

Kommunistische Partei (German Communist Party – DKP), a West German party that was closely linked to East Germany's rule Socialist Unity Party (SED). The fact that the village’s one and only Communist was a prominent member of the anti-nuclear community in Weisweil was not without its difficulties for the movement. Proponents of the reactor project spared no opportunity to red-bait all of Weisweil and even the entire anti-reactor movement on his account, which they argued “must somehow be steered by Balthasar Ehret.” But Ehret’s membership in the DKP had its advantages as well. Siegfried Göpper believed that Ehret had been sent to Moscow “more than once” and had been trained as an organizer there. Regardless of whether or where he had been trained, Ehret certainly had few qualms about speaking out publicly against the reactor project, and he was an adept organizer with connections across the Federal Republic and likely beyond its borders.

These prominent Weisweilers’ staunch anti-nuclear stance significantly affected the strength of the village’s opposition to nuclear power. Furthermore, the impressive array of resources at their disposal, from the parish hall to the Jagdgenossenschaft and the village pub, provided essential support for the movement. Thus, the “Weisweil Citizens’ Initiative against the Wyhl Reactor,” which

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84 In fact, as Siegfried Göpper noted, Ehret’s DKP membership had already posed problems for Weisweil in the immediate postwar years, when the local pastor’s requests for assistance rebuilding the destroyed village had been rebuffed by wealthier villages because a Communist lived there. Göpper, interview.


86 Göpper, interview.
was founded on 20 July 1973—one day after the reactor's move to Wyhl had been announced on the radio—was not quite as spontaneous a construction as it appeared or as some of its members suggested.\[87\]

If the citizens of Weisweil were well prepared to take immediate action against the Wyhl reactor due to these long preparations, they were driven to act quickly by their righteous anger about the backhanded manner in which they had learned of the Badenwerk's plans to build at Wyhl. As Ehret explained it, the people of Weisweil had been left in the dark about almost every aspect of the proposed Wyhl project. More than a month after the original radio announcement, Ehret remarked that he and his neighbors still did not know, "the size of the plant, the number of cooling towers, the amount of water it will use." Even the most general aspects of the project remained unknown:

They haven't even told us how many reactors are to be built. We still don't know for sure if reactors will be built in both Wyhl and Breisach. Those are all questions that just weigh on us.\[88\]

The weight of these questions only bolstered Weisweilers' misgivings about the state of democracy in Baden-Württemberg and the process by which government officials had determined to build a nuclear reactor adjacent to their village without ever consulting or even informing them.

It was in this state that Mossmann and Hoffmann, the first Freiburg leftists to take a bona fide interest in the movement, found the citizens of Weisweil during

\[87\] Siegfried Göpper and Balthasar Ehret quoted in Hoffmann and Mossmann, "Bürger werden Initiativ."

\[88\] Balthasar Ehret quoted in Hoffmann and Mossmann, "Bürger werden Initiativ."
their visit the very next month. Mossmann recalled that he entered the Weisweil
Citizens’ Initiative meeting in the parish hall that August and found a group of,

two [or] three dozen well-defined personalities and divergent individuals, who were only united in one thing, namely the philosophical virtue of doubt. They doubted the dogma of the miracle weapon nuclear energy and they doubted the infallibility of their premier.89

Weisweilers’ doubts in their Landesvater and in the sort of industrial development that had helped West Germany achieve the economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s, framed a deep-seated critique of democracy and even the nature of progress that would both further radicalize the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement and attract the attention of self-described leftists like Mossmann and Hoffmann, who were interested in the movement as a sort of people’s rebellion. Thus, the meeting between Mossmann, Hoffmann, and the “doubters” of Weisweil, led to much more than the production of a radio program on citizens’ initiatives. It was the first encounter between an increasingly radical people’s movement and a cadre of “unemployed” social activists. Though it did not lead to immediate collaboration, this interaction was a clear precursor to a longstanding partnership that deeply affected both groups.

Conclusion

Changes within the anti-nuclear movement and amongst left-leaning political activists created new common ground between these two seemingly distant groups. In the Rhine Valley, anti-nuclear activists who had initially come together in order to

89 Mossmann, realistisch sein, 182.
oppose reactor construction on specific, technical grounds, became increasingly concerned with matters of democracy. It was no longer just the threats posed by nuclear reactors that concerned them, but also their treatment at the hands of government officials. The movement’s new focus on democratic praxis drastically increased the appeal of anti-nuclear activism for some on the political Left. Furthermore, leftists projected their own ideas onto the anti-nuclear movement based on their experiences at Larzac. Thus, anti-nuclear protest became a potential escape from the “unemployment” that hamstrung their activist careers and an exciting new mode of political action.

Despite this potential, the first interactions between the anti-nuclear movement and “the Left” were minor and limited. Though they made little of them at this time, a few intrepid activists including Hertle, Mossmann, and Hoffmann, were quite excited about the possibilities. Furthermore, though these urban leftists valued and supported rural anti-nuclear protest, it is clear that they also understood this movement as a potential means towards their own ends. Hertle justified environmentalism to his comrades in the <i>graswurzel</i> groups as a radical, anti-militarist movement. Hoffmann was turned on to anti-nuclear protest due to her sense that anti-nuclear “citizens’ initiatives” were a powerful new mode of political action that circumvented the political parties in which she lacked confidence. Mossmann’s recollection that the Freiburg Left turned to nuclear power out of an interest in “popular rebellion,” not environmental protection seems well founded.\(^{90}\)

\(^{90}\) Mossmann, “Die Bevölkerung ist Hellwach!” 15.
This instrumental approach to anti-nuclear politics is significant because it reveals a more nuanced relationship between young leftists and “value change” than comes across in studies depicting a sudden turn towards “post-material” interests among western youth during the 1970s. Instead of re-calibrating their own priorities in order to approach anti-nuclear activism on its own terms, leftists projected their priorities onto the environmental movement. Viewing anti-nuclear protest as part of an anti-militarist campaign or a broadly defined movement for social justice had ramifications both for leftists and anti-nuclear activists. The cross-fertilization between these two groups paved the way towards a Left more interested in environmental concerns and an anti-nuclear movement more able to elucidate its doubts in West German democracy.
Chapter Three

Acting “Out of Bounds:”
How reactor opponents left the licensing process and re-appropriated the public sphere

On 1 August 1974, the Badische Zeitung (BZ) reported on the first meeting of a “newly formed working group” dedicated to “Major Reactors on the Upper Rhine.” The gathering quickly focused its attention on the public hearing on the Wyhl reactor project, which had taken place several weeks earlier. Those present, the article stated,

were in agreement that “government pre-programming,” including “shrewd obstructions of the complainants,” made the hearing, when all was said and done, a farce intended only to narrowly fulfill the letter of the law.¹

That the government’s actions had appeared designed to prevent public input and hinder dialogue, in other words, had become a central concern of anti-nuclear activists. Instead of such obstructionism, local people desired an open debate and the opportunity to make their case against the project.

Protesters’ optimism that the hearing might derail, or at least re-shape, the government’s plans for Wyhl drew on the success of their campaign against the Breisach reactor. Following their numerous complaints against that project,

¹ “Der Widerstand wächst auf beiden Seiten des Rheins,” Badische Zeitung, 1 August 1974.
Breisach had been silently removed from the drawing board.² Thus, the government’s unwillingness to countenance any criticism of the Wyhl project disillusioned protesters. They quickly came to see the hearing as a parody of the open dialogue that they desired. Concerned citizens responded to government officials’ unwillingness even to hear out their concerns, let alone debate them, by walking out.

The complainants’ absence had little effect on the hearing, which was quickly concluded to the satisfaction of the presiding public officials. Nevertheless, the BZ alleged that by walking out, reactor opponents had sabotaged the event. The newspaper’s charge that protesters had “maneuvered out of bounds” when they left the meeting hall was in reality little more than a rhetorical attack parroted from government officials, who had intended it to paint anti-nuclear activists as reckless radicals. Yet this problematic characterization, which located anti-nuclear activists outside the pale of acceptable politics, proved surprisingly astute in another sense: It was on account of their belief that “government pre-programming” had stifled debate that protesters walked out of the hearing.

Jürgen Habermas has written widely on the lack of public debate in political decision-making processes within modern mass societies. He argues that politics are now conducted exclusively by “the private bureaucracies, special-interest associations, parties, and public administration.” The public, in contrast, “is

² In fact, government officials were determined to remove the Breisach project from consideration without appearing to give in to protesters. Sibylle Morstadt, “Die Landesregierung von Baden-Württemberg und der Konflikt um das geplante Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl,” (Diplomarbeit, Freiburg, 2002), 22 – 23.
included only sporadically in this circuit of power, and even then it is brought in only to contribute its acclamation.”3 Habermas’s characterization of modern politics meshed well with the turn of events at the Wyhl hearing. The licensing authority desired public feedback only insofar as it supported the foregone conclusion that the Wyhl reactor project would go forward. Concerns that might postpone the project’s completion were most unwelcome.

Recognizing that they were being excluded from the decision-making process did not, in and of itself, allow reactor opponents to gain influence over the fate of the Wyhl project. In order to work against the project from outside the “circuit of power” dominated by bureaucrats and special interests, reactor opponents needed a political institution of their own. Within village politics, where public debate of nuclear power had been invigorated through informational events and canvassing campaigns, citizens’ initiative groups had gained influential allies in local government and the Protestant clergy. Yet even these local authority figures could do little more than lobby the state government decision-makers to alter or postpone the Wyhl project.

The situation changed dramatically within days of the Wyhl hearing, when the news that a Munich-based company intended to build a lead processing plant in the Alsatian village of Marckolsheim – less than two kilometers from Wyhl –

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exploded on the Kaiserstuhl.\(^4\) Despite its proximity to Wyhl, French Marckolsheim was obviously outside the jurisdiction of the government of Baden-Württemberg. As Mayor Jäger of Sasbach put it, though “the environment knows no borders...political action surely does.”\(^5\) From the Mayor’s standpoint, political action could not transcend the Rhine. Yet local people chose not to see things as Jäger did. Instead, they forged an international alliance to fight against these dual threats to their livelihoods. In the process, French and German activists came to conceive of the Rhine Valley as a single, united region. Operating in a political space that was by definition outside the purview of the state government in Stuttgart, not to mention the national governments in Paris and Bonn, the International Association of Badensian and Alsatian Citizens’ Initiatives became an autonomous vehicle for local people to address the population on both sides of the Rhine and to take action outside the closed circuits of state politics.

**Building on Success? The mixed results of the second signature drive**

Both anti-nuclear protesters and government officials drew on the things they had learned in the debates over the proposed Breisach reactor as the struggle over the Wyhl project intensified. Anti-nuclear activists made no secret of the fact that their earlier campaign against the proposed Breisach reactor shaped their anti-

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\(^4\) Though some on the Kaiserstuhl had been aware of the planned Marckolsheim lead plant since earlier that spring, the news did not break in the mainstream media until after the Wyhl hearing. See, for example, “Jäger erkannte die Gefahr in Marckolsheim sofort,” *Badische Zeitung*, 25 July 1974. HSAS EA 1 / 107 Bü 764.

\(^5\) Ibid.
Wyhl protests. In a lengthy op-ed, which was published in the BZ on 25 May 1974, the Aktionsgemeinschaft gegen Atomkraftwerke and the Aktion Umweltschutz described the success that they attributed to this earlier round of protests:

The site license for the Breisach reactor was never issued. Protests conducted by the informed population, who were aware of the value of the unspoiled countryside, included numerous demonstrations and more than 65,000 objections. These protests were successful.\(^6\)

By the time the op-ed went to press, a signature drive against the Wyhl reactor was already well underway. Veterans of the anti-Breisach campaign intended to stop the Wyhl project by collecting even more objections than the 65,000 that they had gathered against Breisach.

Government officials, on the other hand, had disavowed any connection between public protests and their decision to scuttle the Breisach project. Baden-Württemberg’s Ministry of the Interior (IM) had rejected Breisach as a potential reactor site months before the 65,000 objections had been delivered to the government.\(^7\) Even the Ministry of Economics had agreed with the IM that the “possible negative effects of the cooling towers on agriculture and viticulture” were reason enough to abandon Breisach. Nevertheless, Minister of Economics Eberle had continued to promote the project in public. Instead of “formally repudiating the


\(^7\) Morstadt explains that the Interior Ministry (IM) had never been enamored with the Breisach project for two reasons. First, its “State Development Plan” had set aside the proposed construction site as a recreation area, and second it was concerned about the potential effect on local agricultural production. Despite these concerns, the IM did not make a final decision against the reactor until July 1972. Morstadt, “Die Landesregierung,” 21 – 22.
Breisach site,” and thus publicly acquiescing to the will of the protesters, Eberle’s ministry pushed for a new site behind the scenes.8

Given this studied disregard for public protest, the government did not outwardly flinch in the face of protests against the Wyhl reactor. In fact, officials in the Ministry of Economics were convinced that with a “more purposive course of action,” the Badenwerk could have pushed through the proposed Breisach reactor. With this lesson in mind, the government defended the Wyhl site even more tenaciously than it had defended Breisach. Because the government “placed the highest priority on the earliest possible start of construction,” and because the other potential reactor sites on the Upper Rhine all had significant drawbacks, taking purposive action became even more important.9

To overcome the government’s tenacious support for the Wyhl project, veterans of the anti-Breisach effort had determined early in their campaign against the Wyhl reactor to reach out to new segments of the population. The Aktionsgemeinschaft in Freiburg sent personal letters to pastors requesting that they make petition sheets “available at religious services and other community events.”10 Rural members of the Oberrheinische Komitee wrote to village mayors, urging them to file objections to the project on behalf of their communities. To expedite this

8 Ibid., 22.

9 Ibid., 23 – 24.

arduous process, activists even provided village officials with detailed technical data upon which objections could be based.\textsuperscript{11}

These efforts to broaden local involvement in anti-nuclear protest were remarkably successful. One activist described the extent to which the entire population became involved in the signature drive:

The pastors collect signatures before and after services. Pupils collect the signatures of upperclassmen in the high schools. Students collect them in the university, teachers collect them from their colleagues, entire enterprises in the Kaisersstuhl area sign against the reactor together. Farmers’ wives go from door to door, every house is visited. Even the \textit{Schwarzwaldverein} [Black Forest Club] helps out.\textsuperscript{12}

On the basis of such deep, grassroots involvement, protesters collected 90,000 signatures during the month-long comment period—a figure equivalent to the entire population of rural Emmendingen county, where the reactor was to be built.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to the signatures, the villages of Sasbach, Endingen, Weisweil, and Lahr filed formal objections against the proposed reactor, and more than 300 individual complaints were submitted.\textsuperscript{14}

Protesters did not waste the opportunity to emphasize this impressive display of public antipathy. On 18 June 1974, the final day of the public comment

\textsuperscript{11} Hans Erich Schött to Bürgermeister Eitenbenz (Endingen am Kaisersstuhl), 1 June 1974. StA-EN III. A 842.


\textsuperscript{13} Of course, many of the signatures came from the city of Freiburg, which was outside of \textit{Landkreis Emmendingen}. “Nicht gegen den Willen der Bevölkerung durchsetzen,” \textit{Badische Zeitung}, 14 August 1974. HSAS EA 1 / 107 Bü 764.

\textsuperscript{14} Nössler, “Genehmigungsverfahren,” 45.
period, Margot Harloff loaded page after page of signatures into her laundry basket and delivered them to the county government office in Emmendingen. The county executive who accepted the basket-load of signatures shamelessly downplayed this herculean achievement. He explained that he could act only as a messenger to the state government and that he could not answer questions because he was ill-informed about the project.¹⁵

Perhaps expecting this dismissal of protesters’ hard work, Harloff had posted a letter to Minister of Economics Eberle that same morning. Here, she highlighted the difference between the things that protesters had learned through their experiences and the Minister’s failure to live up to his pledge that, “new and additional points of information were brought to the Breisach hearing, that will be taken into account as the licensing process continues.” As Harloff somewhat mockingly put it, “today, we can be certain that your ministry buried these new insights along with the Breisach licensing process.”¹⁶

Harloff’s letter got to the heart of the difference between the things that protesters had learned from the anti-Breisach campaign, and the insights they believed that government officials had failed to build on. Opponents of nuclear power had learned to expect little of their government and to take nothing for granted. Eberle, however, had learned nothing because he “did not have the courage, to act in accordance with [his] own realizations made at the Breisach


licensing process and also in accordance with concerned supporters of nuclear energy throughout the entire world and to ‘dare more democracy.’” Of course, Eberle had made no such realizations at Breisach. As he himself explained, the only thing he had learned was that pushing through a reactor on the Upper Rhine would require “more purposive action.”

Despite the impressive mass mobilization that reactor opponents painstakingly organized, therefore, the government-directed reactor licensing process was not stalled or even slowed. Looking back on these “years of information work,” one activist described her frustration. “It was apparent,” she recalled, “how little the representatives of the state and the government were interested in those that they claimed to represent.” A lack of interest that was obvious, she said,

Because no apparent notice was taken – of what amounted, in the meantime, to thousands – of letters. One begged for discussions, explanations, position statements, one invited, protested – all without any reaction, paper did not blush. Even when one showed up with 100,000 signatures against the nuclear reactor – they were wiped off the table with flimsy excuses (for example that everyone who had signed was from out of town).18

The perception that government officials still had not learned to take popular protest seriously informed reactor opponents’ preparations for the Wyhl hearing, the next step in the reactor licensing process. It was during this next stage, furthermore, that the government’s failure to respond seriously to the local

17 Harloff to Eberle, 17 June 1974.

18 Gabi Walterspiel, “Die Wyhler Ereignisse aus der Sicht der Gewaltfreien Aktion Freiburg (GAF).” ASB 9.4.1.I.
population’s overwhelming outpouring of anti-reactor sentiment caused reactor opponents to dismiss the entire licensing process as a farce. In fact, if a single tipping point for this transformation of public opinion could be located, then it would be the second day of the July 1974 public hearing on the Wyhl reactor.

Democracy on (Show) Trial: The Wyhl hearing

Jürgen Habermas has laid much of the blame for the “structural transformation of the bourgeois public sphere,” on the transformation of nineteenth century bourgeois society into modern mass society. Formerly, locally organized discussion circles, coffee shops, and salons created space for public political debate. In the twentieth century, by contrast, the “mass circulation press” and supralocally organized mass political parties have never intended to engage the citizenry in debate. Instead, these institutions have been concerned with “something like modern propaganda,” which means that they exist at the intersection “of enlightenment and control; of information and advertising; of pedagogy and manipulation.” In such a system, where “the transactions themselves are stylized into a show,” he argues, “publicity loses its critical function in favor of a staged display.”

As we have seen, locally organized groups and circles had played an important role in the anti-Wyhl struggle, suggesting a reinvigoration of the Habermasian public sphere. The hearing on the reactor project, however, was little more than a “stylized show,” intended to mute growing public criticism. The

19 Habermas, Structural Transformation, 206.
Kraftwerk-Union, the firm that had been selected by the Badenwerk to build the reactor, viewed the hearing as little more than an opportunity for a “staged display” of public support for the project. In preparation, therefore, the KWU had hosted “numerous carefully planned... informational meetings and discussions about the reactor with the people of Wyhl and neighboring communities.”\textsuperscript{20} Reactor opponents stood in the way of these well-orchestrated plans. They had prepared themselves similarly, setting up a series of information sessions with experts in Freiburg and the villages near Wyhl, where a critical version of “the facts” of nuclear energy production were rehearsed time and time again.

There was a clear imbalance of power in the preparations for this veritable showdown. Even as opponents of nuclear energy continued to verse themselves in the finer points of the technical concerns they intended to describe to government officials, they could not be sure that they would have the opportunity to do so. Their past experiences with government officials caused them to steel themselves for the possibility that there would be no debate at the hearing. Though representatives of the KWU were concerned that “demonstrators” might mar the meeting, they knew that the licensing authority had the ability to manage the hearing in a way that was beneficial to their interests.

Reactor opponents, on the other hand, continued to hope that they would be able to use the hearing to showcase their concerns in the presence of government regulators. At a mass meeting and rally held in Weisweil on 25 June—just two

weeks before the 9 July hearing—experts gave “easily understandable” reports on topics including “the safety of nuclear reactors, the effects of steam emissions and their dispersal throughout the region.”21 Another meeting in nearby Sasbach focused almost exclusively on problems with government-commissioned meteorological reports. Hans Schött, the village pharmacist in Endingen and a co-founder of the Oberheinische Komitee, explained to the vintners of Sasbach that the data used in government reports “had been measured near a cooling tower in Niederaussem, where there were totally different atmospheric conditions.”22 Such repetitive rehearsals of such specific technical details would have been of little use to local farmers and vintners had they intended only to torpedo the hearing before it began. Instead, reactor opponents’ keen focus on technical matters belied their hope that they would be able to state their concerns to licensing officials at the hearing.

At the same time as opponents of nuclear energy explained how their technical concerns about the Wyhl project caused them to reject it, they also drew on their experience dealing with the state government in order to voice their misgivings about the ground rules governing the upcoming hearing. In an 18 June 1974 press release, the Aktionsgemeinschaft gegen Umweltgefährdung durch Atomkraftwerke put forth a veritable laundry list of demands related to the mechanics of the upcoming hearing. Perhaps most pointedly, the


Aktionsgemeinschaft drew on past experience in order to demand that, “The [hearing’s] moderator must not be allowed to shut off the microphones.” Yet the group did not stop there. It also called for a clearer distinction between government regulators and reactor proponents, and voiced its wish that a neutral “ombudsman” be given the authority to regulate both sides’ microphone access and speaking time. Finally, the Aktionsgemeinschaft demanded that anti-nuclear experts be allotted equal time at the microphone, and that they be granted access to the materials and “technical aids” that they needed in order to present their scientific arguments.23 Past experience suggested that such procedural demands were all but certain to be ignored by government officials, who were not likely to encourage public feedback during the hearing. The very fact that the group continued to push for such specific improvements to the hearing process, however, revealed its members’ lingering hopes that some sort of public dialogue would be possible at the Wyhl hearing.

This eagerness to speak out against the reactor project was met with a deafening display of political pageantry as the hearing began on 9 July 1974. That morning, hundreds of people from across the Kaiserstuhl and from Freiburg streamed into the public sports hall in the village of Wyhl. Plastered to the sides of homes throughout the village were pithy anti-nuclear messages like, “Even CDU voters prefer life without Geiger-counters.”24 Standing watch at the entrance to the sports hall were two men on horseback dressed as the grim reaper; their dark

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24 Nössler, “Genehmigungsverfahren,” 46.
costumes foreshadowed local people’s concerns about the hearing. Yet the scene inside the gymnasium was even more chilling for anti-nuclear protesters.

All of the seats close to the stage were occupied by the government’s scientific witnesses, representatives of the utilities company that was to run the reactor, and the engineering firms that were to build it. Thus, an impressive phalanx of well-heeled reactor proponents confronted members of the public as they entered the gym. At the center of a long table that dominated the stage at the front of the hall, with “all the controls for all the microphones” clutched tightly in his fists, sat Mr. Grawe, the Stuttgart official who had been sent from the Ministry of Economics to chair the proceedings.25

“The first big blow-up” came almost immediately after the proceedings began. It was a matter of the ground rules governing the hearing itself that ignited this initial explosion as “countless objectors declared that the government officials [presiding over the meeting] had a conflict of interest.”26 Banners held aloft in the audience also trumpeted this perceived partiality, targeting particularly Premier Filbinger and Minister Eberle, who both sat on the Badenwerk’s board and supervised the public officials conducting the hearing.27 Nevertheless, Grawe and the other officials whom protesters argued should recuse themselves handily

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27 Nössler, “Genehmigungsverfahren,” 46 – 47.
dismissed these concerns. They explained that they were, in fact, proceeding
“according to the letter of the law.”

After the entire morning was consumed with heated discussions of such
procedural matters, the hearing’s focus turned to the long awaited debate on the
reactor project itself. Concurrent to this change in topic, protesters noted a “180
degree change” in the behavior of Mr. Grawe. He now treated their complainants
“dictatorially,” ending the discussion of various topics even in cases where two-
thirds of the registered speakers had not had a chance to state their concerns. He
made it clear that he had no compunctions about ignoring or dismissing comments
that did not suit him:

He condescendingly suggested to an excited farmer that he should
simply submit his concerns in writing. Or he made it apparent that he
was only listening to an environmentalist’s chit-chat for the sake of
form. Or he switched off all the microphones in the hall.

Grawe’s antics precluded the interchange between citizens and government officials
that reactor opponents had desired. As they stared into the “government
representatives’ smiling faces, the population’s anger grew.” In the bureaucrats’
smug grins, they saw clear evidence that “the concerns of the population were not
being taken seriously.” In the eyes of reactor opponents, Grawe’s “captious

28 “Der Widerstand,” Kommunistische Volkszeitung.
30 Nössler, “Genehmigungsverfahren,” 47.
obstruction of the appellants” meant that the hearing was, “when all was said and done, a farce.”

By the evening of the hearing’s first day, “even sober, thinking citizens had become emotional.” One anti-nuclear activist reported that his fellow citizens were so angry that they “no longer believed in democracy and the unbiased administration.” As the hearing adjourned for the day, noisy protests began on the streets of Wyhl:

Around 100 farmers and vintners awaited [the government officials] outside the hall, and they did not content themselves with sharing their opinions. Just as protesters attempted to flip a car filled with workers from the ministry of economics, state police waded in to save the bureaucrats from public outrage.

It could hardly have been more apparent that local people considered the hearing’s first day a colossal failure.

The public’s patience was stretched quite thin when the meeting was reconvened the following morning. At the day’s first session, “the population did not just sit still and listen to the experts but rather it expressed itself through chants and signs.” A stream of local people including “mayors, lawyers, citizens, and technical experts added verbally to the complaints” that they had submitted previously in writing. Rather than listening to this litany of criticism, Mayor Zimmer


32 Nössler, “Genehmigungsverfahren,” 49.

“sacrificed only a few minutes to the hearing” before returning home to “sun himself in his own yard.”34 As reactor opponents, too, began to tire of the proceedings, the area outside the hall became an impromptu gathering spot. Huddled groups of protesters composed “the first poems and songs about the Wyhl reactor.”35

In the afternoon, members of the Communist League of West Germany (Komunistische Bund Westdeutschlands – KBW) reported selling some 120 copies of an issue of their newspaper that featured a story on the hearing. Local people told the KBW members circulating through the crowd, “we are no communists, but when one experiences this here, one has to become radical.”36 Soon enough, “hundreds of agitated and repeatedly provoked reactor opponents had had enough of the hearing, which had degenerated into a farce.”37

Several prominent villagers, including Mayor Nicola of Weisweil, Reverend Bloch of Köndringen, and Siegfried Göpper, the miller who chaired Weisweil’s Jagdgenossenschaft, attempted to convince Mr. Grawe to suspend the hearing. This trio even prevailed on Grawe to call Minister Eberle in Stuttgart in order to ask for a final decision on the hearing’s fate.38 After Grawe announced that Eberle had refused to suspend the proceedings, Hans-Helmuth Wüstenhagen of the Bund


35 Nössler, “Genehmigungsverfahren,” 49.

36 “Der Widerstand der Wyhler wächst,” Kommunistische Volkszeitung.

37 “Weil die Wyhler,” Lahrer Zeitung.

Bürgerinitiative Umweltschutz (Federal Association of Citizens’ Initiatives for the Protection of Nature – BBU) stood up and denounced the event as a “show trial.” He proclaimed that, “We are leaving and we will see to it that our democratic claims are fulfilled at a higher level!”39 Silently, in Wüstenhagen’s wake, “the complainants almost unanimously left the hall.”40

Still, the curtain failed to drop. “The Badenwerk’s shock troops, the police, and ‘the big-wigs’ on the podium” simply remained in their places and shepherded the hearing to a hasty conclusion before a sea of empty seats.41 In the midst of this parody, however, a band of protesters returned to the virtually empty meeting hall in order to stage a political performance of their own. Bearing a black coffin onto which they had painted the word “Democracy,”42 these protesters publicly proclaimed the demise of public debate. The ‘big-wigs’ could do little more than “acknowledge with puzzled looks” the band of protesters who paraded through the hall with the coffin. After exiting the meeting, the mock funeral party proceeded to Mayor Zimmer’s home, where protesters’ “disappointment was expressed” in short speeches directed at the sunbathing mayor.43 Though “only a few [onlookers] joined the march” of some 150 protesters as they solemnly bore their coffin through


41 “Weil die Wyhler,” Lahrer Zeitung.

42 Nössler, “Genehmigungsverfahren,” 50.

43 Ibid. See also: Wüstenhagen, Bürger gegen Kernkraftwerke, 51.
Wyhl, this potent, symbolic criticism marked a major turning point in the anti-nuclear movement. The mock funeral marked the end of obedience to the “degenerate” democratic process for a much broader cross-section of the movement.44

The day after the hearing’s spectacular and polarizing conclusion, the Weisweil Citizens’ Initiative issued a more formal statement of local people’s dismay with the turn of events. In a telegram addressed to Premier Filbinger, the group explained why it had “ended its participation in this alibi-hearing.” According to the Weisweilers, the government had – “contrary to the promises of Minister of Economics Eberle” – failed to provide the proper scientific documentation for any of its pro-reactor arguments. This failure, coupled with Eberle’s “unsubstantiated refusal” to suspend the hearing until such information was available, could only be considered further evidence of the “licensing authority’s bias.” Thus, the Weisweilers concluded, “What was done in front of empty chairs without complainants was not a hearing, but a farce.” The blame for this turn of events could, accordingly, be attributed only to Minister Eberle, who had failed to intervene.45

Quite predictably, the government did not share the Weisweilers’ interpretation of the meeting’s conclusion. Instead, Eberle’s Ministry issued a statement “lamenting the fact that due to a minority of loud and violent extremists,


the opportunity of the citizens of Wyhl and the surrounding region for an objective
discussion with the licensing body was shortened.” Eberle maintained that he was
in agreement with “responsible environmental organizations” in his opinion that
“acts of violence and the suppression of public speech” would do little to help the
anti-nuclear cause.46 Eberle’s statement was certainly correct in so far as reactor
opponents’ “maneuvering out of bounds” served as a foil for the government and the
nuclear industry. Nevertheless, anti-nuclear protesters’ unwillingness to participate
any longer in the farcical licensing process was also essential to the expansion of
their movement and the creation of a new forum for forthright discussion of the
dangers posed by nuclear reactors.

Stepping outside the licensing process’s legalistic framework and
condemning the narrow interpretation of public discourse embodied in government
officials’ actions was a momentous move for anti-nuclear protesters. The BZ took
immediate note of this change in protesters’ attitude, boldly headlining its story on
the hearing, “Environmentalists maneuvered themselves out of bounds.”47 Going
“out of bounds” exposed anti-nuclear protesters to a barrage of new attacks from
media outlets, government officials, and fellow citizens. In another article, for
example, the BZ derided the walk-out by arguing that protesters’ “departure from
the hall proved itself to be a boomerang for them and all those who were more

46 “Umweltschützer haben sich selbst ins Aus manövriert,” Badische Zeitung, 12 July

47 Ibid.
interested in provocation than discussion.” Following their dramatic action, in other words, anti-nuclear activists were blamed for the lack of debate at the hearing; Grawe and his colleagues in Stuttgart were taken off the hook.

Yet the response of the Kraftwerk-Union (KWU), the subsidiary of Siemens and AEG that was to build the proposed Wyhl reactor, suggested that reactor proponents felt from the beginning that debate was neither realistic nor desirable with the vast majority of complainants. The KWU reckoned that while only one quarter of the complainants were “earnestly interested citizens,” the other three-quarters were comprised of “demonstrators and organized groups who spared no means in order to feign ‘righteous indignation’ about the proposed project.” The firm’s conclusion that the vast majority of the public was only feigning its outrage was bolstered by its finding that making available the documents had, “as predicted,” led only to “boisterous criticisms on account of incompleteness, too short a period to look at it, or manipulation.” Far from soliciting public comment and furthering debate, in other words, the KWU sought the path of least resistance. In fact, the firm’s recommendations for future public hearings included an admonition not to issue numbers or compose long speakers’ lists in the future, because doing so “means that the opponents can, at any time, prove how many speakers have yet to be heard.”

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Yet as the KWU noted in its report, it was not so much the nuclear industry, but rather the licensing body and in particular the Ministry of Economics, represented by Grawe, that was “from the get-go, the target for activists.” Throughout the hearing, Grawe faced “furious attacks on account of conflict of interest, undemocratic proceedings, etc.” Grawe did not yield to these attacks, however. Instead, the KWU concluded that, “it was on account of Grawe’s patience and resoluteness that the event did not have to be cut short despite this persistent pressure.”

From the “first big blow-up” on the morning of 9 July to the walk-out the following afternoon, complainants and government officials had clashed over the procedures governing the hearing. This focus on format, on the accountability of government officials, and on the intentions of protesters, revealed the extent to which the hearing itself had become a “stylized show.” Neither side believed that the other was interested in an objective discussion of the project. Instead the hearing was interpreted as a staged display of each side’s resolution. In the aftermath of this showdown, the bankruptcy of the licensing process as a forum to actually debate the project—let alone to stop it from going forward—was clear to reactor opponents. They sought a new, out of bounds strategy to derail the project.

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50 Ibid. Grawe’s performance left a much different impression in the minds of anti-nuclear protesters. Six months later, in January 1975, Grawe appeared on the podium at an open forum in Weisweil hosted by the Südwestrundfunk. Despite the fact that he had “camouflaged himself by growing a beard,” he was recognized and greeted with a chant of “Grawe out – Grawe out!” Nössler, “Genehmigungsverfahren,” 60.
“Independence Day:” The founding of the International Association of Citizens’ Initiatives

In the spring of 1974, just as Badensian opponents of nuclear power were organizing their signature drive against the Wyhl reactor, a Munich chemical firm announced its plans to build a lead-processing plant directly across the Rhine from Wyhl in the Alsatian village of Marckolsheim. Almost immediately following this announcement, Alsatian conservationists voiced their opposition to the project.51 Much like their Badensian neighbors, Alsatians had engaged in several significant environmental campaigns since the beginning of the 1970s. In 1971, Alsatian activists had launched the first protests against the Fessenheim reactor, which had served as an introduction to anti-nuclear protest for Badensian activists such as Margot Harloff and Engelhard Bühler, who went on to play important roles in the protests against the Breisach reactor.52 Even before their involvement in the anti-nuclear movement, however, these same Alsatian conservationists had launched a petition drive to protect the Vosges mountains, which had garnered some 40,000 signatures in 1970.53

Unlike the more mysterious dangers of radiation that were linked to nuclear energy production, the effects of lead processing were well known throughout Europe.54 “The names of towns like Stolberg and Nordenham,” where lead plants

51 Solange Fernex, “Non-Violence Triumphant,” The Ecologist 5 (No. 10), 373.
52 See Chapter One for more on the first protests at Breisach.
53 Ibid., 372.
54 See Chapter One for a description of the distinction between people’s responses to radiation and other types of pollution.
had caused cattle to drop dead in the fields and endangered human health, had
“become synonyms for contamination of the environment.”55 In the case of the lead
plant proposed for Marckolsheim by the Chemische Werke München (CWM), the
widespread public aversion to this industry was readily apparent. Previous
attempts to site the plant near Munich, then in the German towns of Ramstein,
Worms, and Kaiserslautern, and finally in the French town of St. Avold had all been
shelved due to strong local opposition.56 Professors of Pharmacology and
Toxicology at the University of Strasbourg did not shy away from warning the
population about the specific effects that the plant might have on their health.
These respected scientists “explained how lead accumulates in the body (in fat),”
and they also reported the heightened danger for young people “through the
ingestion of milk.”57 The Alsatian conservationist groups that had grown out of the
struggles to protect the Vosges and to oppose the Fessenheim reactor wasted little
time declaring their opposition to the proposed lead plant.58

55 Walter Mossmann, realistisch sein: das unmögliche verlangen. Wahrheitsgetreu

56 Fernex, "Non-Violence Triumphant," 373. See also "Die Bauplatzbesetzung in
Marckolsheim dauert an," Badische Zeitung, 8 October 1974. HSAS EA 1 / 107 Bü
764.


58 Including S.O.S. Plaine du Rhin, Comité de Sauvegarde de Fessenheim et de la
Plaine du Rhin (CSFR), and the Association Fédérative pour la Protection de la
Nature. Georg Löser, Grenzüberschreitende Kooperation am Oberrhein. Die Badisch-
Elsässischen Bürgerinitiativen (Stuttgart: Landesarchivdirektion Baden-
Württemberg, 2003), 108. See also “Erklärung der 21 Bürgerinitiativen an die
In addition to these regionally organized groups, opposition developed quickly within the village of Marckolsheim itself. In a manner reminiscent of the way that resistance against the Breisach and Wyhl reactors had developed, “respected citizens,” including “vets, pharmacists, dentists, even the vicar,” joined the local opposition to the lead plant. A “citizens’ initiative,” called the Groupement d’Information pour la Sauvegarde de l’Environnement de Marckolsheim (G.I.S.E.M.) was founded in the village in April 1974.\(^{59}\) Shortly thereafter the village government formally joined the opposition to the plant when the village council voted 11 – 10 to reject plans for it. After the prefect of the Upper-Rhine Department, M. Sicurani, overturned this vote and ordered the construction to go ahead as planned, all eleven village councilors who had voted against the plant resigned in protest.\(^{60}\)

Planning for the project had begun in the spring, but news of the proposed lead factory spread rapidly in Baden in the days after the conclusion of the Wyhl hearing in early July 1974. Harried Badensians began attending yet another series of information sessions—targeted this time at the lead plant and its potential to devastate the region. Following up on the debacle of the Wyhl hearing, these new “tidings of horror,” left local people to speculate on the question, “What is going to become of our countryside?”\(^{61}\) Yet, the trans-national nature of the threat also spurred collaboration between Badensians and Alsatians who quickly realized that they all had reason to be concerned about their shared landscape. This nascent

\(^{59}\) Fernex, “Non-Violence Triumphant,” 373.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 373 – 374.

\(^{61}\) Nössler, “Genehmigungsverfahren,” 51.
cooperation brought fresh ideas, additional activists, and new life to the movements on both sides of the Rhine. Beginning with information sessions held in local dialect, and therefore intelligible to rural people from both the Alsace and Baden, the two projects came increasingly to be linked together as a single threat to the region in the minds of local people.⁶²

A protest march scheduled to take place in the center of Marckolsheim on 28 July 1974 reinforced this newly vibrant trans-border cooperation against the pair of projects that threatened to transform the Upper Rhine Valley into a “second Ruhr.” After more than 2,000 protesters from both the Alsace and Baden marched through Marckolsheim, a number of protesters continued on to the proposed lead factory construction site.⁶³ Not only did this visit to the construction site ensure that “each and every one” of the project’s opponents knew its location. It also revealed just how grave an impact the proposed plant might have on both sides of the river. From this spot near the banks of the Rhine, “everyone could see just a few hundred meters away the vineyards in [the Badensian village of] Sasbach.”⁶⁴ Surrounded by the threatened beauty of the Rhine forests, the mighty river itself, and the trellised

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⁶² As is described in more detail in Chapter Four, the “Alemannic dialect,” which was intelligible to villagers from both sides of the Rhine, was a key binding agent in the trans-Rhine movement.


⁶⁴ Nößler, “Genehmigungsverfahren,” 52.
slopes of the Kaiserstuhl, Alsatians and Badensians planted a tree on the site “as a symbol of the shared struggle ahead.”

This shared struggle moved from the symbolic to the substantive on Sunday 25 August 1974. That afternoon, feeder marches from the villages of Sasbach, Endingen, and Weisweil converged in Wyhl. Somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 demonstrators took part in the day’s protests, which featured, “hundreds of banners and signs, some of them written in French, a loud-speaker car, a smoke machine...chants, even a team of donkeys.” Together, the protesters marched onward to the site in the Wyhl forest where the reactor was to be built. At a clearing in the woods, an impressive roster of speakers, including Dr. Bühler, the founder of the Oberrheinische Komitee, Reverend Bloch, Hans-Helmuth Wüstenhagen of the BBU, and representatives of the Alsatian and Swiss anti-nuclear movements addressed the crowd. By 6pm, the demonstration in the Wyhl forest had ended, but the day’s work was far from complete for the protesters.

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65 Ibid. The tree was later ripped out of the ground by the Mayor of Marckolsheim, who favored the lead plant. “Jean,” Elsass: Kolonie in Europa (Wagenbach: Berlin, 1976), 82.

66 Mossmann, realistisch sein, 191.

67 The BZ reported that there were only 2,000 demonstrators present. “2.000 Teilnehmer beim Sternmarsch,” Badische Zeitung, 26 August 1974. ASB “Wyhl—Die Anfänge,” 1372. Mossmann claims that there were 3,000. Mossmann, realistisch sein, 191.

68 “2.000 Teilnehmer beim Sternmarsch,” Badische Zeitung.
Immediately following the protest’s conclusion, several dozen activists drove to Weisweil and re-convened at Balthasar Ehret’s *Fischerinsel*. “Delegates from the various [local anti-nuclear] groups,” including ten Alsatian groups, were present at this gathering. Solange Fernex, a leading Alsatian conservationist described this first discussion between Alsatian and Badensian protesters as “an historical meeting.” Walter Mossmann backed up this notion from the Badensian perspective, writing that “25 August 1974 was something of a regional independence day.” Not only did French and German protesters put their heads together for the first time, it was at this meeting, he explained, that “the groups present in the great hall of the *Fischerinsel* decided to give up their national loyalties

and work together across the border to prevent the construction of the Wyhl reactor and the Marckolsheim lead plant, and in both cases, to jointly occupy the sites if necessary.”\(^{70}\)

Giving up national loyalties and working together across the border had more than symbolic significance for the future of these movements. In a sense, the formation of the Badensian-Alsatian citizens initiatives could be considered another “maneuver out of bounds.” By transcending national boundaries, protesters found a new framework for their activism. Not only did operating outside the bounds of politics as usual give protesters the opportunity to open a new debate of their own, it also allowed them to have a say in projects on both sides of the border.

All together, 21 groups were represented at the meeting in the *Fischerinsel*. In addition to the *Oberrheinische Komitee*, the *Aktionsgemeinschaft*, and the *Aktion Umweltschutz*, which had held leadership roles in the Badensian anti-nuclear movement since the campaign against the Breisach reactor, the citizens’ initiatives from seven Kaiserstuhl villages, and ten Alsatian conservationist groups were represented. The twenty-first group, Mossmann and Hoffmann’s “Initiativgruppe Freiburg KKW NEIN!” was the newest on the scene.\(^ {71}\) Yet Mossmann still managed to play a key role at the meeting, pushing for the adoption of a statement that would allow the protesters to “explain themselves to the world and declare their solidarity

\(^{70}\) Mossmann, *realistisch sein*, 196.

\(^{71}\) Founded in July 1974, the Iniativgruppe Freiburg KKW Wyhl Nein! had 12 original members, including 2 students. The group was mainly comprised of Freiburgers under the age of 30, who Mossmann recalls were interested in anti-nuclear activism as a people’s movement, not as an environmental matter. Walter Mossmann, *Flugblattlieder, Streitschriften* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1980), 26 and 31.
to one another.” Re-invoking the “numerical hocus-pocus” that he associated with the “Declaration of the 103” on the Larzac, Mossmann wanted to call this statement the “Declaration of the 21.” In the end, the statement was entitled “The 21 Citizens’ Initiatives’ Declaration to the Badensian-Alsatian population,” but Mossmann, whose desire to write the statement had driven him to advocate so fiercely for it, succeeded in his bid to become the principle author.

Mossmann spent the next few days writing and “going over the draft with all the important signatories and many friends.” The text was slowly massaged into a form that was acceptable to all. This painstaking reconfiguration was necessary because of the explosive message that the text contained. Mossmann had intended to model the declaration on Bertolt Brecht’s “Resolution,” a song from The Days of the Commune. Specifically, he wanted to use the “beautiful, euphuistic, Old Frankish term, ‘In Erwägung’ [Whereas]” to open a series of sentences describing the reasoning behind what Mossmann referred to as the statement’s “dynamite conclusion.” Though Hoffmann was able to convince him not to literally “ape” Brecht by using the antiquated In Erwägung, Mossmann did go ahead with his plan for the declaration to take the form of a list of reasons building up to the powerful conclusion.73

Thus, the statement was divided into three sections entitled, “Because we know...,” “Because we see...,” and “Because we have learned...;” each of which

72 Ibid.

73 Mossmann, realistisch sein, 197. Also: Freia Hoffmann, interview with the author, Bremen, 17 June 2010.
contained four points describing what local people had come to realize on account of their years of anti-nuclear protest. According to the statement, protesters had seen, for one thing, that the nuclear industry was hell-bent on pushing through its projects, despite its awareness of the risks. They had learned that the government was not neutral and that it was keen to promote the interests of the nuclear industry despite the opposition of the nearly 100,000 local people who had signed a petition against the Wyhl reactor. Georg Löser, a member of the Aktion Umweltschutz proudly remarked that the Initiatives’ rationale featured “a self-assured, powerful, dramatic, and yet admirable language.” As such, these statements “pointedly brought together and concentrated the experiences and knowledge of the Initiatives.”74

The statement’s “dynamite” conclusion followed up on this impressive register of rationale. Such “disrespect for our rights will no longer be accepted,” the statement boldly proclaimed. Instead, the 21 citizens’ initiatives have decided to jointly occupy the construction sites for the Wyhl reactor and the Marckolsheim lead factory, as soon as construction commences. We are determined, to passively resist the violence that is being done to us through these projects, until the governments come to their senses.75

The decision to occupy the two construction sites was clearly the statement’s centerpiece. Löser described it as nothing less than an “unmistakable declaration of

74 Löser, Grenzüberschreitender Kooperation, 114.

75 “Erklärung der 21 Bürgerinitiative an die badische-elsässische Bevölkerung.”
war against the planned projects and the self-empowerment of the initiatives vis-à-vis the government.”

Figure 4. The Declaration of the International Association of Badensian and Alsatian Citizens Initiatives. ASB "Wyhl—Die Anfänge" 17652. Reprinted with permission.

In pronouncing their intention to carry out such a spectacular non-violent protest, the twenty-one citizens’ initiatives drew particularly on preparations made by the Alsatian activists. Solange Fernex reported that the idea of occupying the Marckolsheim site had been floated in the Alsace shortly after the 28 July protest march. “Preparations were made swiftly and silently,” she wrote, and “a circular was sent to around 500 conservationists” asking them to pledge their support for an

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76 Löser, Grenzüberschreitender Kooperation, 114.
eventual site occupation. About fifty people responded and “promised vigorous support for the occupation.”77

In part, the Alsatians’ quick decision to plan such a radical action was a function of their closer connection to the ongoing protests on the Larzac. Members of Lanza del Vasto’s Community of the Ark, which played a key role in the protests on the Larzac, traveled to the Alsace in order to help organize the first protest against the Fessenheim reactor.78 Later, during the summer of 1973, a number of young Alsatian farmers traveled to the Larzac plateau in order to participate in the construction of the illegal sheep farm, La Blaquière.79 This farm, which became a seminal symbol of the protest at Larzac, was organized on land already under the control of the French military.80 La Blaquière was, therefore, also part and parcel of an ongoing site occupation. Thus, the close connection between Alsatian conservationists and the non-violent struggle of the 103 farm families on the Larzac doubtlessly informed the Alsatians’ rapid decision to occupy the Marckolsheim construction site. According to a number of Badensian activists, the Alsatians’ resolve to occupy the Marckolsheim site strongly influenced the discussion in


78 See Chapter One for more on the Community of the Ark’s role in the first Fessenheim protest.


80 Fernex, “Non-Violence Triumphant,” 373.
Weisweil on 25 August. The Alsatians, in other words, provided the key spark in the drafting of Mossmann’s “dynamite conclusion.”

Once the text was completed, the “Declaration of the 21” was delivered to the Vollherbst print shop in Endingen, where it was printed “green on white...the front side in French, the backside in German (or the other way around), 30,000 copies.” The green and white poster, which was twice the size of a regular page, was distributed “in the communities between the edges of the Black Forest and Vosges Mountains.” Soon, the declaration was all but ubiquitous in the Upper Rhine Valley:

It was pinned up wherever it fit, perhaps only within one’s own four walls, or on the bulletin board in a shared apartment, or perhaps in the hallway of an apartment building, in some places on public poster columns, or even more representatively, on the gate to one’s own yard, in the display window of the bakery, the apothecary, the junk shop, at the electrician’s, in the vintner’s cooperative, in the waiting room at the dentist’s office, at school, in the guest house, in the parish hall.

Shortly after its initial printing, the Declaration was run in the BZ as an advertisement, as well.

The government in Stuttgart seemed not to take notice of the declaration or its “explosive” conclusion. The bold-faced statement that the citizens’ initiatives would occupy the construction site, posted all over the Kaiserstuhl, was simply

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81 Walter Mossmann, interview with the author, Freiburg, 20 February 2010.

82 Nössler, “Das Genehmigungsverfahren,” 52.

83 Löser, Grenzüberschreitender Kooperation, 114.
ignored by government officials. Nevertheless, Mossmann saw a silver lining in Stuttgart’s total lack of response:

Nothing better could have happened to us. Only because the government underestimated us to that degree, and allowed itself to be thoroughly surprised, did we have any sort of chance.  

In fact, the government’s “underestimation” was secondary to the statement’s importance as the manifesto of a new, autonomous anti-nuclear organization, operating outside the boundaries of politics as usual. In stating clearly the government’s shortcomings and declaring their willingness to correct them by any nonviolent means necessary, anti-nuclear activists positioned themselves outside the licensing process that had, thus far, been so useless as a forum for the promotion of their interests.

What is more, the association that had come together in order to write and support this radical new manifesto marked an important shift in the anti-nuclear movement. For the first time, the opposition was formally organized beyond the local level. In skipping from the local to the “international” level, the citizens’ initiatives had found a means of declaring their “independence” from the state and national governments that had proven so unresponsive and so unwilling to address their concerns. The founding of the International Association, and its statement to the Badensian and Alsatian population marked, in other words, the creation of a new public sphere where nuclear energy could be debated and where government officials no claim to control.

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84 Mossmann, realistisch sein, 200.
Conclusion

The formation of the “International Association of Alsatian and Badensian Citizens’ Initiatives” marked a major turning point for the anti-nuclear movement. This self-empowered organization side-stepped state and national politics by organizing across the Rhine, a border that was all but impenetrable for French and German politicians, but easily permeable for steam discharge, radiation, and the byproducts of lead processing—not to mention grassroots protesters. Thus, the formation of this new coalition was both the crowning achievement of a period of movement expansion and understandable as a new “maneuver out of bounds” by anti-nuclear activists.

The Wyhl reactor licensing process, which anti-nuclear protesters were quick to classify as a parodic re-occurrence of the Breisach licensing process, provided the basis for this achievement. Activists re-applied strategies that they had employed successfully in their struggle against the Breisach reactor. Though they collected some 90,000 petition signatures, however, protesters barely even received a response from government officials. Despite months of preparation, the public hearing also proved little more than a farce. The majority of complainants had no opportunity to voice their concerns, and the event ended in the presence only of pro-reactor “big-wigs.”

This mockery of democratic process did prove significant for anti-nuclear protesters, however. In reaching out to a wide variety of groups and individuals as part of their signature drive, anti-nuclear activists laid the groundwork for both public debate and the expansion of their movement. Their controversial move “out
of bounds” at the Wyhl hearing both attracted media attention and forced local officials and authority figures to clarify their positions in the ongoing anti-nuclear struggle. Even as they expanded their movement by stepping outside the legalistic licensing framework, which was clearly skewed towards the interests of reactor proponents, anti-nuclear activists prepared themselves to declare their independence from state authorities.

As local people sought new ways to get across their objections to the reactor project that they believed would destroy their livelihoods and their communities, the International Association became an increasingly important vehicle for the promotion of their interests. Self-empowered and representative of an entire region, the very existence of which transcended the authority of national governments, the International Association allowed activists to express themselves in the face of unresponsive government officials. Though the dynamite conclusion of the group’s manifesto was ignored by government officials, it boldly announced protesters’ newly determined position to oppose the industrialization of their landscape by any nonviolent means. Moreover, in creating a powerful network that extended beyond local boundaries, the International Association suggested a means of extending the public sphere beyond local discussion circles.
Chapter Four

“A Different Watch on the Rhine:”
How anti-nuclear activists imagined the Alemannic community
and created a region in resistance

In Alsace and in Baden
Was long a time of woe
We shot each other for our lords
They told us our friends were foes

Now we’re fighting for ourselves
In Wyhl and Marckolsheim
Here we are together
A different watch on the Rhine

-Walter Mossmann, “The Watch on the Rhine”\(^1\)

At a September 1974 protest near the Alsatian village of Marckolsheim, Meinrad Schwörer gave a short speech. As a German protesting across the Rhine in France, Schwörer was sure to emphasize the links between rural people on both banks of the river. He described the Alemannic dialect, which was still spoken by many farmers on both sides of the Rhine, as a vivid representation of the recently rekindled relationship between rural people from Southern Baden and the Alsace. By using their local dialect, Schwörer proclaimed, Badensians and Alsatians could “voice so well their mind.” What is more, he continued, the dialect articulated the

distance between rural people and government officials because it was “a language that they do not understand in Paris, that they do not understand in Bonn.”

Though the dialect was a powerful metaphor for the efficacy of trans-Rhine cooperation, the community that extended back and forth across the Rhine was “not only a union of friends of dialect, but also an expression of a common position in world politics.” As we saw in the previous chapter, Alsatian and Badensian protesters began in earnest to develop a common political position with the formation of the “International Association of Badensian and Alsatian Citizens’ Initiatives” in August 1974. Anti-nuclear protesters from both sides of the Rhine made this organization into the institutional backbone of their maneuverings outside the bounds of dysfunctional democratic processes. As their trans-national community developed, Badensians and Alsatians came closer together even as their collective distance from their central governments grew. This close collaboration became a primary source of protesters’ strength. More importantly, it was the engine that brought new ideas into the seemingly limited political landscapes on both sides of the Rhine.

In this chapter, I will explain how protesters imagined a new “Alemannic community” that transcended the riparian boundary that separated Baden from the

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2 An audio recording of Schwörer’s speech is available on: Badisch-Elsässische Bürgerinitiativen, Neue Lieder und Gedichte aus Dreyeckland, Trikont-Verlag (Record). My translation into English is based on “Jean’s” transcription of the speech into high German. See: “Jean,” Elsass: Kolonie in Europa (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1976), 87.

Alsace. Instances of cooperation that could be traced back to the Peasants' Wars of the fifteenth century provided a powerful historical basis for such Franco-German collaboration. The Alemannic dialect, despite its touted post-war decline in Alsace, was still the primary language of rural Alsatians. As such, Alsatian farmers could actually communicate better with their Badenian neighbors than many of their French countrymen in Strasbourg. In addition to the dialect's role as a peculiar sort of lingua franca, widespread distrust of centralized authority also brought protesters together.

Yet, these would-be collaborators had simultaneously to overcome a much more recent history of animosity. “There were,” as the Germanist Hermann Bausinger put it, “ample reasons for emotional distance; German was after all the

\[\text{In Imagined Communities, his renowned study of the origins of nationalism, Benedict Anderson describes how nations are “imagined” by the people who comprise them. Such a process was clearly underway along the Rhine as people from Baden and the Alsace re-discovered their shared “Alemannic” identity. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 1983), 6.}\]

\[\text{In 1962, one-third of those employed in agriculture in Alsace could not speak French. In contrast, a 1973 survey showed that 96% of Alsatians were able to speak and understand the dialect. As late as 1975, 88% of farmers still used the dialect as their principle means of communication. Bernard Trouillet, Das Elsaß – Grenzland in Europa: Sprachen und Identitäten im Wandel (Frankfurt: Deutsches Institut für Pädagogische Forschung, 1997). Hermann Bausinger argues that dialect is a particularly powerful weapon in an environment like that of the Alsace in the postwar era, where it was seemingly in decline. Bausinger, “Die ‘Alemannische Internationale.’”}\]

\[\text{On Alsace, see Christopher Fischer, Alsace to the Alsatians? Visions and Divisions of Alsatian Regionalism, 1870 – 1939 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010). The Badensian case is a more recent development due to the incorporation of Baden into Baden-Württemberg in 1953. Walter Mossmann has described the creation of the so-called Südweststaat as Baden being annexed. There were more Swabians than Badensians, so the Swabians won the referendum and Baden was “annexed” by Swabian Württemberg.}\]
language of Kaiser Wilhelm [and] the language of Hitler.”

7 Memories of allied bombing raids on the Badensian Rhine villages could not always be easily set aside, either. 8 The circumstances of Alsace’s return to France after the war had caused many Alsatians to fully disavow all things German. 9 Even the physical border had become a deep scar during the Second World War: The Rhine, after all, was traced on its left bank by the Maginot Line and on its right by the Westwall. It was only as they learned the benefits of operating across otherwise sturdy and constrictive borders that protesters began to truly overcome these deep divisions and develop a renewed sense of trans-Rhine community.10

This sense of community proved essential to the Rhenish protest movement. Over the course of their long struggle, activists benefited both from the different conditions and regulations that existed across the border as well as their perceptions of these differences. They harnessed experiences gathered “abroad” – that is, across the Rhine – in order to alter domestic politics. In late 1974 and early 1975, this trans-national context took on seminal importance for the region’s anti-

7 Bausinger, “Die ‘Alemannische Internationale,’” 152


9 See for example: Sarah Farmer, Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

10 Hermann Bausinger argues that the Rhine “for a long time did not create separation, but rather neighborliness.” It was the “preponderance of “state-territorial, economic, trade, religious, and natural and cultural contacts” that allowed the feeling of neighborliness, however tenuously, to hang on. Bausinger, “Die ‘Alemannische Internationale,’” 144.
nuclear movement as a series of site occupations brought protesters back and forth across the Rhine.

It was within this context that activists gathered experience for the Wyhl occupation. For the farmers and vintners of southern Baden, who were unversed in nonviolent action and who struggled to find shining examples of civil disobedience in the recent annals of German history, site occupation became a powerful model for political activism via the Alsace. The Marckolsheim site occupation, which drew on nonviolent protests that had taken place in the Larzac, was Badensian reactor opponents’ single most important experience in the run-up to the Wyhl occupation. At the same time, the Alsatian movement, which at first encompassed a far narrower slice of the population, benefitted from the popular quality of anti-nuclear protest in Baden. Taken in the appropriate context, in other words, the Wyhl occupation was far from unforeseeable or unprecedented. Instead, it was part of a powerful, trans-national movement.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Dieter Rucht for example, argues that “this opposition arose completely unexpectedly.” Dieter Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben* (Munich: Beck, 1980), 206. See the Introduction for more on Rucht’s description of the anti-nuclear movement.
Global Thinking, Local Action: Making good on the idea of occupation in the Upper Rhine Valley

Mr. Rosenthal has a site
That we don't like one bit
But he doesn't care at all
He's interested only in profit
But we are interested
In the river, the forest, the field
And our health
Will not be sold for wealth
-Walter Mossmann, “The Watch on the Rhine”

Despite local people’s resolute opposition to the proposed Marckolsheim lead plant, there was little local precedent for a site occupation in the fall of 1974. With only a few exceptions, the people of the Upper Rhine Valley had never even seen, much less participated in, an occupation like the ones they claimed that they intended to carry out in Marckolsheim and Wyhl. Nevertheless, just a week after Badensian and Alsatian activists formed the International Association of Citizens’ Initiatives in late August 1974, the beginning of construction in both Marckolsheim and Wyhl seemed imminent. The Marckolsheim project had already received the approval of Prefect Jean Sicurani, and the “first partial license for the [Wyhl] reactor was expected.” Opponents of the two projects were convinced that construction of either one could commence “any day.”12 As the situation heated up, Bernd Nößler of Wyhl explained, protesters “in many villages” nervously debated “the ‘if and buts’ of

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the planned occupation.”13 Despite their nerves and their inexperience, the time to act was upon them.

Though local precedents were limited, protesters had not just come up with the idea of a site occupation out of the blue. Their plan of action drew on two precedents; one from far away, one from close to home. Particularly important were the protests taking place on the French Larzac plateau. As we have seen, a handful of Badensian protesters, not to mention a far larger group of Alsatians were familiar with the protests of the 103 Larzac farm families against the expansion of a nearby military based that had begun in 1971. After Lanza del Vasto, a student of Gandhi and leader of the community of the Ark, became involved in the Larzac struggle, nonviolent direct action protests including site occupation gained pride of place in the movement. For a handful of Freiburg leftists, including Walter Mossmann, Freia Hoffmann, and more indirectly the members of Freiburg’s graswurzel group, the Gewaltfreie Aktion Freiburg (Non-violent Action Freiburg – GAF), Larzac was a point of entry into local anti-nuclear protests. For a group of young Alsatian farmers who had visited the Larzac in December 1973 and helped to set up La Blaquiere farm on occupied land, Larzac was a powerful introduction to occupation.14

At the same time as the group of young Alsatian farmers was in the Larzac, a dozen non-violent activists in Kaiseraugst, Switzerland brought the site occupation


14 Solange Fernex, “Non-Violence Triumphant,” The Ecologist 5 (No. 10), 373. For more on the Larzac, see Chapter Two.
tactic into the Upper Rhine Valley. On 26 December 1973, these members of the newly formed Gewaltfreie Aktion Kaiseraugst (Nonviolent Action Kaiseraugst – GAK) trespassed onto a proposed reactor construction site in order to begin what they had decided to call a “trial-squat.” The five-day squat, which took place a mere 80 kilometers from Freiburg, introduced the tactic to the Upper Rhine valley. GAK considered the action to be the first of their “Propaganda of Deeds,” a rapid-fire campaign meant both to inform local people about the threat posed by nuclear power and convince them to act against it. Despite the -10C weather, the squat lasted until 30 December. It exceeded expectations by attracting some 400 visitors and created a “wide echo” in the press. A few months later the BZ reported that based in part on this success, GAK had announced its plans to carry out a full-fledged occupation in the fall.

Though these experiences brought the idea of site occupation into the region, many local people were still not at ease with the prospect of initiating an illegal action. Their second thoughts had not subsided on 16 September 1974 when construction began in Marckolsheim. At a planning meeting held that night, Solange

15 Like the GAF, the GAK quickly became one of the so-called graswurzel groups affiliated with the non-violent, anarchist publication graswurzelrevolution.


Fernex reported that the entire occupation project “hung by a thread.” As this “decisive meeting” began, Fernex recalled, “everyone, poised on the brink, was afraid to take the final step.” Fernex reported that it was the conservationist Antoine Waechter who finally convinced the protesters to move forward with the occupation, reminding them that there would only be one chance to save the primeval forest that still thrived along the banks of the Rhine near Marckolsheim.

Once this crucial decision had been taken, protesters did not look back. Late in the night of Thursday 19 September, Fernex and other members of this core group delivered flyers to 500 local people who had previously expressed their willingness to take part in the occupation if it became necessary.18 The flyer reminded its readers of their pledge to occupy the site and concluded in bold letters, “Now it has gotten to that point! Come one and all to the construction site in Marckolsheim!”19 By 7am the following morning, a few dozen protesters had responded to the nocturnal alarm and showed up on the site. For some, the relatively sparse crowd was cause for concern. Solange Fernex, however, seized the “dramatic moment” by pulling a bundle from her car and assembling “a small, ugly tent.”20 Soon, another woman joined Fernex and pitched her own tent on the site.21

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18 See Chapter Five for more details.


20 Walter Mossmann, interview with the author, Freiburg, 8 March 2010.

21 Fernex reports that “two women” were the first to set up their tents. Fernex, “Non-Violence Triumphant,” 374.
By 10 am, more than one hundred activists were on the site, which was dotted with tents.22

Throughout the day, a diverse and unusual assemblage of local people found their way to and from the site. In the afternoon, the eleven Marckolsheim village councilors who had voted against the lead plant joined the protesters on the site and announced their support for the nascent occupation.23 Police officers mingled with protesters, as well, but they made no attempt to intervene. “Relations with the [construction] workers,” Fernex reported, remained “friendly and polite, but firm.” The workers, though, were among the first to leave the site. Once they “realized they were not going to get any work done that day,” the workers simply gave up and went home for the weekend.24 Just by gathering on the site and proclaiming their intention to remain there, protesters had succeeded in postponing construction until at least the following week. Though no hard-nosed confrontation had occurred, the occupation was now underway. The occupiers phoned media outfits across France to circulate word of their initial victory. At 1 pm, RTL announced the news on the air.

The protesters’ continued presence on the site was at least partially due to the fact that police had not even attempted to stop what was clearly an illegal action. Nevertheless, an air of uncertainty still hung over the occupied site. Together with a

22 The description in the last two paragraphs is based on Fernex, “Non-Violence Triumphant.”

23 See Chapter Three for more details.

handful of villagers from Marckolsheim, the crowd on the construction site was comprised mainly of “teachers, some sailors, and tradesmen.” Local farmers remained largely absent, and demonstrators worried that they would be easily overpowered by police without more widespread local support. The occupiers began to expect that a confrontation with the police would come Monday morning, when the construction crews returned to work.

In order to recruit more local people to the site, protesters fanned out into the surrounding villages and spoke with farmers. As mundane as this task may have seemed, it required the participation of other rural Alsatians or Badensians; many older farmers could not speak French and could not, therefore, be approached by Strasbourg students or others incapable of speaking the Alemannic dialect. As a dialect speaker who held close relationships with many local farmers, Marckolsheim’s veterinarian, Léon Siegel, was particularly well-suited to this task. Accordingly, Siegel spent Friday evening making house calls to the farms around town. Rather than checking up on the livestock, however, Siegel, told his neighbors about what was going on down the road at the construction site. Other protesters fluent in the Alemannic dialect asked local people how they felt about the occupation as “a means of raising [their] awareness, arousing their curiosity, and

25 Jean de Barry, interview with the author, Strasbourg, 3 March 2010.


27 De Barry, interview.

28 Maire-Reine Haug, interview with the author, Freiburg, 8 March 2010.
[their] desire to see the site for themselves.”

Their curiosity piqued, visitors were enticed to stay on the site with beverages and nature tours into the adjacent Rhine forest.

A flyer circulated by Freiburg Chemistry students highlighted the extent to which demonstrators used the weekend to entrench themselves on the site. More tents been pitched and “an information center [had] been set-up.” The occupiers had also selected “individuals who would be responsible for acting as speakers in case of an appearance by the construction company or the police.” The surrounding communities were working to reinforce the occupation, too. The residents of Marckolsheim brought food to the site, and villagers from both the Alsace and Baden devised an alarm system that would be deployed if the police attempted to break-up the protest. As the occupiers’ grip on the “liberated” construction site tightened, their confidence also grew.

After the excitement of the weekend, the long awaited showdown on Monday morning turned out to be a non-event. Fifty tractors blockaded all the access routes to the occupied site, causing the construction workers to quickly give up their attempt to get back to work. Once again, however, the police declined to intervene. Dr. Christian Rosenthal, director of the Chemische Werke München


(CWM), later suggested that, “if he wanted to, he could have sent the police to the protesters.” Of course, the French government’s lackluster support for the German industrialist Rosenthal may also have contributed to the police’s non-response. After all, the plant that Rosenthal hoped to build in the Alsace had already been rejected by three other municipalities in Germany and one in France. The harder the government fought to push the plant through in Marckolsheim, the more protesters’ characterization of the plans as an attempt to turn the Alsace into a “rubbish bin” seemed accurate. In retrospect, Fernex thought, “from the first Monday the fight was almost over.”

In another sense, however, the fight was just beginning. As days of occupation became weeks, and weeks of “cold, wind, and rain” stretched into months, the CWM did not give up on its plans to build in Marckolsheim. An article in the *Badische Neue Zeitung* on 10 October explained how activists had dug in for the long haul, and suggested how the work they had undertaken on the site was creating a new center for the movement. “A small town of some twenty tents” had been built on the site. Protesters had even set up an electric generator and a “small


35 A sign on the site said, “Alsace is no trash can.”


'print shop' for the immediate reproduction of informational materials.” Two stands now offered “visitors and occupiers beverages and sandwiches.”38

At a rally on 20 October, one speaker pondered the occupation’s progress. “It is uncertain if we are close to victory,” he said, “but it is certain that we are closer to victory than we were at the beginning of this action.”39 In fact, the action itself was a sort of victory. The anxiety with which protesters had initially approached the project was long gone and a growing feeling of confidence had replaced it. Moreover, the impressive infrastructure that protesters had assembled on the site made Marckolsheim the hub of a vibrant, transnational community. Interactions between diverse elements of the population continued to take place in Marckolsheim long after the occupation’s chaotic first day. Not only had the occupation brought protesters closer to stopping the lead plant, it also brought them closer to one another.


Reclaiming the Rhine, Imagining the Alemannic Community

In Strasbourg in the fortress  
Resides the honorable Prefect  
By the chemical industry  
He’s been treated without neglect  
Sicurani, Sicurani  
You’ve hung us out to dry  
But just watch out: the Alsace  
Is not your colony

On the twentieth of September,  
It was already high time  
We spread ourselves out  
on the CWM’s site on the Rhine  
And as he tried to stop us,  
Sicurani, that wretched little thing  
We headed for the river  
And blockaded every crossing  
-Walter Mossmann, “The Watch on the Rhine”

Already on the first day of the Marckolsheim occupation, the BZ reported that
the occupiers included, “not only Alsatians, but also many Kaiserstühlers, and even
like-minded Swiss.”40 Such transnational cooperation was not an everyday
occurrence in a region that had been highly militarized after 1918, torn apart in the
final months of the Second World War, and “held hostage” in the aftermath of three
different conflicts in the last 100 years. For French who had survived the Nazi
invasion and Germans who had lived through allied air raids, each trip across the
river brought back shades of “a dark past in which we could not find a common way
to benefit both the neighboring peoples.”41 Yet, the longer “like-minded” citizens

40 Peter Meister, “Gegner des Bleichemiewerks besetzen Baugelände,” Badische
Zeitung, 21 September 1974.

41 Ida Tittelmann, “Keineswegs saßen wir Frauen untätig herum,” in Wyhl (see note
12), 201.
spent with one another on the occupied site, the more they came to realize the
potential power of their cooperation. What is more, their shared struggle against
industrial development and nuclear energy led them increasingly to define
themselves and their goals in opposition to their respective department, state, and
national governments. By cooperating with erstwhile enemies, protesters
empowered themselves and expanded their movement.

Drawing roughly on Benedict Anderson’s concept of the “imagined
community,” I argue that the process of cooperative protest that took place across
borders in the Upper Rhine Valley coincided with the imagination of a new
Alemannic community; an association that Andre Weckmann and Hermann
Bausinger have dubbed the “Alemannic International.” In an important similarity
to Anderson’s concept of the “imagined community,” Weckmann and Bausinger
emphasize language as a key element of this Alemannic union.

The language that arguably played such an important part in the imagination
of the Alemannic community, however, was a dialect, not an expanding print
language. In fact, the Alemannic dialect was almost non-existent in print; and

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42 André Weckmann and Hermann Bausinger have referred to this as the
“Alemannic International.” Bausinger describes the “International” as “not only a
union of friends of dialect, but also an expression of a common position in world
politics... shortly put, the Alemannic International is an expression and a
particularly striking embodiment of the new regionalism.” Bausinger, “Die
‘Alemannische Internationale,’” 147.

43 Anderson describes the importance of “national print-languages” for the rise of
nationalism in his chapter on “Old Languages, New Models,” in Anderson, Imagined
Communities: 67 – 82.

44 Bausinger argues that dialects in print are largely inventions of “Dialektdichter.”
even as a spoken language, it was in dramatic decline.\textsuperscript{45} The dialect was, nonetheless, a “weapon” for the region’s protesters. As Hermann Bausinger explained, this was particularly the case in the Alsace, where the dialect’s marked decline since the end of the Second World War meant that regardless of the content expressed, simply speaking Alemannic was a form of counter-attack against centralization.\textsuperscript{46} Of course, estimates of the Alemannic dialect’s decline in Alsatian cities failed to take into account its continued position as the primary language of rural people. As one 1975 study summarized its findings, “The more rural the milieu, the smaller the village, the older the person surveyed, the more likely dialect was spoken.”\textsuperscript{47} According to Bausinger’s theory, then, rural people were engaged in a linguistic counter-attack nearly every time they opened their mouths; a circumstance that appears well-matched to their emphasis on the conflict between the rural periphery and urban centers of government.

In a further twist on Anderson’s theory, the people of this Alemannic community desired only autonomy from distant centers of government, not the creation of independent nation-states.\textsuperscript{48} As Weckmann put it, there were already

\textsuperscript{45} In the Alsace, in particular, statistics reveal a dramatic decline in the usage of the dialect in the post-war decades; the lone exception to this rule of sharp decline was amongst the rural population. Michael Essig, \textit{Das Elsaß auf der Suche nach seiner Identität} (Munich: Eberhard, 1994).

\textsuperscript{46} Bausinger, “Die ‘Alemannische Internationale,’” 151.

\textsuperscript{47} Trouillet, \textit{Das Elsaß}.

\textsuperscript{48} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 51 – 53.
“far too many political units” in the region.\(^{49}\) Instead of creating a new one, members of the Alemannic community imagined their own territory as an autonomous region that existed both within and outside three distinct nations. In reference to the region’s tripartite transnational core, the Alsatian balladeer François Brumbt dubbed it “Dreyeckland.”\(^{50}\) While the region existed in three nations, its heart was clearly the occupied site in Marckolsheim. It was on this “liberated terrain” that people from all three nations got to know one another and learned the practical advantages of cooperation. Through these interactions and their shared struggle to maintain control of the site, protesters not only imagined the new Alemannic community—they lived it as well.

\(^{49}\) André Weckmann, quoted in Bausinger, “Die Alemannische Internationale,” 144.

A group of middle-aged farmers’ wives from the Badensian village of Sasbach exemplified the significance of the transnational interactions that took place on the site. Even before many Alsatian farm families had been recruited to take part in the protests at Marckolsheim, the women of Sasbach spent their days knitting on the occupied construction site. Hailing from a village where the threat of nearby nuclear reactors had long been debated, these women were particularly quick to respond to the new threat that the proposed lead plant posed to their viticultural livelihoods. These German women’s presence helped French activists to recruit Alsatian farmers. For the Alsatians, the Sasbachers’ participation was evidence that the occupation, “had support from German people, support from farmers, and [that]
those farmers were able to understand the problems of the French farmers, as well."  

Interactions between the women of Sasbach and Alsatian activists also helped to make life on the site more routine. Jean de Barry, a University of Strasbourg student, recalled how impressed he was with the German women’s organization, which he felt "was much stronger... at the beginning than on the French side." It was the Sasbach women, Jean-Jacques Rettig recalled, who each day "brought the soup and checked to make sure that the young men had clean hands before they ate it." Daily Franco-German cooperation was further standardized through the development of a rotating occupation schedule. “Every day,” Rettig explained, “one village from the Alsace and one village from Germany met, in order to watch over the land, this land that we were occupying.”

The importance of this cooperation was not overlooked by Prefect Sicurani, who honed in on it in his attempt to halt the occupation. Rather than intervening directly on the occupied site, Sicurani attempted to blame Badensians for the disorder in Marckolsheim. The Germans were, after all, an easy target. A brutal struggle between protesters and police for control of the site may well have been a formula for bad headlines, but preventing le boche from wreaking havoc in Alsace was hardly an indefensible action for any French official. Thus, just one week after

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51 De Barry, interview.

52 Ibid.

53 Rettig, interview.

54 Ibid.
the occupation began, Prefect Sicurani ordered two local border crossings closed to Badensian protesters.55

Activists from both banks of the Rhine responded quickly in an attempt to prevent Sicurani from enforcing the boundary between France and Germany. In Alsace and in Baden, villagers rang church bells and set off fire sirens in order to “alarm the entire region” that something was amiss.56 As Badensian protesters made their way towards the site, they came upon the closed bridges in Sasbach and Breisach. Alsatians, too, were sent from Marckolsheim to the sealed checkpoints. Using tractors, cars, and even their bodies, protesters from both countries blockaded the two bridges for hours.57 “The border,” they declared, “cannot stop poisonous lead particles. It will not hinder our solidarity!”58 This stunning display of transnationalism on the part of people who had fought three wars against one another in the past century forced Sicurani to realize that he would not be able to divide and conquer the protesters along the lines of the old stereotype of Franco-German “hereditary enmity.”59 By the end of the day, he relented on his decision to


57 “Sperrung des Grenzübergangs auf der Sasbach Rheinbrücke” (Photograph), in Wyhl (see note 12), 55.

58 “Blei-Alarm Gilt!” Informations-Dienst.

stop Badensian protesters from entering France and re-opened the border to all traffic.

![Image of Rhine bridge blockade](image)

**Figure 6.** Badensians blockade the Rhine bridge near Sasbach on 26 September 1974. Image © Leo Hörlacher. ASB “Wyhl—Die Anfänge” 17572. Reprinted with permission.

For protesters, the day’s successes extended well beyond the quick re-opening of the border. Sicurani, who spoke not a word of dialect and who had previously served as a colonial governor in Polynesia was an obvious symbol of oppressive Parisian rule.\(^6^0\) Taking charge of the border crossing was not only a defensive display of trans-Rhine solidarity, but also a counter-attack against meddling, far-off government officials. As such, Sicurani’s order became a means for protesters to challenge the government’s control of the Rhine, and to reclaim it as the central artery of the Alemannic community.

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\(^6^0\) KKW-NEIN! Freiburg, *Die Wacht am Rhein*, Trikont Verlag (Liner Notes).
Jean Gilg, an Alsatian schoolteacher, wittily expressed the significance of the protesters’ reclamation of the Rhine from on a banner that he hung outside his tent in Marckolsheim. “Germans and French together,” the banner read, “The Watch on the Rhine.” Seizing the title of a patriotic song that had been used to rally soldiers to defend the “German Rhine” during wars between the two countries was a bold proclamation of the power of the new cooperation between Badensian and Alsatian activists. Inspired by Gilg’s banner, Walter Mossmann, the singer/songwriter and freelance journalist who had authored the declaration of the International Association of Citizens’ Initiatives, penned a completely new version of “The Watch on the Rhine.” Set to the tune of an American strike song, the thirteen verses of Mossmann’s ballad retold the story of how their shared protests against government authority developed Badensian and Alsatian protesters’ transnational cooperation.61

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61 Mossmann took the tune from the song, “Which side are you on?” by Florence Reece. He even used this question in the refrain, which asked: “Which side are you on? / A site is being occupied here / We’re protecting ourselves from trash / Not tomorrow, but now!” Ibid. Also: Mossmann, interview, 20 February 2010.
The new, cooperative transnational culture that was “born” on the occupied site did not wipe clean the slate of history or abolish national borders. In line with Meinrad Schwörer’s conception of the Alemannic dialect, however, the idea underlying Mossmann’s “Watch on the Rhine” brought together French and Germans in a common project that transcended those borders. Much like the dialect, then, the Alemannic community existed both within and beyond the confines of the nations in which it was physically located. As the normalization of life on the occupied site and the dramatic bridge blockades made clear, transnational cooperation was not only imagined; it was being lived everyday on the occupied site. At the same time, however, these two signposts in the struggle against the Marckolsheim plant revealed that trans-national cooperation functioned precisely because it was a counter-attack against meddling government officials and their presumptions about how French and Germans related to one another. Thus,

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cooperation was a product of both Franco-German solidarity and opposition to both national governments.

“Marckolsheim and Wyhl – The Same Problem”

At the same time as protesters were imagining the Alemannic community in Marckolsheim, government officials were refining their plans for the Wyhl reactor. As life on the occupied site stabilized, therefore, the Wyhl project became a hot topic of conversation on the “liberated terrain.” The ongoing occupation and the strengthening solidarity between Alsatians and Badensians expanded reactor opponents’ sense of the possible. In the context of the occupied site in Marckolsheim, an occupation in Wyhl seemed anything but far-fetched. In the minds of government planners, too, the specter of the Marckolsheim occupation haunted the Wyhl reactor project. As part of an effort to remove the ongoing Marckolsheim occupation from conversations about Wyhl, government officials in Baden-Württemberg did everything in their power to disassociate the two projects.

The dispute over Marckolsheim’s relationship to Wyhl went far beyond rhetoric. As we have seen, participating in the Marckolsheim occupation opened local people up to transnational cooperation. It also prepared them for future actions. In a report on the anti-Wyhl campaign, Gabi Walterspiel of the GAF described the “struggle against the lead plant in Marckolsheim” as the “key experience” on the road to Wyhl.63 A series of collaborative creative projects that

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developed organically on the construction site and prepared activists for future struggles buttressed her assertion.

As fall turned to winter in Marckolsheim, the occupiers built a “yurt” to keep themselves warm. As Walter Mossmann explained it, this building began with a tarp to keep out the rain, continued with walls to keep out the wind, and eventually became a fully enclosed structure.64 This organic construction project was not just an act of necessity, however. It also helped to “further a positive atmosphere” on the site because it allowed occupiers to get to know one another better.65 As one protester put it, “one gets a new image of his fellow activists [while working on the yurt]—its not how well one can speak that counts here, but rather how one wields a tool.”66 The structure, which became known to protesters as the “friendship house” was soon a potent symbol of cooperation and of the occupation’s permanence. Though it had emerged slowly and in piecemeal fashion at Marckolsheim, the yurt was now a pre-fabricated idea that could easily be exported to future site occupations.

The bilingual “occupiers’ newspaper,” Was Wir Wollen (WWW) was another valuable creative enterprise that connected the Marckolsheim protests to future occupations. Like the friendship house, the newspaper grew organically from the occupation itself. It was designed both to improve communication and as “an

64 Mossmann, interview, 8 March 2010.

65 Ibid.

instrument to use time on the site more effectively.” 67 Beginning with the
publication’s very first issue, which appeared on 3 November 1974, WWW billed
itself as the “Newspaper of the Occupiers in Marckolsheim and Wyhl [sic!].” A
report on a meeting of the “international occupiers’ committee,” which appeared in
that debut issue made the occupiers’ perception of Marckolsheim’s close connection
to Wyhl even more obvious. The very first topic discussed at this meeting was
“Marckolsheim and Wyhl – the same problem.” According to the article, “the
procedure for an eventual occupation of Wyhl was debated,” and it was concluded
that, “the example of Marckolsheim can be a lesson for every other action of this
type.” 68

In her report on GAF’s involvement in Rhenish anti-nuclear protest, Gabi
Walterspiel also looked back on some of the more personalized lessons that
protesters drew from Marckolsheim. “The contacts to one another were created
during the five-month occupation,” she wrote. What was more, an “environmental
consciousness” developed in Marckolsheim and “one saw, what could be achieved
when one stuck together.” 69 At a rally held just a month after the beginning of the
occupation, a speaker from an Alsatian citizens’ initiative was already harping on
these points. After he “called on the participants to exercise solidarity with the
Badensians if construction starts in Wyhl,” the speaker inferred that the

67 Wolfgang, “Vorschläge,” Was Wir Wollen (No. 1), 3 November 1974, 6. ASB

68 Marie-Reine [Haug?], “Bericht über die Versammlung am 22.10.1974,” Was Wir

69 Walterspiel, “Die Wyhler Ereignisse.”
government, too, might learn from Marckolsheim. Thus, he continued, it “might become necessary to think of alternatives, of other methods by which the construction could be stopped.”

As protesters feared, the government of Baden-Württemberg was indeed quick to draw conclusions from the success of the Marckolsheim occupation. Top-level officials, who had previously poo-pooed public concerns about lead poisoning, now denounced the Marckolsheim plant as a serious threat to public health. By the end of October, the state government had made such a strong case against the lead plant that the BZ was reporting that, “environmentalists east of the Rhine can only hold out hope that Stuttgart or Bonn will be able to influence Paris.” The newspaper’s supposition documented well the fervor with which the government of Baden-Württemberg was now attacking the proposed lead plant. It also revealed a shocking disregard for the fact that protesters—not the government—had halted all progress on the project by occupying the site.

The government’s intention to disassociate the two projects was made even more obvious on 6 November 1974. That morning, the Ministry of Economics took out a large ad in the BZ explaining that it had decided to approve an initial

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71 Shortly after the beginning of the occupation, Minister Griesinger stated that “lead emissions were not harmful.” Nössler, “Das Genehmigungsverfahren,” 58.

72 “Tag und Nacht auf der Wacht am Rhein” Badische Zeitung, 26 October 1974.
construction license for the Wyhl reactor. At the very same time as the ad appeared, the paper reported two days later, Premier Filbinger had been in Paris pleading with French officials to stop the Marclosheim project. Anti-nuclear activists denounced this juxtaposition of the two projects as hypocritical. Instead of backing their premier’s intervention against the Marclosheim plant, they derided Filbinger’s mission to Paris as “a trick to push through the reactor in Wyhl.” After all, as one report in WWW put it, “it costs the state government nothing to speak out against the lead plant...it is under the control of the French authorities.” In response to the government’s attempts to separate the two issues, protesters simply repeated their mantra that, “the reactor and the lead plant are one issue!”

The very fact that protesters and government officials so earnestly debated the connections between these two projects reveals the wide opening of the border achieved by Alemannic cooperation. Though the Wyhl and Marclosheim sites were only a few kilometers from one another, the projects were being pursued in strikingly different national contexts. The fact that government officials struggled

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75 Arbeitskreis Umweltschutz an der Universität Freiburg, “Gefährdung durch Kernkraftwerke – Kein KKW in Wyhl!” (Freiburg: Stern-Druck, January 1975), 3.


77 Ibid.
so mightily just to keep them separate is, therefore, one of the most telling signs of the significance of Alemannic cooperation.

**Wyhl – A Separate Peace?**

Some don’t sleep well at all
In Wyhl, in Wyhl the town
Because that’s where the Mayor
Sold us out and let us down
Now he sits with his pistol
Inside his Judas-house
And thinks: “If only I hadn’t done that...”
It’s me that they will oust!”
-Walter Mossmann, “The Watch on the Rhine”

The spirit of trans-national cooperation that caused protesters to connect the Marckolsheim and Wyhl projects manifest itself quite differently within the village of Wyhl than it did elsewhere in the region. The village’s privileged status as the future host of the proposed reactor meant that the project had separate ramifications there. In contrast to the trans-Rhine movement taking place all around Wyhl, which was almost exclusively a struggle between local people on the one hand and government officials on the other, the struggle within the village pitted neighbors against one another and sometimes even “tore families apart.” As the *Badenwerk* pushed ahead with its plans to build a reactor in Wyhl, the engagement of out-of-town anti-nuclear activists in what was purportedly a local matter became a bone of contention in the village. The separate local struggle

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within Wyhl could effectively be considered the exception that proves the rule of the powerful imagined Alemannic community.

Though reactor opponents living in Wyhl were well connected with their allies in the surrounding communities, local supporters of the project had few friends in the region. Instead, the supporters’ principal partners were government officials and Badenwerk spokesmen, who promised that the reactor would mean increased tax revenues and new jobs in the village.79 Wyhl’s Mayor Zimmer happily listed these “advantages” of the reactor to anyone who would listen. In addition to the well known economic benefits, the Badenwerk had promised the village new swimming pools, meeting halls, and athletic facilities as a reward for hosting the power plant.80 This influx of new jobs and facilities would vault Wyhl’s comparatively poor economy and low status ahead of its wine-growing neighbors – an important matter for the villagers’ delicate sense of civic pride.81

Despite the plethora of material and emotional benefits that the reactor project offered Wyhl, reactor opponents in the village found many allies as they went door-to-door to discuss the project with their neighbors in early 1974. Over the course of several weeks, more than 200 of Wyhl’s 2,000 residents joined the local anti-reactor initiative group. For these Wyhlers, “watching the entire village

79 According to Walter Mossman, “from the beginning, Wyhl was the only village that supported the reactor.” Mossmann, “Die Bevölkerung ist Hellwach,” 30. See also: Arnegger, “Die Wyhler sind gleichgültig bis resigniert.”

80 Bernd Nössler, “Bürgerentscheid in Wyhl,” in Wyhl (see note 12), 75.

81 For more on the one-upmanship between Wyhl and the neighboring villages, see Chapter Two.
council support the reactor and shy away from public discussion,” was among the most off-putting aspects of the project.\(^\text{82}\) As in the regional movement, in other words, matters of democratic practice and dissatisfaction with government officials motivated many reactor opponents.

In order to increase the level of democratic dialogue within Wyhl, reactor opponents advocated a local referendum on the reactor project. Protesters within the village worked for months to make the proposed referendum a reality. They collected signatures from 663 Wyhl voters (some 40% of the electorate) in support of the referendum, and initiated legal action when the village council attempted to prevent the vote from taking place.\(^\text{83}\) Flyers circulated in the surrounding villages called on the people of the region to get involved and to lobby Wyhl’s village council. After 500 people demonstrated in Wyhl on 11 November 1974, the village council finally agreed to schedule the referendum.\(^\text{84}\)

Given that a regional referendum on the reactor project was neither up for debate nor constitutionally possible, what had been intended as an appeal to direct democracy ended up reinforcing the divide between the struggle within Wyhl and the regional anti-nuclear movement.\(^\text{85}\) A town hall meeting held just two days prior

\(^{82}\) Nössler, “Bürgerentscheid in Wyhl,” 66.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 67 – 70.

\(^{84}\) Ibid.

\(^{85}\) Citizens of Wyhl were made aware of the differences between the possibilities for a referendum at the local, state, and national levels. An article in the village’s Amtliches Mitteilungsblatt pointed out that West Germany’s Basic Law defined the country as a “representative democracy,” where “citizens had no substantive influence on the work of their elected representatives between elections.” Baden-
to the vote demonstrated this dynamic. The village government and local reactor opponents had previously agreed that only residents of Wyhl would be allowed to attend the meeting. As the townspeople filed into the meeting hall, “the only ‘outsiders’ were a few members of a TV camera crew.” It seemed that both sides were abiding by the agreement. Shortly before the beginning of the meeting, however, “twelve additional visitors marched into the hall!” Among them were Minister Eberle, as well as representatives of the state weather office, the state viticultural institute and other Stuttgart bureaucracies. Needless to say, not one of these “additional visitors” was a resident of Wyhl.

Jürgen Nößler, the chairman of the local citizens’ initiative, waited patiently through two hours of speeches by Mayor Zimmer, Minister Eberle, and several more “outsiders” before he was finally allowed to lodge a complaint about the Stuttgarters’ presence. His proposal that either the state government officials be thrown out, or the reactor opponents’ scientific and legal advisors be allowed in was immediately declined by Mayor Zimmer. In response, many reactor opponents walked out of the meeting.

Württemberg’s law on community government, in contrast, allowed for referendum at the local level because the “active involvement of citizens in the government of the community is a legitimate state political interest.” “Liebe Mitbürgerinnen und Mitbürger,” Amtliches Mitteilungsblatt, Gemeinde Wyhl a. K., 11 April 1974. Reprinted in Wyhl (see note 12), 68.


87 Ibid., 75.

88 Ibid., 76. See also: Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Vor Ort. Bürger gegen Atomkraftwerk in Wyhl, DVD, directed by Thomas Schmitt (1975).
Though the matter at hand was whether the Wyhl reactor opponents’ “counter-experts” would be allowed into the meeting, the debate was in fact shaped by questions of who was affected by the reactor project. In addition to the reactor opponents’ scientific and legal advisors, “many inhabitants of neighboring villages” who had come to “follow the proceedings” were also stuck outside the meeting hall.\(^{89}\) The obvious disconnect between the referendum process, which was limited to inhabitants of the village, and the effects of the reactor and its cooling towers, which would be felt throughout the region, now overshadowed the proceedings.

Other last minute interventions by the state government also pressed the issue of just who would be affected by the reactor and what decision-making framework would allow the voices of these affected individuals to be heard. Three days before the vote, on 9 January 1975, a personally signed letter from Premier Filbinger was sent to each household in Wyhl calling on villagers to “do their part for...the future of Baden-Württemberg” by giving their “‘yes’ to the nuclear reactor.”\(^{90}\) Reactor opponents perceived this letter as another violation of their agreement with Mayor Zimmer that neither side would allow outsiders to influence the referendum.\(^{91}\)

From the government’s perspective, these careful and extensive preparations paid off. Just days before the referendum, several Wyhl voters told a BZ reporter

\(^{89}\) Nössler, “Bürgerentscheid in Wyhl,” 76.

\(^{90}\) Hans Filbinger to Wyhler Bürger, 9 January 1975. Reprinted in Wyhl (see note 12), 74.

\(^{91}\) Nössler, “Bürgerentscheid in Wyhl,” 71 – 72.
that they planned to vote to sell the land even though they were against the reactor. After all, the newspaper reported, “they feel that the property will be taken away regardless.”

The next day, at a Freiburg press conference, Minister of Economics Eberle, and his colleague Minister of Labor, Health, and Social Order, Annemarie Griesinger, reinforced these fears of dispossession. The pair announced that “the village of Wyhl will have its property taken by eminent domain if the citizens vote ‘no.’”

Though the referendum seemed unlikely to actually influence the reactor project’s fate, an exceptional turn-out brought 1,605 of the town’s 1,744 eligible voters to the polls on 12 January 1975. Of these, 883 cast their ballots in favor of selling land to the Badenwerk while 692 voted against the proposition. The project’s supporters in the state government now saw a clear path to the beginning of construction. Even before the referendum, the BZ had reported that if “a majority votes yes, work on the reactor will begin early this year.”

Due to its wide ramifications, the village referendum caught the attention of the national media. An article in Die Zeit pointed out that the local referendum was hardly a legitimate means of polling the people who would be affected by the reactor project. Given the benefits that Wyhl—and Wyhl alone—stood to receive if the project went forward, the weekly opined that, “in truth...the Wyhlers did not

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92 Arnegger, “Die Wyhler sind gleichgültig bis resigniert.”

93 Nössler, “Bürgerentscheid in Wyhl,” 75.

94 Arnegger, “Die Wyhler sind gleichgültig bis resigniert.”
weigh energy needs against environmental protection, instead they placed the self-interest of their community before dangers for an entire region.”

Alemannically-minded anti-nuclear activists were also quick to question the notion that the entirety of “the affected population” had spoken its mind in favor of the reactor. In a statement released shortly after the referendum’s results were made public, the International Association of Citizens’ Initiatives wrote that, “the population of Wyhl has made a decision about the sale of a piece of a land. But we, the affected region, will decide about the construction of the nuclear reactor.” This conflict between community and region sharpened the significance of trans-border Alemannic cooperation and the regional approach for anti-reactor activists’ political project.

At an anti-reactor demonstration held the following week in neighboring Weisweil, a banner hung over the stage contrasted the breadth of the affected population with the microcosm of local election returns. “100,000 affected people are against it,” the banner read in a clear reference to the number of people who had signed the collective complaint against the reactor the previous June. As the

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98 See Chapter Three for more on the June 1974 signature drive.
recent vote had shown, however, only “883 Wyhlers are for it.”99 Certainly, protesters’ rejection of the result was at least partially a function of their inability to win the local referendum.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 8.** “100 000 affected people are against it / 883 Wyhlers are for it.” Demonstration at Weisweil on 26 January 1975. © Leo Horlacher. ASB “Wyhl—Die Anfänge” 17610. Reprinted with permission.

Insisting that the reactor project be re-framed as a regional issue had other, bigger ramifications, however. This push for a regional approach served to transcend, once again, the control of established governments. What is more, the imagined Alemannic community could not be bought off with new swimming pools and athletic facilities. Thus, the exceptional situation within the village of Wyhl revealed the way that the very idea of the imagined Alemannic community was essential to protesters’ challenge to the Wyhl reactor project. This autonomously

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defined region in resistance could not be manipulated by government officials, even though it was capable of butting in to local, state, and national politics as it pleased.

**Conclusion**

In the aftermath of the referendum, a situation quite similar to the one that had existed near Marckolsheim the previous fall seemed to be developing around Wyhl. Despite Siegfried Göpper’s insistence that protesters were ready to “stand protectively in front of the Heimat,” construction appeared to be imminent. On 22 January 1975, just ten days after the votes in Wyhl had been tallied, Premier Filbinger formally issued the permit that would allow construction to begin in Wyhl. One week later, the BZ reported that, “the Badenwerk...wants to begin preparations for construction in a few days.” After the village of Wyhl sold 40 hectares of land to the Badenwerk for two million Marks on 11 February, there were no further legal or procedural hurdles to construction. Still, no precise date for a groundbreaking had been announced and protesters had not issued any more specific details about their plans to halt the project.

Despite these important similarities, the situation surrounding the Wyhl reactor during the first months of 1975 did not perfectly mirror that of fall 1974 in Marckolsheim. The BZ’s 8 January report that, “an occupation of the construction

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102 The deal included an option for the Badenwerk to purchase an additional 30 hectares at a later date. Nössler, “Bürgerentscheid in Wyhl,” 78
site on the Rhine—following the example of Marckolsheim—is already firmly planned” suggested the way that the ongoing Marckolsheim occupation itself had re-shaped the situation in Wyhl.\textsuperscript{103} As we have seen, the collaborative projects that protesters developed on the “liberated terrain” brought people from both sides of the Rhine together and resulted in the creation of readily exportable elements of occupation.

Not only had the Marckolsheim occupation provided logistical and technical templates for the proposed Wyhl occupation, however, it had also furthered solidarity between Badensian and Alsatian protesters. Use of the Alemannic dialect and re-emergent appeals to a shared heritage could be considered the building blocks of an imagined Alemannic community. Even more significantly, confrontations with government officials fostered protesters’ solidarity with one another. Prefect Sicurani’s attempt to drive a wedge between German and French protesters by sealing border crossings, for example, only furthered cooperation between them. In their collective response to this attack on the occupation, and in the normalization of life on the occupied site, protesters not only “imagined,” but also “lived” the Alemannic community.

This trans-border solidarity, and the questions it raised about the dimensions of the affected region became subjects of debate in and of themselves as the government of Baden-Württemberg strove to disconnect the Wyhl and Marckolsheim projects. By defining the affected region in a way that transcended political borders, opponents of the two projects implicitly challenged the authority

\textsuperscript{103} Arnegger, “Die Wyhler sind gleichgültig bis resigniert.”
of government officials, which depended on such boundaries. Thus, deploying the
category of the “affected population” across borders quickly became a potent means
of overcoming supposed divisions and attacking governmental authority. The
power of this idea underlay the growing significance of the Alemannic region as the
appropriate framework for the protests against the Wyhl reactor.

Peering through this prism of regional context is of the utmost importance
for understanding the situation in Wyhl just before the start of construction. Within
it, the Wyhl occupation was far from unprecedented. Local people had experienced
life on an occupied site. They had had the opportunity to work together with a
diverse grouping of people, and they had even written and rehearsed the songs that
they would sing when police brutally removed them from the Wyhl construction
site. Despite its significance in the region, however, Marckolsheim remained
unknown in the West German context even as Wyhl jumped quickly into the
headlines.

Thus, the presumption that people left of the Rhine considered themselves
strongly linked to Paris while the loyalties of those on the river’s right bank lay in
Bonn guided misinterpretations of Rhenish protests. Walter Mossmann illustrated
these presumed allegiances with an example from the world of sports: “if eleven
footballers from Strasbourg play against eleven footballers from Hamburg on
television, the soccer fans in [the Badensian town of] Kehl will cheer for the
Hanseatic team, because those are ‘the Germans,’ they are ‘our boys.’”104 Yet, these
national loyalties faded as local people became increasingly attached to the

collaboratively imagined and jointly lived Rhenish community. It was in this context that a culture of site occupations was established and that protesters found a way to sidestep established political structures. Regardless of how well they were known or understood outside the Upper Rhine Valley, connections across the Rhine were of central importance in the continuing development of the anti-nuclear movement at the local level and beyond.
Chapter Five

Onto the Site and into West Germans’ Living Rooms: The Wyhl occupation and its effects from Freiburg to Strasbourg and Constance to Kiel

As the situation heated up along the Rhine in the late summer of 1974, Heinz Siefritz of the Citizens’ Initiative Weisweil looked outside the region for support. Seeking signatories for a press release condemning the Wyhl project, he contacted Professor Theodor Ebert, an expert on social movements at the Free University’s Otto Suhr Institute. Unfortunately, the professor responded, he was unwilling to add his signature to the release because he was “not personally certain that your existence is in fact threatened [by the reactor].” Nevertheless, Ebert reassured Siefritz, he did “respect the fact that you feel existentially threatened.” After stating this expert assessment of the situation, Ebert suggested that Siefritz keep him up to date about any future direct action protests, which he deemed an “appropriate means” for citizens to express their concerns about the reactor.¹

Just six months after clarifying the difference between citizens’ feelings about the proposed Wyhl reactor and its actual potential to threaten their existence, Ebert caught a flight from West Berlin to Stuttgart. The academic was now intent on visiting southern Baden himself and personally advising members of the Badensian and Alsatian citizens’ initiatives about how to continue their anti-nuclear campaign.

¹ Ebert to Siefritz, 3 September 1974. ABEBI Haag Lore 8HL6.
In a report on his meeting with anti-nuclear activists, Ebert hailed the movement against the Wyhl reactor as “surely the most significant explicitly non-violent campaign since the founding of the Federal Republic.” In his presentation, however, Ebert remained reluctant to attack nuclear energy head on. In fact, he belabored the point that as far as he was concerned, nuclear energy remained the most reasonable alternative to reliance on Persian oil. Accordingly, he suggested that anti-nuclear protesters might have to decrease their own energy consumption in order to legitimize their anti-reactor rhetoric. Regardless of his second thoughts about the issue at hand, Ebert was captivated by “the number of protesters, the significance of the controversy, the scope of the civil disobedience, and the transnational character” of the movement.²

In the early spring of 1975, Ebert's fascination with the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement was far from unique. The Marckolsheim occupation, which began in September 1974, had drawn the interest of the alternative press to the region and even caused several widely read newspapers and magazines to print occasional articles on the situation in the Upper Rhine Valley.³ Yet it was not until local protesters occupied the reactor construction site in the woods outside of Wyhl late


in February 1975 that people all across the Federal Republic became deeply interested in goings-on in this rural borderland. Nor was Ebert’s primary interest in the tactics and scope of the protest unique. Many other observers were drawn to the Rhine Valley not because of a sudden concern about the problems posed by nuclear energy, but rather because they were taken aback by the shape of the emerging anti-nuclear movement and the scope of the coalition that opposed the Wyhl reactor.

The surprising speed with which the Federal Republic turned its attention to Wyhl in early 1975 is well reflected in popular scholarly accounts of the movement. These scholars, much like Ebert, seem to have reassessed nuclear energy on the basis of the increasingly evident strength of the popular mobilization against it. The “facts” on nuclear energy and the reactor’s potential to destroy southern Baden’s agricultural economy were only secondary considerations. What is more, many accounts of the larger, national anti-nuclear movement in West Germany begin with the Wyhl occupation, neglecting the years of grassroots protest that preceded it. At stake with this neglect is more than simple chronology, however. Shearing the occupation of its context has had serious consequences for outsiders’ understanding of the movement’s origins and its significance. Scholars were not alone in disconnecting the occupation from its context, however. Even the local press, which by early 1975 had reported frequently on anti-nuclear protests in the Upper Rhine Valley for several years, seemed suddenly to see the movement in a new light the moment that the Wyhl occupation began.

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4 For more on this historiography, see the Introduction.
By detailing the beginnings of the Wyhl occupation in this chapter, I aim to show both how the Wyhl occupation developed organically from the years of protest that preceded it, and how the action was perceived as a shocking departure by outside observers. Though these two contentions seem to be at loggerheads, I will argue that understanding the expectations of protesters, government officials, and the West German population are paramount in reconciling these two seemingly contradictory ideas. Though the German public had absolutely no expectation that rural anti-nuclear protesters would actually disobey governmental authority and occupy the reactor construction site, protesters had long steeled themselves for this action. In fact, as I will show in this chapter, it was this complete disconnect between the expectations of the German populace and those of the people of the Upper Rhine Valley that caused the first tidings of the occupation to reverberate so strongly throughout the Federal Republic.

**An Unbelieved Action: The 18 February Wyhl occupation**

The remote southwestern woodland where the *Badenwerk* utility company broke ground on the Wyhl reactor project was the epicenter of the anti-nuclear earthquake that rocked the West German political landscape. Away from the Wyhl forest, however, it was anything but obvious that the Rhine Valley lay on an active fault. In part, this was due to the *Badenwerk*'s attempts to downplay the strife that had surrounded the project since it had first been announced in July 1973. To this end, the first day of construction was marked by neither pomp nor circumstance. Instead, crews of workmen arrived in the Wyhl forest completely unannounced on the morning of Monday 17 February 1975. Their first order of business was to seal
off the site from the surrounding landscape. This pre-emptive, low profile enclosure work failed to attract any protesters at all. That evening, remembered Bernd Nössler of Wyhl, “a report came through the ether, ‘Start of construction in Wyhl – no hindrance of the work has occurred.” Further from the construction site’s immediate vicinity, the ground-breaking did not even register.

Yet, the apparent calm surrounding the Wyhl project was not quite as pervasive as it seemed. Local people were indignant that construction had begun before their lingering concerns about the reactor had been fully addressed. The citizens’ initiatives’ standing call for a site occupation had not been lost on the Badenwerk, either. Thus, the police order that forbade “trespassing or loitering on the enclosed construction site” specifically noted that the fine of 200 Marks was to “be repeatedly levied” each and every day that a trespasser spent on the site; occupation came with a hefty price tag. The local authorities were so certain that protesters would show up on the site that the village of Wyhl levied trespassing fines against eight prominent anti-nuclear activists the first day of construction. Yet, there were no protests in Wyhl on 17 February and “some of [these activists] had proof that they had not set foot in the woods that day.” Thus, things seemed to be so tranquil in the Wyhl forest precisely because the Badenwerk and the local authorities had expected a noisy reaction to the start of construction and done everything in their power to work under the radar.⁶


⁶ Ibid.
Given such high expectations, anti-nuclear protesters appeared to respond lethargically to the start of construction in Wyhl. In fact, the International Association of Citizens’ Initiatives acknowledged the ground-breaking only by announcing that it intended to hold a press conference to update reporters on pending legal challenges to the project.7 This event, which took place on the morning of 18 February, was held at a cabin next to the Wyhl forest nature trail.8 Accordingly, the three-hundred citizens who came to the woods in order to watch a handful of movement leaders answer reporters’ questions found themselves a stone’s throw from the construction site.9 This unhappy crowd, which was comprised mainly of rural women,10 looked on as Siegfried Göpper of the Citizens’ Initiative Weisweil provided information on the status of several lawsuits that had been filed as last ditch attempts to halt the reactor project. The onlookers remained calm as Hans-Helmuth Wüstenhagen, leader of the BBU, announced that, “the citizens initiatives would not call for a site occupation.”11

8 Nössler, “Es beginnt die Bauerei,” 82.
9 Ibid. See also: KPD/AO, Rote Fahne Informationsdienst 1 (18 February 1975). HSAS EA 1 / 107 Bü 766; Gerd Auer, “Hier wird ein Platz besetzt,” in Wyhl (see note 4), 86.
10 The men were “in the vineyards, in the fields, or at work.” Maria Köllhofer, “Es war die erste Demonstration in meinem Leben überhaupt,” in Wyhl (see note 4), 101.
Despite his stature as a revered movement leader, the BZ explained the next day, Wüstenhagen “need not have bothered” to make this announcement. After the press conference, members of the crowd decided to take a short walk over to the construction site in order to see firsthand what was going on there. “Confronted by the big machines” on the site, these rural people entered into a heated exchange with the Badenwerk’s project leader, who happened to be present. It was quickly evident that this discussion was going to be fruitless. The angered citizens’ frustration only increased. Matters got even worse, one protester remembered, “when they saw how the forest was being destroyed.” Another protester explained that, “it cut us in the heart, when we saw a hundred-year-old oak being cut down.” In the heat of the moment, without any explicit command to do so, “protesters broke down the fence and surged onto the site.”

The carefully constructed and well-signed barrier was only the trespassers’ first casualty. As soon as they had breached the site’s boundary, a group of Alsatians “pitched the first tent in front of a bulldozer that had been immobilized when some women from Weisweil climbed onto it.”

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12 Ibid.


14 Auer, “Hier wird ein Platz besetzt,” 86.

15 Annemarie Sacherer, ““Panik erfaßte unsere Herzen...”,” in Wyhl (see note 4), 94.

16 Auer, “Hier wird ein Platz besetzt,” 86.

17 Solange Fernex, “Non-Violence Triumphant,” The Ecologist 5 (No. 10), 376.
“jumped onto the shovels of excavators, positioned themselves in front of the treads of the bulldozers, and entered into conversation with the construction workers.”

Before long, “every machine was shut down, [and] the chainsaws were stopped.”

Despite these powerful actions, reporters who had followed the angry crowd from the press conference to the construction site did not believe that it bore the look of an organized cadre of radical protesters. If anything, the crowd had proven its unruliness by disregarding Wüstenhagen’s announcement that the citizens’ initiatives would not call for a site occupation. Accordingly, the press portrayed the crowd as a swarming mob of overwhelmed rural people. The BZ went so far as to report that by twelve o’clock, “the demonstrators stood on the site and did not really know if this was now an occupation or not.” Regardless of the crowd’s uncertainty, the newspaper report continued, the mood was “relaxed, not tense.”

Despite their reported disorganization and their apparent air of nonchalance, it had taken these rural protesters less than an hour to completely stop the construction of a massive nuclear reactor. Recognizing this staggering disconnect between the presumptions of the press, and the actual capabilities of the protesters is the key to understanding the shock waves that the Wyhl occupation launched across the Federal Republic. On the surface, reactor opponents’ actions appeared to be neither systematic nor pre-meditated. Yet, these protesters were clearly

18 Nössler, “Atomaren Ei,” 83.
20 Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Vor Ort.
21 “Demonstranten erzwingen,” Badische Zeitung.
prepared to launch an occupation and they were ready to draw on their collective protest experiences. A group of activists who had participated in the Marckolsheim occupation led the way. They were among the first to pitch tents and get in the way of the construction equipment. Once a few well-prepared protesters had made their way onto the site, “things were moving and the more timid had only to follow.”

Veterans of the Marckolsheim struggle were not the only protesters ready to participate in an occupation, however. Maria Köllhofer, a mother of five from Endingen, had taken to keeping a “fully packed bag containing a warm blanket and provisions” ready by the door at home. Though she was unaware of a specific plan to occupy the site on 18 February, Köllhofer was clearly ready to take part in the occupation whenever it might begin. In fact, she had previously discussed the matter with her family. Collectively, they had agreed that she would take part in the occupation on the family's behalf. After all, she could not be fired and she reasoned that “a mother with five kids would not be so quickly locked up.” Köllhofer’s assumption that a respectable, committed mother like herself would not be targeted by the authorities was shared by many anti-nuclear protesters.

As the sun began to set, the protesters showed that they were, indeed, prepared to remain on the site for an extended period of time. All afternoon, “an endless stream of tractors, cars, and bicycles headed towards the construction site.”

the wild west,” and numerous tents had been set-up on the site. Meanwhile, the husbands of women who had “strolled down’ to Wyhl that morning” appeared “armed with bacon, thermoses full of stew, and bottles of schnapps.” In a quick and orderly fashion, pieces of infrastructure that had only slowly been put into place in Marckolsheim—and that were clear evidence that protesters were steeling themselves for a long-term occupation—were assembled on the site at Wyhl.

Despite the streams of protesters that had come to the site throughout the day and the well-developed camp that they had put together, the subtitle of the BZ’s report on the morning of 19 February stated quite plainly that, “The police order to leave the site was followed.” The occupiers were shocked by the newspaper’s misrepresentation of the previous day’s events. Gerd Auer, a student from Emmendingen, wondered “how one could lie like that.” To prove that protesters still controlled the site, the International Association of Citizens’ Initiatives created a flyer that challenged the newspaper’s report. “Today on 19 February 1975, the BZ reported that the occupation of the construction site has been disbanded,” the flyer explained. “This report is false,” it deadpanned. Evidence that “hundreds of people from throughout the region” were still on the site in Wyhl was provided in the form of a photograph. “The next time a reporter came to the site, he was encircled by

25 Ibid.

26 “Demonstranten erzwingen,” Badische Zeitung.


ten vintners’ wives,” Auer remembered. “They told him very clearly what they thought of his reporting.”

The report was more than a source of ire for protesters. It also evinced how the nonviolent, largely spontaneous occupation of the Wyhl reactor construction site was all but inexplicable for the BZ’s reporters. Not taking protesters’ experiences at Marckolsheim into account and overlooking their clear readiness to occupy the Wyhl site at a moment’s notice made it much easier to see the occupation itself as random, haphazard, and disorganized. Failing to think about the nascent Wyhl occupation in light of numerous earlier protests in the region contributed to reporters’ underestimation of local people. In short, divorcing the start of the Wyhl occupation from the half-decade of protest that had preceded it was an easy means of mischaracterizing it; even if doing so required forgetting that the same women who had pushed their way onto the construction site in an apparent fit of rage had bags with food and blankets pre-packed at home. Just below the patina of disorganization, protesters’ readiness to carry out the occupation was obvious. As the protests on the Wyhl reactor site became larger and more fiercely contested during the following days and weeks, however, the perceived disconnect between earlier protests and these latest dramatic actions grew into a gaping hole.

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29 Auer, “Hier wird ein platz besetzt,” 88.
“A Splendid Own-Goal:"30 The 20 February 1975 police intervention

The occupiers were quite busy on Wednesday 19 February 1975. They spent the day physically entrenching themselves, distributing 15,000 flyers calling “everyone to come to the construction site in Wyhl,”31 and issuing rebuttals to the BZ’s reports that they had dispersed.32 The real action, however, did not take place until late that night when reactor opponents noticed a massing of police units outside the nearby town of Emmendingen.33 Observers noted that, “a force of 600 policemen... a police helicopter, two water cannons, two armored vehicles...and multiple dog teams,” was being assembled.34 This overwhelming assembly of police power was evidence that the occupation was now considered a serious matter by state government officials. In preparing such an oversized response, however, the government also opened the floodgates for a further escalation of the action’s significance and the scope of reactor opponents’ concerns.

For the people of southern Baden, the massing of police near Emmendingen presented a new and confusing situation. Protesters knew they were breaking the law when they trespassed onto the Wyhl construction site, and they expected some sort of reaction from the authorities. At the same time, police had never attempted


31 The entire text of the flyer is quoted in Sternstein, Überall ist Wyhl, 48.

32 Das internationale Komitee, “Aufruf.”

33 Sternstein, Überall ist Wyhl, 51.

34 Ibid., 50-51.
to clear the Marckolsheim site, and unlike urban student activists who frequently clashed with the police at demonstrations, rural anti-nuclear protesters still saw police officers as their “friends and helpers.” Thus, some rural activists were almost paralyzed by the massive police presence, despite the clear threat it posed to the future of the occupation. Overcoming that paralysis would require re-thinking their relationship to the police and even the government.

Informing the rural population of the police presence was the task of Walter Mossmann and Jean-Jacques Rettig. The pair met behind the police lines and sped off in Rettig’s Citroën to sound the fire sirens in the villages surrounding the reactor site. When they arrived in Sasbach, Mossmann and Rettig encountered a crowd of people standing around their village’s silent emergency siren and fretting over their civic duties. As the pair approached, one of the villagers exclaimed:

Man, Walter, at last! We’ve been waiting for half an hour, come on, here’s the box, we just can’t do it! To break the glass and push the button—even though there’s not a house burning in the village—it just doesn’t work that way. We just can’t do it!  

Mossmann did not hesitate. “But it’s burning in Wyhl!” he announced as he stepped forward and shattered the pane of glass with a sock full of pebbles.

For the people of Sasbach, at least, the sounding of fire sirens and the ringing of church bells in the pre-dawn hours on Thursday, 20 February 1975 marked an escalation in the conflict with authority; yet another barrier to action had been broken along with the pane of glass. In fact, after the “fire” at Wyhl was

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extinguished later that morning, local people would never see authority the same way again.

At the same time as rural people readied themselves to defend the site, the police were preparing for a major confrontation. Even before dawn, they had encircled the occupied site in the Wyhl forest and prepared to remove the protesters.36 Huddled around a smoldering campfire, a group of approximately 150 people, including “men, women, children, vintners, students, housewives, priests, and doctors” could do little more than brace themselves for the coming onslaught.37 As the sun rose, “the white helmets of the police” became increasingly visible. “Very slowly, step by step,” the ring of police tightened around the protesters. Finally, the police instructed the occupiers to take down their tents, pack up their belongings, and leave. “The answer,” one protester reported, “came spontaneously as if from the mouth of a mighty giant: songs from the occupation at Marckolsheim, where we had already rehearsed everything.”38 The protesters sang “The Watch on the Rhine” as the police descended on them, repeating “verse after verse, always the same song.”39 Once again, experience from Marckolsheim and the protesters’ sense of

36 Sternstein, Überall ist Wyhl, 50 – 51.


38 Frederic Mayer, “Ein Elsässer fühlt sich wie im Dritten Reich,” in Wyhl (see note 4), 91.

39 Quote is from Annemarie Sacherer, “Panik erfaßte unsere Herzen,” 96. Also: Günter Sacherer, interview with the author, Oberrotweil, 18 February 2010; Fernex, “Non-Violence Triumphant,” 376.
transnational community strengthened them in spite of the phalanx of police that was bearing down on them.

Yet the experience from Marckolsheim was not enough to keep the occupiers on the site. Despite their spirited singing, policemen acted quickly to wrench individuals from the group and drag them away. Next, the officers stood back and watched as water cannons bombarded the remaining protesters. A rural woman looked on and decried the police action as the protesters were deluged in cold water on a frosty February morning. “This is a disgrace,” she shouted. “If you had hearts in your bodies you would never do anything like this.” All the while, an older woman stood next to her sobbing and wiping the tears from her face.40

Watching their friends and neighbors get attacked and dragged away by the police was the last straw for many rural people. They responded immediately to the arrests of fifty-four of their fellow anti-nuclear protesters. In solidarity, dozens of protesters car-pooled to the Emmendingen police station, where the arrested activists had been taken for booking.41 After a preliminary hearing, the protesters were released in the late afternoon.42 The first to emerge from the police station was Balthasar Ehret of Weisweil, who gleefully reported to the crowd of supporters gathered outside the police station that he had told the police, “My name is Filbinger

40 Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Vor Ort.


42 Köllhofer, “Es war die erste Demonstration,” 102.
and Eberle and I am a stockholder in the *Badenwerk.*\(^{43}\) Ehret’s jab at the government surely met with the approval of the protesters, who were outraged about the treatment that their friends and neighbors had received from the police. Once the population’s “friends and helpers,” the police had come to be seen as agents of an illegitimate regime.

Dissatisfaction with the Stuttgart government was particularly pronounced among its erstwhile supporters. In a region that was considered a stronghold for their party, local members of the CDU could no longer accept the way that the Christian Democratic government was treating their colleagues and neighbors. Josef Aschenbrenner, the chair of the local CDU chapter in the village of Sasbach, announced that after 25 years in office he would not stand for re-election to that post. Though Aschenbrenner had long opposed the reactor, he said that previously he “had tried to calm the waves out of solidarity to the government.” After “the wife of a candidate for town council was attacked by a water cannon,” however, Aschenbrenner had “gotten hot under the collar.” At the same time as he explained his decision to step down, five of the party’s eight candidates for village council announced that they would no longer run. Three of them resigned from the party altogether.\(^{44}\)

The situation was similar in other villages. At a meeting on Saturday 22 February, the CDU’s Bischoffingen chapter “voted with an overwhelming majority”


to dissolve itself.\textsuperscript{45} Three days later, 20 local people, almost all of whom were vintners, bought an advertisement in the \textit{BZ} in order to publicly announce that they were leaving the Christian Democratic Union. These resignations, the statement explained, were due to the “reprehensible behavior of the state government in union with the utility company through the brutal police actions.” Such actions were “not compatible with our membership in the CDU under the current state party leadership.”\textsuperscript{46}

From the highest echelons of government to the individual officers who had carried it out, the police raid completely altered the rural population’s view of authority. An action that had grown out of the long-standing anti-nuclear movement and drawn extensively on activists’ years of experience contesting reactors had taken public outrage to a level far beyond that which had been created by protesters’ sense of insufficient public debate. Though the police action had successfully restored control of the site to the \textit{Badenwerk} and allowed construction to resume, it had drastically weakened local CDU chapters and created widespread outrage amongst rural population. In short, clearing the site was at best a pyrrhic victory for the government. At worst, it was a game changing own-goal.


\textsuperscript{46} “Nir allem sich neige, ’s Eige zeige!” \textit{Badische Zeitung} (paid advertisement), 25 February 1975. HSAS EA 1 / 107 Bü 766.
“A United Fighting Front:” Solidarity from the Freiburg Left

The same rejection of the government that caused some rural CDU chapters to fold and others to hemorrhage members made urban radicals increasingly interested in the protests against the Wyhl reactor. As soon as they heard of the brutal police attack on the Kaiserstuhl, a broad coalition of Freiburg activist groups called for an immediate protest in front of City Hall. The rally’s sponsors included student organizations, a third world solidarity group, members of the squatters’ movement, a Protestant organization, the complete spectrum of local K-groups and even two of the region’s Juso (Jugend Organization der SPD – SPD Youth Organization) chapters.\(^\text{47}\) Though the plight of local farmers and vintners had previously been ignored or downplayed by many in the Freiburg Left, this spectrum of activist groups was electrified by the reports about the showdown between police and protesters. A sudden sense of excitement gripped the city’s activist community.

Handbills advertising the hastily organized City Hall protest were headlined, “The reactor will not be built!” Yet their message revealed the primary reason that Freiburg activists now opposed the reactor project. Rather than focusing on nuclear

\(^{47}\) Aktion Dritte Welt, AK-Frieden, Bewohner der besetzten Häuser Belfortstr. 34 – 36, Evangelische Studentengemeinden, Fachschaftsräte Soziologie-Physik-Jura, Gruppe internationaler Marxisten, Gewaltfreie Aktion, Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland, Kommunistische Hochschulgruppe, Kommunistischer Studentenverband, Arbeitskreis Umweltschutz an der Universität Freiburg, DKP, “Das KKW wird nicht gebaut!” (20 February 1975). ASB “Wyhl—die Anfänge,” 3450. The Jusos published their own flyer, which also focused on police brutality, but without the sensationalism of the other groups’ flyer. The Jusos much wordier document described, among other things, the environmental effects that the reactor would have on the region. Jungsozialisten in der SPD, Kreisverband Freiburg, Kreisverband Emmendingen, “Was geschah heute in Wyhl?” (20 February 1975). ASB “Wyhl—Die Anfänge,” 3591.
energy, the flyers bemoaned the fact that, "Women and children were soaked with water cannons and dragged from the site by their hair." Despite the short notice, the city hall protest was a resounding success. Some 250 Freiburgers took part in the rally, most of which was dedicated to the theme of “police intervention and the resistance.” Afterwards, activists had an opportunity to discuss “how to continue support for the population opposed to the reactor from Freiburg.”

Over the next several days, support poured forth from many Freiburg groups. Solidarity statements began to arrive in the village of Weisweil the day after police cleared protesters from the site. Outrage about the brutal police intervention caused many new groups and individuals to become concerned about the ongoing struggle at Wyhl. Many of these groups were also quick to take a stand in support of the Rhenish population. Freiburg’s Catholic Youth Community, for example, began a letter to Premier Filbinger by criticizing the police action at Wyhl, which “had no relationship to the nonviolent behavior of the occupiers.” The city’s Juso chapter decried the police intervention as “yet another clear sign of the way that the state government and the capitalist groups standing behind it intend to deal with the just interests and legitimate demands of the population.”

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49 Aktion Dritte Welt, et al., “Das KKW wird nicht gebaut!”

50 Numerous solidarity statements can be found in: ABEBI Haag Lore 12HL12.

51 Offener Brief der Katholische Junge Gemeinde to Erzdiözese Freiburg and Ministerpräsident Filbinger, 21 February 1975. ABEBI Haag Lore 12HL12.
The University of Freiburg’s physics students’ association, which had long supported the rural protesters, drafted a statement of support for the occupation even before the police intervention. This group spread the news of the police intervention throughout Freiburg and served as a conduit between the city and the countryside. As the physicists received news from the site, “many [students and other members of the institute] drove out to Wyhl in order to personally support the resistance.” In its solidarity statement, the group pledged to “continue to do everything in our power to convince the members of the institute of the just goals of the struggle and to win them as active supporters.”

The clash between protesters and police also sparked local Communist groups’ surging interest in the anti-reactor project. At the outset of the occupation, Freiburg’s KPD branch created the *Rote Fahne Informationsdienst*, a special newsletter that reported almost daily on the goings-on at Wyhl. In an article written on the morning of 20 February, the newsletter reported that, “the police intervention will achieve the opposite [of its intent]: not fear but a strengthened struggle against the construction of the reactor will be the answer.” It was precisely the thought of such a “strengthened struggle” that set dogmatic Marxists into a revolutionary frenzy. The KPD/ML, for example, celebrated the fact that, “the people, who ‘only’ came to fight against the reactor now see [on account of the police intervention] much more clearly the stakes of this struggle: the capitalist

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system, where there is no democracy for the people, but just for the capitalists.”54

Yet it was the KPD’s vision that had changed. The organization now called for the formation of a “solidary coalition of the millions of oppressed and exploited in our country.” Such a group could carry out “a self-conscious struggle against the capitalists and their state apparatus...against the dictatorship of the capitalist class.” It would be nothing less than, “the unified red fighting front of the laborers and working people in our country!”55

As absurd as it sounded, the KPD was not alone in its fixation on a “unified red fighting front.” Premier Filbinger, too, appeared convinced that national extremist groups were at work in Wyhl. In a 19 February statement, the Premier had announced that the “local citizenry is not behind this action [at Wyhl].” Instead, Filbinger explained, “nationally organized manipulators” were at work. As evidence, he cited the case of a Freiburg lawyer who had reportedly offered to bus demonstrators out to Wyhl at no cost.56 In response to this red-baiting, a group of seventeen local Protestant pastors immediately sent a telegram to Filbinger. Their communication, the pastors explained, was intended to “decisively point out that the


protests against the beginning of construction for the Wyhl reactor are largely being
directed by members of the church congregations on the Kaiserstuhl.”57

In spite of the self-aggrandizement evident in the KPD’s observations and the
stark contrast between the image of the protesters articulated by Premier Filbinger
on the one hand, and the pastors of the Kaiserstuhl on the other, the issue of just
who the protesters were had become quite a contentious matter. While arrests and
police brutality against student protesters during the late 1960s had been
considered justified by many West Germans, the perception that rural people had
been targeted by the police intervention at Wyhl outraged everyone from rural CDU
members to the Freiburg Left. It is clear that leftists took part in protests against the
Wyhl reactor, but it was precisely because the leading role was played by rural
people, including members of Kaiserstuhl church congregations, that these protests
seemed far more legitimate to people across the region. It was for this same reason
that the brutal police response seemed so egregious. Following the police action,
the idea that a “unified fighting front” was forming no longer seemed so far off the
mark. This perceived conflict between citizens and the state made the anti-nuclear
cause relevant in Freiburg’s leftist circles, and added to popular outrage on the
Kaiserstuhl.

From Mystery to Reality: The 23 February Wyhl occupation

Despite rural people’s seething outrage and the mounting revolutionary
fervor in Freiburg, the movement’s radicalization was not immediately evident

57 Die 30 Bürgerinitiativen vom Kaiserstuhl und Umgebung, “Wortlaut des
TELEGRAMMS vom 19.2.75 an den Ministerpräsidenten.” HSAS EA 1 / 107 Bü 766.
outside the region. Wolfgang Sternstein, a Stuttgart-based “action researcher” who was completing a PhD under Theodor Ebert, believed he had “come too late” when he arrived in the Wyhl forest early on Friday 21 February. Rather than protests or an occupation, Sternstein found only construction workers busily rebuilding and reinforcing the perimeter fences. Though Sternstein had been aware that protests were taking place in the Upper Rhine Valley since the outset of the Marckolsheim occupation in September 1974, he had not previously traveled to the region. On this first morning of his visit, the movement remained an enigma to him. In fact, for those unsure where to look, the next several days brought a great deal of uncertainty about the intentions of Rhine Valley anti-nuclear activists and the scope of their movement. In large part, this confusion was due to the grassroots nature of the protests; members of a wide array of groups were involved and no single leader was calling the shots.

Sternstein, it turned out, had come to the right place; he was just a little too early. Not long after his arrival, 6,000 people came together for a mass rally at the so-called “NATO-ramp.”\(^{58}\) Though years of action had proceeded that afternoon’s protest, Hans-Helmuth Wüstenhagen of the BBU declared on the riverbank that, “the fight over the reactor has just begun.”\(^{59}\) Despite these strong words and the impressive size of the 21 February protest, no attempt to re-occupy the site was

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\(^{58}\) The “NATO-ramp” was a clearing on the banks of the Rhine at the foot of a pontoon bridgehead near the reactor construction site’s main entrance. It became a favorite gathering spot for anti-reactor protesters.

made that day. Nor did any centralized authority call for a new occupation. The only semblance of occupation were two small encampments outside the gates of the construction site. One was comprised of young people and the other of members of Weisweil’s SPD Chapter. By Saturday night, a sign that read, “The Local SPD Chapter is keeping the watch on the Rhine,” seemed to be the last reminder of the previous week’s occupation.60 Outwardly, at least, the protests appeared to have hit a dead end.

These two small groups of protesters, however, were not the only people intent on keeping the watch on the Rhine. On Friday evening, Sternstein made his way to the Fischerinsel in Weisweil, where 40 anti-nuclear activists, “men and women, young and old, Badensian and Alsatians” were deeply engaged in a discussion about how to re-occupy the site. By the time Sternstein, as an outsider, was forced to leave the meeting by “spy-phobic” reactor opponents, only a few details of the plan to re-occupy the site had crystalized. In fact, keeping protesters’ intention to re-occupy the site somewhat vague seemed to be the plan’s chief component. Accordingly, it was quickly agreed that Reverend Berger, who was to emcee a mass rally planned to take place at the reactor site the following Sunday, could not know about the plan.61 The protesters determined, therefore, to launch

60 Sternstein, Überall ist Wyhl, 63.

61 In fact, even after some protesters had breached the perimeter fences, Berger called on protesters to stay away from the site’s perimeter. “We have nothing to do with what’s going on at the moment at the fence!” he reportedly yelled out to demonstrators as they took a “stroll around the site.” Wolfgang Kern and Gerd Auer, “Die zweite Besetzung in Wyhl,” in Wyhl (see note 4), 113.
the re-occupation via an “encrypted message” at the conclusion of that demonstration.\textsuperscript{62}

Yet the hushed plans to attempt another site occupation were far from confidential. As Wolfgang Hertle, another non-violent activist and doctoral student of Theodor Ebert reported, he was able to “find out all the key details by asking a few questions at a pub in Weisweil.”\textsuperscript{63} The loosey-goosey nature of the “whisper campaign” that was used to spread information about the plan to trusted activists, and the ambiguity of the plan itself bothered members of the \textit{Gewaltfreie Aktion Freiburg}, with which both Hertle and Sternstein were associated. As Hertle explained, the GAF worried:

that too little had been done to prepare for the action, that it was not fully public, that there were no marshals, and that it was possible that the nonviolent character of the action could be jeopardized in a highly visible situation.\textsuperscript{64}

That the GAF, which was quite familiar with the Marckolsheim occupation and the longer history of anti-nuclear activism in the region, had deep concerns is telling. Nonetheless, widespread readiness to occupy the site, and the deep-seated outrage following the police intervention suggested that it would not be difficult to convince others to participate. Such loose planning, in other words, had been made possible by the long anti-nuclear struggle and the widespread public outrage in the aftermath of the police intervention.

\textsuperscript{62} Sternstein, \textit{Überall ist Wyhl}, 35 – 36.


\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 46.
In contrast to the clandestine planning session at the *Fischerinsel*, however, the public preparations for the Sunday, 23 February 1975 rally seemed more likely to beget a festival than an illegal occupation. On the morning of the rally, “information booths and sausage stands were set up” by the NATO ramp while “posters were hung and loud-speakers installed.”65 Meanwhile, construction crews and the police had erected a three-meter-tall “elephant fence” and used water cannons to soak the ground around the construction site in order to create a veritable moat of mud. What is more, following the 21 February protest – when a crowd of 6,000 protesters had not so much as attempted to occupy the site – the authorities seemed relatively unconcerned that another occupation attempt would take place. Only 250 police officers were assigned to the Wyhl forest that day.66

Nevertheless by 2.00 pm, it was obvious that an absolutely massive gathering was about to take place. The road leading up to Wyhl had been obliterated from view by a sea of people, and “the sides of streets and the paths into the fields were covered by parked cars as far as the eye could see.” In fact, the protest had attracted so many people that “many came too late to the rally because they had to find a parking spot far from the village.”67

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
At 2:30 pm, Reverend Berger took the podium by the NATO ramp and looked out over a crowd of 28,000 reactor opponents.\textsuperscript{68} The gathering was so large that members of Freiburg University’s student government described it as “the largest public demonstration that Baden has experienced since the war.”\textsuperscript{69} Yet the details of the mass rally were largely overlooked in most later reports on the day’s events. At the same time as the crowd assembled by the NATO-Ramp, a group of eighty anti-nuclear protesters approached the construction site from the other side. Carrying wire cutters and a portable sound system, they intended to sneak onto the site and then announce their presence in order to provoke the massive crowd to join them.\textsuperscript{70} Just as this group found its way to the center of the sprawling construction site, Meinrad Schwörer, a reactor opponent from Wyhl who worked at the state conservation authority, concluded the rally at the NATO-ramp by suggesting that the tens of thousands of protesters take a walk along the Wyhl forest nature trail. This, of course, was the cryptic message meant to launch the re-occupation.

As the strolling protesters reached the site and noticed their comrades already ensconced behind the fence, some began pushing and shoving their way towards the perimeter. Others continued walking around the site, simply observing

\textsuperscript{68} Sternstein says this is the number used in police reports; others have estimated fewer demonstrators, which is strange, since demonstrators usually claim that police low-ball the number of participants. Sternstein, \textit{Überall ist Wyhl}, 65.

\textsuperscript{69} The students considered this Baden’s largest protest despite the fact that their estimate of the number of protesters was comparatively low. While other sources stated that as many as 30,000 protesters were presented, the students said there were only 10,000. GEW, SHB, LHV, \textit{die den asta tragenden gruppen informieren über DIE LAGE IN WYHL}. ASB “Wyhl—Die Anfänge,” 3446.

\textsuperscript{70} Hertle, “Törichtes und Menschliches.”
what was going on around them or looking for easier access points.\textsuperscript{71} The Mühlbach, a small tributary of the Rhine that had been intended to serve as part of the construction site’s boundary, seemed to be one such weak link in the fortifications. As protesters attempted to cross the brook on an improvised bridge, however, a group of police officers rushed to repel them. The police beat the protesters with their truncheons and pushed many of them into the icy water below. An older woman began crying as she witnessed “how the police attacked the defenseless people.” Others responded to the brutality with stones rather than tears. The police, meanwhile, continued to push back. Self-appointed marshals from the GAF attempted to quiet the situation. Seizing a police megaphone, Balthasar Ehret of Weisweil finally succeeded in stopping the scuffle. “Do you have no hearts in your bodies?” he screamed, “How can you be so awful? Don’t you have families?” Though Ehret aimed the megaphone back at the police, his words caused people on both sides of the Mühlbach to step back. A police commander, who had just arrived on the scene, ordered his men to retreat.\textsuperscript{72}

After disengaging from the struggle at the Mühlbach, protesters simply began looking for other ways onto the site. Many of them realized that there were not nearly enough police to surround the entire perimeter of the expansive site. There were plenty of other spots along the Mühlbach where nothing more than an unwatched section of fence protected the site. In these places, protesters rolled branches and tree trunks into place and began clambering across the stream.

\textsuperscript{71} Kern and Auer, “Die zweite Besetzung in Wyhl,” 112.

\textsuperscript{72} Sternstein, \textit{Überall ist Wyhl}, 71 – 75.
Elsewhere, protesters managed to knock down tall barbed-wire topped “elephant fences” and force their way directly onto the site. Now 250 police officers were all that prevented these thousands of protesters from gaining complete control of the site. Because no serious occupation attempt was expected, many of these officers had not even been outfitted with helmets.73

Though they were unprepared and vastly outnumbered, the police made one last attempt to stop protesters from approaching the construction equipment, which stood idle at the center of the site. It was not long before “shrieks of joy” were heard throughout the site; the crowd of protesters had completely overwhelmed this last line of police. Soon, a growing group of “cheering demonstrators” had replaced the police cordon and surrounded the construction equipment. In a state of awe, the demonstrators watched the police get into their cruisers and buses, form into an orderly column and slowly evacuate the site. It was not until the water cannon was driven past the crowd that the protesters snapped out of this state of shock and began “pounding their fists on the sides of the tank.” Before any damage was done, however, an Alsatian activist climbed atop this embodiment of police brutality and convinced the protesters to stand back. After that, the police evacuation continued unhindered. As dusk settled on the Rhine Valley, demonstrators were in full control of the site.74


74 Sternstein, Überall ist Wyhl, 76
Figure 9. The first day of the second Wyhl occupation, 23 February 1975. © Leo Horlacher. ASB "Wyhl—Die Anfänge" 17616. Reprinted with permission.

**Vor Ort and the Changing Context(s) of the Wyhl Occupation**

Despite the brutal police intervention of 20 February and the mass rally and re-occupation on 23 February, the struggle at Wyhl remained largely unknown elsewhere in the Federal Republic. For almost a week, a single page-seven article in the *FAZ* remained the only report on the situation at Wyhl in a major West German newspaper.\(^{75}\) Finally, on Tuesday 25 February, the occupation made the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*’s front page, with a report entitled simply, “Uproar in Wyhl.”\(^{76}\) The next day, the *FAZ* ran a second article on Wyhl and *Die Welt* reported on the topic for the first


time. Though the occupation was finally starting to receive limited coverage, it certainly was not a lead topic in the national news.

On the evening of 26 February, however, during the height of primetime at 8.15 pm, West Germany’s television-watching populace received an extended introduction to the anti-nuclear struggle at Wyhl. A forty-five minute film on the ARD, West Germany’s Channel One, entitled “Citizens against the Wyhl reactor,” retraced the local population’s travails from the summer of 1974 until the police intervention on the construction site the previous week. The response to this broadcast was rapid and emotional. From a rural backwater known only for its wines, southern Baden’s Kaiserstuhl came to be perceived as a center of protest. The unexpected primetime broadcast was clearly an important catalyst in this transformation. Even as it introduced the West German populace to Wyhl, the film permanently changed the context of the Wyhl struggle.

“Citizens against the Wyhl Reactor” was an episode of the Vor Ort program, a relatively new series produced by West Deutsche Rundfunk (WDR), the regional broadcaster for the state of North-Rhine Westphalia. Staffed by a young crew, supported by a producer interested in challenging the status-quo, and armed with some of the most technologically advanced camera equipment in West Germany, director Thomas Schmitt’s Vor Ort program was designed to break barriers. Using one of only two portable camera set-ups in the Federal Republic that could tape

extended live segments without a cumbersome broadcast van, the Vor Ort crew went “on location” to film grassroots political engagement throughout the country.

Due in particular to producer Hans-Gerd Wiegand’s interest in nuclear energy, the Vor Ort team had located the anti-nuclear protests in southern Baden long before February 1975. In fact, by the time the occupation began, the team had been visiting the region frequently for several years. During the summer and fall of 1974, Schmitt had already created several Vor Ort episodes on the Wyhl protests. These programs had aired throughout North-Rhine Westphalia on WDR, but they had not been broadcast in Baden-Württemberg, let alone the rest of the Federal Republic. During the winter of 1975 Schmitt and his team had prepared a special, full-length documentary on the Marckolsheim occupation, for which Wiegand and WDR’s television director Werner Höfer had been able to secure a coveted national primetime slot on the ARD, West Germany’s channel one.78

As fate had it, the Marckolsheim film, which was entitled “Demonstration” was set to be broadcast on Wednesday 26 February—just three days after the reoccupation of the reactor construction site in Wyhl.79 Schmitt, who had just spent the week in Wyhl filming the initial occupation as well as the brutal police intervention, had other ideas of what to do with this airtime. With the strong support of Wiegand, Schmitt quickly put together a full-length film on the Wyhl occupation to be broadcast during the slot that had originally been reserved for

78 Thomas Schmitt, interview with the author, via Skype, 14 February 2012.
“Demonstration.” The film was comprised mainly of material from previous *Vor Ort* episodes that had been devoted to Wyhl. Its climax, however, was the heart-wrenching footage that Schmitt’s team had captured during the 20 February police raid.

In an era when such lengthy on-location footage was still a novelty, the *Vor Ort* program was a dramatic introduction to the Wyhl protests. What is more, with only two national channels, such controversial programming was rarely broadcast across the country. In fact, as soon as the director of the *Südwest Rundfunk* (SWR), CDU-member Helmut Hammerschmidt, caught wind of the possibility that a film on Wyhl might be aired on national television, he telephoned the WDR’s programming director, Dieter Stolte, who was known to be supportive of the CDU.

Hammerschmidt’s questions about the proposed film were eventually fielded by Werner Höfer, the WDR’s television director. He personally assured Hammerschmidt that “Citizens against the Wyhl reactor” was safe for the airwaves. With the SWR’s potential objection resolved, the film was broadcast as planned on the ARD. Its only national competition was an hour-long interview on financial matters with Bruno Kreisky, the Chancellor of Austria. In this evening time slot when many West Germans were in their living rooms watching television,

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80 Schmitt, interview.


the comparatively gripping depiction of the struggle at Wyhl attracted viewers from throughout the Federal Republic. Though the police intervention comprised only a relatively brief scene near the end of the documentary, it was this short segment that had by far the greatest impact on the West German populace. Viewers looked on in horror as the rural population of the Kaiserstuhl was battered with water cannons and threatened by vicious police dogs.

Just as the news of the police intervention had quickly stirred up outrage in Freiburg and throughout southern Baden, the national broadcast of Vor Ort “created widespread sympathy from Constance to Kiel.” The mother of an anti-nuclear activist featured in the film joyfully reported that, “callers are congratulating us on our struggle and pushing us to keep up the fight!” Indeed, a steady stream of solidarity statements, letters of support, and donations from across the Federal Republic was pouring into the mailboxes of members of the Badensian and Alsatian Citizens’ Initiatives.

A letter written by a group of scientists at a Heidelberg research institute was typical of this correspondence. These researchers began their letter to Jürgen Nößler of the Citizens’ Initiative Wyhl, who had been featured in the film, by mentioning their scientific concerns about the threat posed by nuclear energy. Yet it was on account of Vor Ort in particular that the group was taking the opportunity to declare its solidarity with the citizens’ initiatives in their “struggle against the Wyhl reactor.” The Vor Ort broadcast, the Heidelberg scientists explained, had been

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“particularly upsetting” because it made clear “that such projects are to be forced on you despite all of your protests and all the objections from across your Lebensraum.” Even for these scientists, in other words, it was not primarily scientific concerns that motivated their solidarity with the opponents of the Wyhl reactor, but rather the government’s clear failure to hear out these protesters.

A statement sent by Ralf Egel of the Hamburg Chapter of Friends of the Earth echoed the words of the Heidelberg scientists. Members of this environmental organization explained that, “in terms of the issue at hand” they could “only fully and completely support radical opposition to reactors and the further destruction of the environment.” Yet even more upsetting than this potential environmental destruction were the “reactions of the political parties and the police against the clear declaration of opinion by the overwhelming majority of the population.” These officials’ responses, the Hamburger explained, “make quite clear how little the interests of the population are taken into account in the parliaments and what strong political changes are still necessary.” The people of southern Baden, the letter concluded, were to be praised for their “radical action against the plans of the cooperating forces of state and industry,” which had “set a clear sign that is being hailed by thousands of informed citizens throughout the country and beyond.”

In addition to the numerous scientists, environmentalists, and citizens’ initiatives who stated their solidarity with the protests of the Rhine Valley, radical

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84 Peter Trietech et al to Jürgen Nößler, 27 February 1975. ABEBI Haag Lore, 12HL12.

85 Ralf Egel (Freunde der Erde Hamburg) to Heinz Siefritz, 5 March 1975. ABEBI Haag Lore 12HL12.
left-wing groups positively gushed with praise for the fantastic struggle between protesters and police. In a statement from prison regarding the June 2nd Movement’s kidnapping of CDU politician Peter Lorenz, Horst Mahler of the Rote Armee Faktion (Red Army Faction – RAF) declared his solidarity with the Wyhl protesters. He went so far as to describe the Wyhl occupation as a “revolutionary mobilization of the workers.” One month later, in a statement explaining why they had kidnapped Lorenz, the June 2nd Movement also specifically mentioned “the struggle against the Wyhl reactor” as an example of the “people’s struggle for their rights” of which, they claimed, the Lorenz kidnapping was also part.

News of the ongoing struggle at Wyhl had a powerful effect in France, as well. The Stuttgarter Nachrichten reported that the Wyhl protests were being “reported on in the French press with palpable sympathy.” On the left bank of the Rhine, it appeared, the protests at Wyhl “had a similar resonance” to earlier protests against the Marckolsheim lead plant. In part, this resonance came from the scientific community. Four-hundred scientists from Paris and another three-hundred from the Alsace had signed appeals urging local governments not to accept nuclear reactor projects until more research was done on their potential to threaten the environment and public health. The information currently provided by the


government, these scientists explained, was "inconsistent, incomplete, and misleading." 89

Pierre Pflimlin, a former Prime Minister of France now serving as mayor of Strasbourg, stated the potential effects of this new wave of protest quite bluntly. “If the nuclear plant at Wyhl is stopped,” Pflimlin declared, “it would be extremely difficult to put one in the Alsace. If you can’t do it here, where can you do it in France? I believe the entire French nuclear program rides with Wyhl.” 90 Pflimlin, of course, neglected to mention the Fessenheim reactor, which was nearly ready to go critical and which had received relatively little scrutiny from the Alsatian population. Nevertheless, his alarm about the potential effects of Wyhl appeared genuine.

Links to the struggle over the Marckolsheim lead plant likely played a part in the inflation of Pflimlin’s concern about the future of the French nuclear program. On the same late February day that the Vor Ort episode was broadcast, France’s Minister of Public Works, Robert Galley, refused to sign the final license for the Marckolsheim lead-processing plant. 91 As a result, the plant could not be built. The six-month occupation ended in success. According to Solange Fernex, the plant’s

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opponents celebrated their victory by “sowing four hectares of spring wheat on the site.”

The anemic coverage within Germany of the under-stated Marckolsheim victory reflected on the way that Wyhl’s anchoring in the imagined “Alemannic Community” was unimportant for West German citizens. In France, Marckolsheim had become “at least within the ecological movement...a point of reference,” and variety of prominent dissidents had visited the site during the months of occupation. Yet in the Federal Republic, Marckolsheim never achieved anything close to the immediate prominence garnered by the Wyhl occupation. In stark contrast to the vibrant trans-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine Valley, the border continued to bound the interests of West Germans elsewhere. Even the Informationsdienst zur Verbreitung unterbliebener Nachrichten (Information Service for Unreported News – ID), a weekly publication explicitly dedicated to spreading news ignored by the mainstream media, provided only spotty coverage of the protests at Marckolsheim. Although ID had noted the protests of the Badensian and Alsatian citizens initiatives during the summer of 1974, the publication failed to report on the Marckolsheim occupation for more than two weeks after it began.

The mainstream media coverage and widespread public outrage that followed the start of the Wyhl occupation downplayed the importance of the

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93 Jean de Barry, interview with the author, Strasbourg, 3 March 2010.

Alemannic cooperation in the anti-nuclear project even as the occupation’s
significance within German politics skyrocketed. The better the occupation became
known within West Germany, in other words, the more the trans-national context of
the Wyhl struggle was considered irrelevant. Though cooperation between
Badensians and Alsatians remained as important as ever for the continuation of the
occupation in the Wyhl forest, this cooperation was not perceived as essential to the
struggle for outside observers. If anything, the heightened public concern about
Wyhl within West Germany allowed for Marckolsheim and the Alemannic
connection to be overlooked so that a symbol of West German protest could be
created.

Conclusion

The exciting events of February 1975 and the fortuitous Vor Ort broadcast
had drawn the attention of West Germans throughout the country to the secluded
Wyhl forest. Police brutality in particular had made Rhenish anti-nuclear activism
had fostered solidarity “from Constance to Kiel.” Locally, the 20 February police
raid had done even more than that. From “Freiburg to Strasbourg,” an even broader
cross-section of the population had replaced the initial coalition of rural vintners,
scientists, and members of the educated urban middle class that had come together
to oppose the reactor project during the early 1970s. Both the Freiburg Left and
rural CDU members had become deeply involved in the struggle on account of police
repression.

That the same event so deeply affected both Left and Right, in Freiburg and
the countryside, evinced its significance. Freiburg leftists, who had done their best
to belittle rural anti-nuclear protests suddenly saw a popular movement of citizens
oppressed by the state. Rural CDU-members, who had done their best to downplay
or even to ignore the growing rift between state government and local interests,
could no longer look the other way. It was not only erstwhile observers who were
changed by this spectacle, however. Its protagonists, too, were changed by their
bitter battle with police. Never had the state’s disregard for not only their interests,
but also their life and limb been more readily apparent. Suddenly respectable rural
people had an important experience in common with the protagonists of the student
movement.

Police brutality framed the national discussion of Rhenish anti-nuclear
activism, too. Given the dearth of previous media coverage, Vor Ort had introduced
this struggle to West German as a showdown between passionate rural people and
callous police. As such, the national discussion effectively legitimized these citizens’
protests, despite their indisputable illegality. In an effort to stop this wave of
sympathy for anti-nuclear activists, the government of Baden-Württemberg
attacked the integrity of the Vor Ort team. While Premier Filbinger attacked the film
for “doing nothing more than stirring up emotions and moods,” Minister Eberle
claimed to have “seldom experienced the rules of the game for journalistic
objectivity and fairness being so trampled on as they were here.”95 Regardless of
the concerns raised by Filbinger and Eberle, the shocking, unexpected Vor Ort
broadcast profoundly affected the German populace. The brutal police attack on

95 “Fehl am Platze,” Der Spiegel.
ordinary citizens, in particular, unleashed just the sort of emotional reactions denounced by Eberle.

At the same time as Vor Ort made nuclear energy into a national issue on account of the brutal police intervention, the film also detached the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement from its deep local roots. Feeding these roots was the matter of nuclear energy itself. As we have seen, people in southern Baden first became deeply concerned about nuclear energy because of the threat that reactors would pose for their crops. Careful research into the effects that reactors might have on the local climate all but fell by the wayside as West Germans’ attention turned to nationally televised police brutality. The very process that pushed the struggle against the Wyhl reactor onto the national stage, therefore, also legitimized the latest, most radical protests in Wyhl, and significantly altered the character of the struggle.

In contrast to the lasting changes that the protests of February 1975 wrought on the local level, the Vor Ort broadcast and the few reports about Wyhl that found their way into the national news media afterwards were not enough to permanently interest most West Germans in the Rhenish anti-nuclear struggle. It would take a concerted effort on the part of activists in the Upper Rhine Valley and interested individuals throughout the Federal Republic to deepen West Germans’ interest in the Wyhl struggle. As we will see in the next chapter, therefore, the Wyhl protests and anti-nuclear activism more generally still had not established themselves in the mainstream press after February 1975. It was the months’ long occupation that served to re-focus various alternative press networks onto the Upper Rhine Valley,
and thus made this isolated and unexpected protest—which might otherwise have quickly been forgotten—into a defining feature of the Federal Republic's political landscape.
Chapter Six

Bringing West Germany to Wyhl, Taking Wyhl to the World:
Interactions on and off the occupied site
and the spread of anti-nuclear activism

On 23 February 1975, the University of Freiburg student Roland Burkhart
traveled home to the village of Jechtingen to celebrate his father’s birthday. After
coffee and cake, the Burkhart family embarked on a Sunday outing—to the Wyhl
forest. The destination was an easy choice. “Let’s go out to Wyhl,” one family
member suggested, “there’s something going on there.” After arriving in the early
afternoon, the Burkharts witnessed much of the mass demonstration taking place on
the site that day. They returned home to Jechtingen just before it ended. Having
seen firsthand the barbed wire “elephant fences” stopping protesters from
venturing onto the site, Roland Burkhart was convinced that the movement was up
against a metaphorical wall, too. He presumed that there was nothing left to do but
watch the plant get built from outside the tall fence. The trip to Wyhl, at least, had
been an entertaining Sunday outing.¹

When he returned to his Freiburg apartment that evening, however,
Burkhart learned that protesters had toppled the fence and re-occupied the site.
Thrilled by the news, Burkhart jumped into his car and drove back to Wyhl. That
night, he celebrated the re-occupation with people from throughout the region.

¹ Roland Burkhart, interview with the author, Freiburg, 24 February 2010.
Clearly, the forest’s appeal as a weekend destination was not limited to the Burkhart family. As the occupation continued, the site became something of an outdoor community center for the people of the Upper Rhine Valley. Sundays, one occupier explained, were a particularly special day. Week after week, “the people of the Kaiserstuhl made the occupation their Sunday outing. They set-up coffee and cake stands and sold sausages and wine.” The occupiers even built a playground out of old tires and tree trunks so that children could join in on the fun.\(^2\) As local people spent more and more time in the woods, protest became part of their daily lives. The political was becoming ever more personal.

The comfortable open spaces that protesters created on the occupied site made their encampment a new focal point in the region’s community life. It was a place where people who typically had few interactions with one another came together. Under normal circumstances, hard-working vintners and young unemployed Freiburgers were hard pressed to speak with one another, let alone to collaborate on a political project. In the Wyhl forest, however, they were forced to work together just to keep the occupation alive. In fact, such unlikely alliances soon defined the occupation. Observers came to see the remote Wyhl forest as a meeting place for everyone from farmers to physicists and from radical leftists to convinced conservatives.

It was not just the diverse local population that was coming together in the woods outside of Wyhl. The occupation also attracted visitors from far beyond the

Upper Rhine Valley. Through their visits, these travelers incorporated the site itself and the region’s “affected population” into a larger, trans-national network of protest. Lectures at the newly established Wyhl Forest Community College,\(^3\) rallies, conferences, and training sessions attracted social activists from all across the Federal Republic. Others made their way to the site on their own in order to learn about the anti-nuclear struggle or to seek advice on how to build an occupation elsewhere. Even tourists stopped off in Wyhl en route to their vacations in Southern Europe or the Swiss Alps. Many who could not personally visit Wyhl experienced the site vicariously through stories brought home by these “multipliers” or relayed by traveling anti-nuclear activists.

Though the occupation was ostensibly concerned only with the fate of a single reactor project, it was in the Wyhl forest that the regional movement against nuclear reactors was imagined into a national and even a global project. In large part, the occupied site’s central role in the creation of this larger anti-nuclear project was due to the way that outsiders came to perceive the Wyhl occupation. A writer for the *Kommunistische Volkszeitung (KVZ)*, the official publication of the KBW, described the role that members of his organization attributed to Wyhl. “This movement has by no means a solely regional meaning,” the article proclaimed, “It has inspired the masses throughout the country to take part in the struggle against

\(^3\) As will be described in detail later in this chapter, the *Volkshochschule Wyhler Wald* was no typical “community college.” Instead, it was part institution of continuing education and part community center. Nevertheless, I have chosen to use the name “Wyhl Forest Community College” in the English translation, because I think it best characterizes both this combination of functions and also the sense of propriety that the institution’s founders believed it would lend to the occupation.
the decisions of the state bureaucracy, which are directed against the people’s will.”

As this soaring prose indicated, the KBW had come to conceive of this single small clearing in the Wyhl forest as a key site in the world proletarian struggle. The group was far from alone in attributing some sort of seminal importance to the Wyhl occupation.

The stabilization of the occupation, outsiders’ numerous visits to the site and their growing familiarity with Wyhl all contributed to what some outsiders described as the “de-provincialization” of the rural anti-reactor campaign. “De-provincialization” was, of course, an interesting characterization of an activist project that, though locally focused, had long relied on trans-national cooperation. What is more, as I will show in this chapter, the very rootedness of the occupation and its seamless incorporation into public life within the Upper Rhine Valley connected the struggle against the Wyhl reactor to global concerns.

So long as the occupation endured, the site itself became an essential node in the expansive network that linked opponents of the Wyhl reactor with a remarkable range of concerned citizens across the Federal Republic and beyond. The site was more than just a piece of infrastructure in this trans-national network, however. By experiencing the occupation, whether by visiting Wyhl or by hearing about it from the action’s many “multipliers,” outsiders grasped the physical dimensions of Rhenish protest and expanded their own sense of the possible. The spread of anti-

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4 “Die Kämpfe in Wyhl haben die Volksmasse im ganzen Land ermutigt,” *Kommunistische Volkszeitung* (No. 15 / 16), April 1975.
nuclear activism across the Federal Republic, therefore, was based on outsiders’ will to build on Rhine Valley protesters’ local challenge to government officials.

**Stabilization as Radicalization: The occupation and the political as personal**

Roland Burkhart was in good company that first night on the occupied site. In fact, a large celebration took place in the Wyhl forest after the police left the site on 23 February 1975. Villagers carried copious amounts of “wine and beer, sausage, cheese, and bread” to the woods. Men and women from Baden and the Alsace congregated around campfires, ate together, recounted the day’s events, and even told stories of their experiences during the Second World War.\(^5\) These mundane actions strengthened the recently reconstructed bonds between neighbors who had been divided by the *Westwall* and the Maginot Line. At the same time, Freiburg radicals were getting to know Kaiserstuhl vintners. The excitement and the vibrant feeling of community did not end the next morning. For days, “a whole lot of people” could be found on the occupied site around the clock. To pass the time, the occupiers drank beer, played cards, and talked.\(^6\) On a secluded site in the Wyhl forest, local people were turning their personal lives into a political project. Simply spending time on the site was politically important, illegal, and a whole lot of fun.


The celebratory atmosphere of those early days, one activist recalled, “[was] all meaningful enough, but at some point it had to come to an end.” Finding ways to keep protesters entertained on the site became a key concern of anyone interested in keeping the occupation going. After all, the broad cross-section of the population that was engaged in the occupation had little in common apart from their opposition to the Wyhl reactor. As the initial euphoria subsided, tensions between urban and rural people and between hard-working farmers and unemployed youth increased. Sleeping outside in the late winter cold also lost its appeal quickly. Organizers posted signs advising protesters to “Learn from the mistakes, stay the whole night on the construction site!” Still, Frank Baum recalled thinking that just “one night with only ten people” might have been enough to end the occupation. After all, the police “had their spies.”

Drawing on hard won experiences from the Marckolsheim occupation, protesters worked to make life on the Wyhl site easier and more welcoming for occupiers. In short order, they re-created institutions and practices that had developed haltingly and organically across the Rhine. The yurt that protesters had built in Marckolsheim, for example, had evolved over time in response to the wind, the rain, and eventually the cold of winter. Almost as soon as the occupation

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7 Ibid.


9 Frank Baum, interview with the author, Stauffen, 19 February 2010.

10 See Chapter Four for more on the Marckolsheim yurt.
began at Wyhl, Balthasar Ehret led a team of volunteers who built an even larger protective structure. This “Friendship House” was a “large round construction, with space for several hundred people.” Though it was well built and made completely of wood, the yurt was assembled at a rapid pace.\textsuperscript{11} By 9 March—barely two weeks after the occupation began—it was complete.\textsuperscript{12}

The quickly constructed Friendship House did more than just help protesters overcome the cold and rainy weather of late winter and early spring. The sturdy structure was a powerful, permanent symbol of reactor opponents’ determination to remain in the Wyhl forest. It also became the anchor of the well-ordered effort to maintain the occupation. The stalwart supporters of this project were young or unemployed people, who were able to stay on the site for extended periods. These “permanent occupiers” pitched their tents all around the yurt. Yet local farmers and vintners also maintained a key role in the occupation. Representatives of the Alsatian and Badensian Association of Citizens’ Initiatives, which had swelled from twenty-one to thirty groups, worked together to devise a rotating schedule that organized the participation of rural citizens’ initiatives and Freiburg anti-nuclear organizations.\textsuperscript{13} According to the schedule, members of these groups were to “appear regularly and in great numbers” on the site each day and remain there for

\textsuperscript{11} Baum, interview.

\textsuperscript{12} Beer, \textit{Lernen im Widerstand}, 76.

\textsuperscript{13} Die Bürgerinitiativen, “KKW Wyhl” (12 May 1975). AEBEI 2HL2.
the next twenty-four hours. Only through “orderliness and good planning,” this document explained, could the occupation be successful.14

Maintaining order on the site and ensuring good planning meant more than simply mandating who was to be present in the Wyhl forest at what time. A wide variety of tasks were managed through a clear division of labor. Even on the site, after all, “the coffee [had] to be made, the sandwiches prepared, and the kitchen cleaned.” In the Wyhl forest, these duties were carried out by women from the rural citizens’ initiatives, who arrived at 6am each morning to staff the field kitchen. “The food is always good, and we occupiers have always been satisfied,” one young permanent occupier noted. In fact, he concluded, “the women always make everything nice and clean and it looks very orderly.”15 Barely hidden behind these backhanded compliments of the women’s work, were the social tensions that lay just beneath the surface of the cooperation mandated by the protesters’ common will to remain on the site and prescribed by the occupation plan.

Roland Burkhart, the Jechtingen native studying at the University of Freiburg, personally embodied these tensions. Having left the Kaiserstuhl to study in Freiburg, Burkhart explained, he had “neither become a pure, intellectual Freiburg student nor remained a true Kaiserstuhler.”16 As such, Burkhart, or “Buki” as he was to be known on the site, was well aware of villagers’ distrust of long-haired young people. Freiburg youth were sometimes even suspected of belonging to the group of


15 “Geschichten aus dem Wyhl Wald,” Was Wir Wollen (No. 5), Undated [May 1975].

16 Roland Burkhart, “‘G’hert dä aü zu däne do?,”” in Wyhl (see note 2), 262.
“radical students and manipulators” alleged by Premier Filbinger to be secretly running the occupation. Buki was also aware of the demeaning way that students interacted with rural people. In fact, the Kaisersstühlers had long been mocked in Freiburg on account of their dialect and their reddened faces, which were said to evince their chronic alcoholism. Even for Buki, who had a foot in both worlds, it was initially difficult to overcome this divide. At first, he reported, he actively avoided acquaintances from the village because he “simply did not know what to talk about with them.” The feeling seemed to be mutual.17

Yet there was clearly a need to overcome such misgivings on the site, “where every single affected person counted.”18 By and large, these tensions were managed on a piecemeal basis. After a Berlin student called a site-wide meeting to order one morning and began to organize the occupiers to perform the day’s duties “in typical university-jargon, as if this was an assembly of student radicals,” a local vintner interrupted the speaker. In thick dialect, the vintner shouted out that he simply could not understand what was going on. Buki was called upon to resolve this problem by taking the megaphone and serving as “translator.”19 Recognizing such essential disconnects was the first key to making the site into a place where the alliance of necessity between “young long-haired protesters, who were typically

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 261.
19 Ibid., 260.
unemployed” and rural farm families could develop into a more meaningful relationship.20

Over time, these disparate groups found ways to not only to tolerate one another on the occupied site, but also to understand each other. The occupiers’ newspaper, Was Wir Wollen (WWW), which had first been published during the Marckolsheim occupation, came to serve as a forum for this purpose. In an article entitled “We, the permanent occupiers,” several young activists, who were living full-time on the site, described their situation and what they had learned on account of it. One occupier, who identified herself as ‘Carla,’ stressed the importance of the community that was developing in the Wyhl forest. With the same breath, however, she noted the tensions that underlay it:

Because I’ve participated in every action since the first day in Marckolsheim, at least as often as was possible for me, I’ve met many people who share my goals. These relationships were strengthened through the police intervention and then the re-occupation at Wyhl. In particular, between the old and young people, who wouldn’t otherwise have much contact with one another. In this way, one learns about the problems of the farmers or the women much better and vice versa.21

As Carla’s report reveals, learning and community-building were byproducts of the tensions and misunderstandings that frequently occurred on the site. Though the simple fact that protesters had come to understand one another did not necessarily extinguish the tensions on the site, this process did strengthen the occupation.22

20 Baum, interview.


22 For more on cooperation on the site and the role of Was Wir Wollen in this collaboration, see also: Eine Platzbesetzerin, “Das Leben auf dem Platz.”
One project that was clearly shaped by protesters’ will to foster community and understanding on the site—and that became one of the occupation’s most enduring achievements—was the Wyhl Forest Community College. Helgo Bran, a biologist and member of the Aktion Umweltschutz in Freiburg suggested the creation of this institution, which he envisioned as both a center for learning and a means of keeping people on the occupied site. Despite its distinctly alternative location and its goal of furthering the illegal occupation, however, Bran proposed a pedestrian program for the new Community College.23 As he envisioned it, courses were to include “French for Germans” and “Plants of the Rhine forest.”24 Yet the proposed program raised concerns. As another Aktion Umweltschutz member recalled, Bran’s original program was like a “miniature version of a major university’s course catalog.”25

In order to engage as many different groups and individuals as possible, and to “represent the breadth of the movement,” Frank Baum revised Bran’s initial plans for the Community College. Rather than focusing only on foreign language training and botany, Baum proposed a diverse program of evening lectures, discussions, and even travel reports, concerts and sing-alongs.26 Recurring lecture series were devoted to such themes as “History and culture of the Upper Rhine,” and “The

23 Baum, interview.

24 Beer, Lernen im Widerstand, 95.

25 Baum, interview.

26 Ibid.
Alemannic people: over here and over there.”\textsuperscript{27} These opportunities to discuss the region’s rich history and sing folk songs did not just “add fresh vegetables to the reactor stew,” one observer explained. They went “above and beyond” this function “in that they allowed for relaxation, entertainment, and even contributed to solidarity.”\textsuperscript{28}

![Figure 10. Walter Mossmann performs inside the "Friendship House." ABEBI. Reprinted with permission.](image)

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Wyhl Forest Community College as re-envisioned by Baum was that it allowed for even technical topics to be discussed in a way that was inclusive and furthered community on the site. In fact, the very


\textsuperscript{28} Wolfgang Beer, “Volkshochschule Wyhler Wald,” in \textit{Wyhl} (see note 2), 266.
first lecture held at the Community College, “How does a nuclear reactor function?” was devoted to an obviously relevant, if extremely technical topic. Protesters’ will to learn about nuclear matters was evident in the pride of place that such technical topics retained in the Community College Program. Each Tuesday night, critical scientists like the meteorologist Hans von Rudloff and the physicist Hans Klumb spoke in the Friendship House. Even reactor supporters like Hans Grupe, the director of the Karlsruhe Nuclear Research Center, were given the opportunity to speak on the occupied site.

One visitor to the site noted the extent to which local people got involved in these lectures and learned from them. On account of the Community College, he observed, “everyone that you meet on the site, whether a permanent occupier or a visitor from the region, was well informed and remarkably well prepared to speak about all topics related to nuclear energy, from the workings of reactors, to the dangers, and even the economic and political components.” Hans Schött, Endingen’s village pharmacist and a leader in the local citizens’ initiative, reported with perhaps a touch of hyperbole that after eight weeks of coursework at the VHS Wyhl, the people of the Kaiserstuhl knew more about nuclear energy production than their representatives in Stuttgart.

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29 Beer, Lernen im Widerstand, 98.

30 “Grupe war da,” Was Wir Wollen (No. 8), 8 July 1975.

31 Beer, Lernen im Widerstand, 99.

In addition to learning about reactors, the seminars were also an opportunity for the occupiers to get to know one another better. Evenings devoted to technical programs were so effective because they featured an atmosphere that was quite different from the typical scientific lecture. Addressing farmers and vintners inside the “Friendship House” was a big change for scientists, who were used to speaking to fellow academics at universities and research centers. Local people, on the other hand, were right at home on the occupied site. The familiar faces and relaxed atmosphere put them at ease and fostered the impressive level of audience participation that came to characterize Wyhl Forest Community College events.33

By moving away from a more traditional approach to continuing education, therefore, the Wyhl Forest Community College became a bulwark of the community-building process on the occupied site. Its ability to attract reputed academics also stood in poignant contrast to the rough and tumble image of the occupation itself, thus adding an air of respectability to the movement. By hosting talks featuring prominent nuclear scientists, but also programs like “Humor and contemplation in Alemannic dialect,”34 by inviting audience participation, and even asking local people to make presentations, the Community College made the most of contradictions that characterized the occupation. In so doing, it attracted many people “who otherwise would not to have come [to the site].”35 Soon, Community

33 Beer, Lernen im Widerstand, 115.


35 Baum, interview.
College events were drawing more people than the site-wide plenary meetings, despite the fact that these lectures were held three or four nights each week.\textsuperscript{36} Typical attendance at Community College events, one participant noted, was between 30 and 400.\textsuperscript{37}

By setting up infrastructure on the site, from basics like a field kitchen and the friendship house, to organs of communication and learning like WWW and the Wyhl Forest Community College, the occupiers made the Wyhl Forest into a center of the local community. All of these institutions were designed to help the occupation outlast its first celebratory days by attracting local people to the site. As a result, this infrastructure personalized the political for local people. Spending time with friends on the site, cooking food in the field kitchen, and attending lectures at the Wyhl Forest Community College were all illegal activities. These mundane actions, therefore, became powerful and daring contributions to the occupation. By making everyday activities the core of their movement, reactor opponents fashioned the occupation into a sustainable part of life in the Upper Rhine Valley.

Though they provided common ground and helped to stabilize the occupation, however, these institutions could not overcome the tensions between the many different groups and individuals participating in the anti-reactor struggle. Interpreting the Wyhl occupation as an ongoing party where everyone got along famously would be a serious mistake. Yet, the very fact that the institutions

\textsuperscript{36} Beer, \textit{Lernen im Widerstand}, 129.

\textsuperscript{37} Beer, “Volkshochschule Wyhler Wald,” 269.
developed by protesters in order to maintain their presence on the site forced participants to work together and caused them learn from one another in the process explains a big part of the occupation’s success. Even if life on the site was not always so easy, protesters created a new model for protest by establishing a positive and cooperative atmosphere in Wyhl. What is more, the less outsiders knew of the tensions at Wyhl, the more they romanticized the occupation, and the more impressive it seemed. Thus, beyond its local effects, the stabilization attracted outsiders to Wyhl and caused the occupation to take on an important role at the center of an expanding network of anti-nuclear activists and actions.

“Everywhere that a Nuclear Reactor is Being Built against the Will of the Local Population is Wyhl:” The Easter Monday rally

Outsiders began to draw connections between their own work and the occupation almost as soon as it became known throughout the Federal Republic. On 9 March 1975, just days after the broadcast of Vor Ort and barely two weeks into the occupation, Roland Vogt, one of Professor Theodor Ebert’s colleagues at the Otto Suhr Institute, wrote to Reverend Richter in Weisweil. In his letter, Vogt explained that he and Ebert were trying to determine how they, “as outsiders, could make themselves useful in the Kaiserstühlers’ cause.” “As you well know,” Vogt explained to the Pastor, “this is not always easy.” After all, Vogt continued, he himself had been kicked out of a local citizens’ initiative meeting after being deemed “not local enough.” In challenging the organizers of the anti-reactor campaign in Wyhl to
incorporate outsiders into their protests, Vogt was knowingly pushing the trans-local dimensions of this grassroots anti-nuclear movement.\footnote{Roland Vogt to Günter Richter, 9 March 1975. ABEBI Haag Lore 12HL12.}

By connecting his own interests to Wyhl, Vogt was not simply pushing the geographic boundaries of this local action. His efforts, and those of many other “outsiders,” re-framed the Wyhl struggle and effectively harnessed it to a wide variety of ends. Vogt’s early March letter to Richter proposed Easter weekend, when West Germans would have four days off from work and school, as an opportune moment for the geographic expansion of the local protests at Wyhl. In another communication, Ebert explained that he and Vogt had been inspired, “as old Easter Marchers,” to seize an opportunity to link the Wyhl struggle with an important West German activist tradition.\footnote{Theodor Ebert, “Als Berliner in Wyhl: Friedensforschung und Konfliktberatung vor Ort,” Gewaltfreie Aktion, 24 / 25 (1975), 37}

The discrepancy between the potential of the Wyhl movement as imagined by outsiders and the movement’s distinctly local history was clear in the way that Vogt and Ebert framed their “Easter March” proposal. The original Easter Marches, which had taken place throughout the 1960s, had been directed against nuclear arms proliferation. The long Easter weekend had been used as an opportunity to organize these treks across West Germany and thus to bring awareness of the nuclear threat to people throughout the Federal Republic. Accordingly, Vogt suggested, “the idea of an Easter March could easily be associated with the topic of a nuclear reactor.” Yet, as Vogt himself readily admitted, the Easter Marches had been
dismissed by the political mainstream during the 1960s because they were allegedly “infiltrated by Communists.” Vogt maintained that there was little substance to this allegation, but the Berlin academic’s plan to bring outsiders to Wyhl and to “de-provincialize” the struggle still clearly relied on ideas hatched in West Berlin and traditions of protest that had little resonance in the rural Upper Rhine Valley. Nevertheless, Vogt was convinced that in order for his proposal to be successful, “the citizens’ initiatives [would have to be the ones to] call for an Easter March.” For Vogt, then, imagining the Wyhl struggle into the Easter March tradition would require both the consent—and more importantly the cachet—of the Rhenish activists themselves.

As outsiders worked to expand the struggle at Wyhl, the nature of the relationship between big ideas that transcended the Upper Rhine Valley and localized activism became increasingly significant. While the line between co-option and collaboration was blurry, it was clearly frequently crossed. It was also clear if not somewhat paradoxical, however, that such interaction relied on the magnetism of local protests. Drawing outsiders onto the site was the key to spreading anti-nuclear activism throughout West Germany and beyond. On the basis of this “de-provincialization” of the Wyhl protests, locals retained much of their control over the struggle at Wyhl itself, while outsiders came increasingly to


41 Ebert described the “de-provincialization” of the struggle as the chief point for the further development of the citizens’ initiatives when he came to “advise” them in March 1975. See: Rainer Stephan, “Wyhl zeigt ein neues Verständnis von Demokratie,” Badische Zeitung, 25 March 1975. HSAS EA 1 / 107 Bü 767.
project their own ideas onto the struggle and to re-cast it as the core of a global movement that was closely aligned with their own interests.

The events of Easter 1975, which had significant, yet different meanings locally and outside of the Upper Rhine Valley, illustrate this complicated and sometimes problematic de-provincialization. On Easter Monday, which fell on 31 March 1975, reactor opponents organized an “International Easter Gathering of Anti-Nuclear Activists at Wyhl.” An article in the Dernièrres nouvelles d’Alsace described this unique event as an “anti-nuclear rally, mini-Woodstock, family outing, and Volksfest” all rolled into one. Like the “International Association of Badensian and Alsatian Citizens’ Initiatives,” Rhenish activists could easily have dubbed this event “international” simply on the basis of the participation of people from the Alsace, Southern Baden, and Northwest Switzerland. The gathering, however, drew interested people from across western Europe to the rural Upper Rhine Valley. If reports of police brutality on 20 February had brought Wyhl into West Germans’ living rooms, the Easter Rally brought outsiders to Wyhl. It was on the basis of such firsthand experience that sustained interest in this localized anti-reactor protest developed all over Europe.

42 “Kundgebung und Volksfest: Die neue Wacht am Rhein,” Dernièrres nouvelles d’Alsace, 1 April 1975. HSAS EA 1 / 107 Bü 768.
The Federal Association of Citizens’ Initiatives for Environmental Protection spearheaded the effort to bring West Germans to Wyhl by calling on activists from across the country to spend Easter in the Upper Rhine Valley. “Wherever you live,” a BBU flyer explained, “whatever particular problems concern you, come to Wyhl this Easter.” The BBU supported this plea for participation with its own analysis of the geographically broad effects of the grassroots site occupation currently taking place in the Wyhl forest. “Whatever happens in Wyhl will affect all future developments,” the advertisement explained, “Our struggle is your struggle. ‘Wyhl’ is all of our cause!”

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Anti-nuclear activists from across the Federal Republic responded to this announcement by descending on Wyhl en masse. Many of them were making their first visit to the Upper Rhine Valley. A report in the *KVZ* noted that delegations came from other sites where reactors were proposed or under construction, including Mannheim, Schwörstadt, Schweinfurt, and Kaiseraugst. Accordingly, the article explained, “with the Easter gathering, the struggle against the lead factory [sic!] in Wyhl has achieved widespread support beyond the Kaiserstuhl region.”

The Easter Gathering did not just expand the reach of the Wyhl protests within the Federal Republic, however. Other groups from across Western Europe also attended this truly international rally, which drew somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 participants. A reporter for the *KVZ* recorded the presence of citizens of Switzerland, the Netherlands, Austria, Luxembourg, and France. The crowd was diverse in other ways as well. “The mixture of age groups, which has been denounced as impossible, the city and country people, the hippies and the ‘citizens’ seems suddenly possible here,” the *Dernières nouvelles d’Alsace* concluded. For one fleeting afternoon, visitors from far afield experienced the sort of teamwork and collaboration that was considered unimaginable elsewhere, but supposedly characterized daily life on the occupied site in Wyhl.

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44 “10,000 beim Ostertreffen in Wyhl,” *Kommunistische Volkszeitung* 3 (No. 13), 3 April 1975.

45 “10,000 beim Ostertreffen in Wyhl,” *Kommunistische Volkszeitung*. The *Dernières nouvelles d’Alsace* noted the presence of delegations from the same countries. Neither report specified how large these groups were. “Kundgebung und Volksfest,” *Dernières nouvelles d’Alsace*.

46 “Kundgebung und Volksfest,” *Dernières nouvelles d’Alsace*. 
As people from all over western Europe and from a wide variety of backgrounds mingled on the construction site, ten speakers addressed the crowd. Selected by a committee led by Walter Mossmann, the speakers came from every part of society in the Upper Rhine Valley, and also from other countries and other grassroots movements.47 Local speakers introduced visitors to the long anti-nuclear struggle on the Rhine. Engelhard Bühler, the country doctor who had sought to convince his fellow physicians to oppose nuclear energy back in 1971, opened the rally with a speech on the dangers of nuclear reactors.48 Other local activists highlighted the long duration of the anti-nuclear campaign in the region, the significance of the movement’s position “On the Badensian-Alsatian border,” and the principles that guided the anti-nuclear struggle in the Upper Rhine Valley.49

Outsiders described the struggle somewhat differently, framing local action in a global context. Hans-Helmuth Wüstenhagen, the Chairman of the Federal Association of Citizens’ Initiatives for Environmental Protection (BBU) pushed this interpretation of the Wyhl occupation in his speech, “Wyhl as an Example.”50 He suggested the broadest possible significance of the struggle at Wyhl by calling it, “a

47 The speakers’ list included almost only local people, but numerous reports describe speeches by outsiders like Petra Kelly and representatives of other local movements, such as someone from Luxembourg. See: “Rednerliste.” ABEBI Haag Lore 12HL12; “Wieder ein Ostermarsch – Wyhl,” Infodienst für gewaltfreie Organisatoren 19 (March / April 1975).

48 On Bühler’s earlier efforts, see Chapter One.

49 “Rednerliste.”

50 Ibid.
page in the modern history of freedom.”

Meanwhile, Petra Kelly, a young administrative worker at the Economic and Social Committee of the European Economic Community (EEC), talked her way onto the program after the event had begun. Having traveled from Brussels just to attend the rally, Kelly jokingly informed the crowd that she was in Wyhl as a representative of “the profit-addicted EEC.” Though she worked in Brussels, Kelly did not consider herself an aspiring “Eurocrat.” She was active with the Young European Federalists (JEF), and she advocated a grassroots approach to European cooperation. On this basis, she declared more earnestly, “we are waiting for Wyhl!”

That Kelly had trekked from Europe’s titular capital to rural Wyhl in order to find evidence of the sort of European integration she sought to foster in Brussels was an important signal of the “de-provincialization” of the Wyhl struggle. As she drove away from Wyhl with Jo Leinen, one of her JEF colleagues, the pair found themselves in awe of the international movement against nuclear power they had just encountered. For Leinen, the visit had an “aha-effect.” It was on the way home, he recalled, that he and Kelly realized that “atomic energy would divide society.”

Traveling to the provincial Upper Rhine Valley had introduced these two young federalists to a movement that they now considered the basis for a locally-rooted, sustainable future for Europe. To them, such a model stood in stark contrast to the

51 Quoted in “Wieder ein Ostermarsch – Wyhl,” Infodienst.


endless economic growth promised by proponents of nuclear power and supporters of the EEC in Brussels. Indeed, as the Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace put it, “In Wyhl, the new watch on the Rhine is perhaps the fleeting, embryonic, and sometimes fumbling search for a new way of living.”

Kelly revealed the extent to which she herself saw Wyhl as a “new way of living” in a letter that she sent to the West European Socialists, another left-leaning integrationist group. On the basis of her experience in the Upper Rhine Valley, Kelly suggested three new “possibilities for action.” She placed her first proposed course of action under the excited heading “Europe and Nuclear fission centers: GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE!!!!” Here, she described the “resistance in the Wyhl region” as a sign of “transnational consciousness” and argued that the West European Socialists should get into dialogue with grassroots opponents of nuclear power in order to “put to use collected experiences in joint transnational actions.”

In Kelly's eyes at least, the highly effective border-crossing protests along the Rhine had much to teach even the cosmopolitan West European Socialists. Here, then, was another example of the outside de-provincialization of Rhenish protest. Instead of continuing to develop ideas intended to draw people from “every local level” into the orbit of Brussels, Kelly was asking the elite of the Euro-Left to follow the lead of the locally-minded farmers of Wyhl. Through this re-centering of Europe onto the Upper Rhine Valley, Kelly was both de-provincializing the Wyhl struggle in line with

54 “Kundgebung und Volksfest,” Dernières nouvelles d'Alsace.

55 Petra Kelly, “WAS TUN ??? Einige Aktionsmöglichkeiten für die Westeuropäischen Sozialisten !” (November 1975), 1. PKA Akte 534, 2. Emphasis from original.
her own interests and following up on her observation that advocates of a more inclusive Europe had been “waiting for Wyhl.”

Kelly was far from alone in suggesting such a significant role for rural Wyhl in European politics. A group of activists from Kassel traveled for five hours to attend the Easter rally. They reported extensively on the Gathering for the Infodienst für gewaltfreie Organisatoren, a newsletter that served a network of nonviolent activists across the Federal Republic. The Kasseler were impressed by the wide range of speakers who addressed the crowd. These speeches, they pointed out, were rife with universalist rhetoric. An anti-nuclear activist from Luxembourg exclaimed to the people of the Upper Rhine Valley that, “the struggle in Wyhl is our struggle, your victory will be our victory!” Even Marie-Reine Haug, a young Alsatian woman who had been a leader in the Marckolsheim and Wyhl occupations, closed her speech by referencing the tremendous potential of the Wyhl struggle to transform local protests into a global movement. “The struggle against nuclear reactors must be a chain reaction,” she said. “One victory will trigger another.”

Finally, the Kassel activists reported on the speech of Luc Aders, a member of the group Gewaltfreie Aktion Kaiseraugst (GAK), which had been founded to work against the proposed Kaiseraugst reactor in Switzerland. Aders began by stressing the importance of cooperation between the French, Germans, and Swiss of the Upper Rhine Valley. He went on to extrapolate the significance of this cooperation on a higher level. To this end, he called for international and transnational cooperation far beyond the shared regional struggle of Rhenish activists. As Aders

put it, “only by sticking together can the populations of Germany, France, Switzerland, even Europe and the whole world, prevent yet more misfortune on account of nuclear reactors.”

Aders’s speech was also the highlight of the Easter Gathering for protesters from within the region. Just before Kelly took the podium, Aders closed out his address by triumphantly declaring that the occupation of the nuclear reactor construction site in nearby Kaiseraugst was to begin that very evening. His speech took the crowd from the rhetorical heights of global solidarity to the very real transnational cooperation taking place within the Rhine Valley. The local population’s response was rapid and determined. “A coach [to the Kaiseraugst reactor site] was immediately organized,” the Alsatian activist Solange Fernex reported. At the same time, “others went to find their tents and set off for Kaiseraugst [on their own].” In total, “some 100 veteran occupiers from the Alsace and Baden” left Wyhl for Kaiseraugst that afternoon.

The next morning, when workmen arrived on the Swiss construction site, they “found their machines had been immobilized by the demonstrators; tents had been pitched in front of them and women were sitting in the driver’s seats.” At Kaiseraugst, the site of the December 1973 “trial-squat” that had brought the tactic

57 Ibid.


of occupation to the region, this powerful new means of protest had come full circle. What is more, Aders’s intonation of the Kaiseraugst occupation on the Wyhl site suggested links between an expanding grassroots movement and the transnational trajectory of anti-nuclear protest, connecting these locally enacted protests with a globally articulated movement.

The International Easter Rally, then, connected local action with global politics by opening the occupation up to a wide range of interpretations. While some speakers used the rally as an opportunity to de-provincialize Wyhl by proudly proclaiming a swathe of rhetorical connections that spanned the globe, the event also played an important part in moving forward the local “chain reaction” of anti-nuclear protests that were effectively challenging industrial projects in the region. That this gathering was understood differently by local people and visitors helps to explain how such an obviously local action could have influence from Brussels to Kassel. As the rhetorical connections made by outsiders revealed, the Easter Gathering was a perfect opportunity to harness local anti-reactor protest to broad, transnational themes like European integration. The springtime rally also set the stage for a summer that was filled with visits of many kinds to Wyhl and the more permanent incorporation of the Wyhl struggle and anti-nuclear activism into the agenda of a host of political organizations from across western Europe. In so doing, the rally placed the Wyhl struggle solidly at the center of a grassroots anti-nuclear network in Europe even as anti-nuclear activism continued to spread throughout the Upper Rhine Valley.
“Wyhl is Worth the Trip:” Visiting the occupied site during the summer of 1975

The International Easter Gathering opened up a summer of unusual encounters that connected individuals from all around the globe with the grassroots protests taking place on the Wyhl site. These encounters, which took place both on the site and wherever its “multipliers” traveled, established the Wyhl forest as a central node in several transnational networks. As Walter Mossmann noted, “it was not just the left-wing scene, which had long been targeted by the police and the courts, that was meeting on the occupied site.” Interactions between people of various political backgrounds, of all ages, from cities and from villages in Europe and overseas, occurred frequently in Wyhl during the summer of 1975. Such interactions also took place elsewhere as these visitors, and even Rhenish activists themselves, “multiplied” the occupation’s reach by sharing their experiences of it with audiences far from the Upper Rhine Valley. By transmitting experiences to “their own networks of opinion, personal, local, regional, federal, and even international,” these multipliers created an extensive counter-public and thus ensured that, “the story of Wyhl simply could not be kept secret anymore.”

This grassroots process of sharing the story of Wyhl institutionalized the informal networking that had been taking place since the Easter Gathering. As widely as these networks grew, however, the occupied site itself retained a central position. Spreading awareness not only that an occupation was taking place, but also how it was taking place, how it looked, felt, and even tasted was essential to the

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Wyhl occupation’s remarkable influence far from the Upper Rhine Valley. In sharing such visceral experiences, visitors and travelers helped to share just how real—and also how down to earth—this illegal occupation was.

A pair of Berlin activists who traveled to Wyhl in July 1975 explained what they learned by physically experiencing the occupation. Before their visit, the Berliners explained, everything they knew about Wyhl “came from newspaper reports and television footage;” and they were a bit skeptical of the Rhenish protests. Their impression of Wyhl began to change as soon as they arrived on the site, however. “Nowhere else,” the pair opened a report on their trip that they wrote for WWW, “have we ever received so friendly a welcome as the one we received in Wyhl.” Foremost among many fond memories was time spent “eating hot sausages and drinking good Silvaner.” If not for the mosquitoes, the authors concluded, “it would have been even better on the site.”62

These gustatory highlights were not the only reason that the pair chose to title their article “Wyhl is worth the trip.” During their “first hour on the site,” the Berliners explained, many of their misconceptions about the citizens’ initiatives had been corrected. “Direct contact with the people who have pitched their tents here erased all the skepticism with which some of us regarded the Citizens’ Initiatives,” the Berliners reported. The brief time they had spent on the site was “more valuable for us than ten of the newspaper articles that we get to read in Berlin,” they concluded.63

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62 “Wyhl ist eine Reise wert!” Was Wir Wollen (No. 9), 28 July 1975.
63 Ibid.
The Berliners’ high assessment of their visit to the occupied site was hardly unique. Such visits were daily occurrences at Wyhl. One occupier recalled that “packed buses” filled with “pupils, tourists, supporters and opponents” pulled up each day during the summer of 1975.\(^6^4\) According to Walter Mossmann, these visitors included everyone from girl scouts, boy scouts, and Gray Panthers, to followers of every conceivable religion, to “critical architects, doctors, pedagogues, journalists, frustrated orchestral musicians, [and] ruminant police officers.”\(^6^5\) The steady stream of curious visitors meant that the occupiers often “had to re-tell the story of Wyhl three or four times in a single day.” As a result of these efforts, each visitor to the site received a personal introduction to the Wyhl occupation. After hearing the occupation’s story, visitors investigated its physical dimensions. They were taken aback by the spartan living conditions that protesters endured throughout the lengthy occupation.\(^6^6\) The thank you letters and reports that visitors sent back to southern Baden and published in the alternative press revealed effects of this spread of knowledge and the powerful human connections that were developing between visitors and occupiers.\(^6^7\)

\(^6^4\) Eine Platzbesetzerin, “Das Leben auf dem besetzten Platz,” 147.

\(^6^5\) Mossmann, \emph{realistisch sein}, 203.

\(^6^6\) Eine Platzbesetzerin, “Das Leben auf dem besetzten Platz,” 147.

\(^6^7\) A group from the city of Kassel helped to explain just how visiting Wyhl offered activists both a new model for their protests and ample inspiration for their activism. The Kassel activists noted that they had traveled to far-off Wyhl in order to “take experiences home for the fight against the Borken reactor.” Though they felt that their own movement “was still in its infancy” in comparison to the Wyhl struggle, the Kasselers described how they were proudly following in the footsteps
Even scientists noticed the site’s potential as a center for networking.

Inspired by the Easter Rally, the Wyhl Forest Community College, and the countless impromptu meetings already taking place at Wyhl, Freiburg University’s Aktion Umweltschutz decided to hold a “Conference against Nuclear Reactors” on the site. The event, they explained, would draw scientists to Wyhl where they could, “compare the state of knowledge and research that is being conducted in isolation at the universities and in the working groups.” To this end, Aktion Umweltschutz sent invitations to universities across the Federal Republic. Their expectation that 80 or perhaps 100 researchers would take part in the conference was wildly exceeded when some 300 participants arrived in Wyhl, including “scientists from almost every university in the Federal Republic of Germany” as well as “delegations from Austria and Switzerland.” Even these scientists gladly coupled conference proceedings with firsthand experiences of the occupation. They huddled around the campfire with the occupiers, pitched their tents on the site, and listened attentively to presentations on nuclear energy made by local farmers.

The Young European Federalists made use of the site’s magnetism just two weeks later, hosting their own weekend-long anti-nuclear seminar. Entitled “Nuclear Energy – Risk or Advance for European Society?” this seminar brought thirty-five participants from West Germany, France, Switzerland, Belgium, and

of Rhenish protesters by building on the concerns of “directly affected” farmers. “Kein KKW in Borken und anderswo” Was Wir Wollen (No. 9), 28 July 1975. 


69 Ibid.
England to the Upper Rhine Valley. Despite their reverence for the local anti-nuclear movement, the JEF openly worked to push anti-nuclear activism in a new direction and thus to continue the sort of “de-provincialization” advocated by Ebert and Vogt. To be successful, the Federalists proclaimed, the anti-nuclear campaign would have to bring “the resistance against nuclear reactors from the Kaiserstuhl to other parts of the Federal Republic.” Furthermore, the participants determined to make the problems of nuclear energy major issues at the next Bundestag election and the upcoming direct election to the European parliament. Advocating “trans-border electoral districts,” and drawing attention to “the question of uncoordinated siting like in the Upper Rhine region,” would help to connect grassroots anti-nuclear activism to European electoral politics.70

As the countless visits, meetings and conferences that took place there attest, the occupied site in the Wyhl forest became an important center for discussions about nuclear technology and a veritable clearinghouse for information about the meaning and significance of grassroots activism. The idea that a previously uninhabited woodland outside of an unknown village might become such an international focal point had not been a consideration for the members of the Badensian and Alsatian citizens’ initiatives as they planned the occupations in Marckolsheim and Wyhl. Nevertheless, their protests attracted the interest of people from all across the Federal Republic and far beyond its borders. In effect, the

occupation modeled a new kind of protest and changed West German social
activism without ever really intending to do so. In the wake of local people’s
impressive actions, outsiders hurried to see the movement for themselves. While
many were transformed by these experiences, others sought to transform the anti-
nuclear movement and nudge it towards their own goals.

**Taking Wyhl on the Road**

As their movement became a subject of international interest and a frequent
topic in the media, Rhenish anti-nuclear protesters themselves began to take on a
larger role in spreading knowledge about the occupation in order to share what they
found significant about the “example of Wyhl” and to de-provincialize the movement
on their own terms. “Beginning in March, April 1975,” Walter Mossmann reported,
“I traveled with the story of Wyhl to every possible anti-nuclear citizens’ initiative in
West Germany and West Berlin, in Switzerland, in Austria, Luxembourg, Denmark,
Holland, and time and again to Paris.”71 Though Mossmann was a particularly
prolific traveler, he was just one of “hundreds who were fanning out to tell the story
of Wyhl as an inspirational example.”72 As Mossmann put it, however, the point of
these travels was not simply to “teach” other people, “since they had long ago been
taught.” Instead, their aim was to spread “the good news, that the impossible is

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71 Mossmann, *realistisch sein*, 205.

72 Ibid., 204.
possible.” If anything, he explained, the story of Marckolsheim, Wyhl, and Kaiseraugst showed that such activism “was not just romantic, but also realistic.”

As these comments suggest, visitors like Mossmann helped to bring the lessons of Wyhl into various local contexts by engaging directly with local people who were struggling to make headway in their own activist projects. They also sought to bring the sort of firsthand experiences acquired by visitors to the site to other populations who could not make their own way to Wyhl. In so doing, these “missionaries” of the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement showed that the value of their grassroots activism was not so much its universality as its adaptability.

The travels of Balthasar Ehret, who shared his interpretation of the Wyhl struggle with audiences across the Federal Republic showed just how Rhine Valley activists connected their own experiences with a range of far-flung grassroots struggles. In Freiburg, Ehret gave a talk entitled, “Lehrstück Wyhl,” an apparent reference to Bertolt Brecht’s so-called “learning plays,” and a suggestion that participants could learn by engaging themselves in the Wyhl struggle.

On the night of 2 April 1975, he showed slides and narrated the citizens’ initiatives’ efforts against the Marckolsheim lead plant and the Wyhl reactor to an inquisitive audience at Frankfurt’s iconic Club Voltaire. Unsurprisingly, this audience was much less familiar with the goings-on in Wyhl than the Freiburg

73 Ibid., 205.


students had been. During the question and answer session that followed his lecture, however, Ehret was able to connect the experiences of rural anti-nuclear protesters with those of his urban audience. In this process, he brought the occupation to bear on Frankfurt politics by answering questions about “the ways that experiences gained through the occupation of the site might prove useful for the squatters’ movement in Frankfurt.”

A nervous representative of the German Electricity Association (VDEW), which was headquartered in Frankfurt, attended the Club Voltaire lecture and took notes. His conclusion that, “the citizens’ initiatives in Wyhl are taking advantage of the local population’s possibly inadequate understanding of nuclear reactors and their necessity in order to push for systemic change on the political level” accurately reflected the way that discussions of Wyhl might move into other political realms. It was not so much the ins and outs of nuclear energy, but rather the fact they revealed the potential for grassroots action to effect systemic change that made the Wyhl protests so powerful. Far beyond the context of nuclear power, therefore, Wyhl was evidence that, “the impossible was possible.” Discussing how experiences from Wyhl applied to the squatters’ movement was a powerful means of bringing the Rhenish successes into the lives of Frankfurt activists and using the Rhenish protests as a catalyst for systemic change in the banking metropolis on the Main.

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77 Ibid.
On 18 July 1975, these efforts to push the Wyhl occupation into other contexts took another step forward when travelers from the Upper Rhine Valley took the occupation on the road. Early that morning, three carloads of Rhenish anti-nuclear protesters, including Roland Burkhart, set out for Bonn. Rather than simply bearing tidings from the occupied site, these activists were headed to the West German capital in order to participate in a protest organized by the Young European Federalists, who had recently visited the site. In carrying out this action, Badensian protesters and Bonn activists gave government officials and residents of the capital city the opportunity to experience Wyhl firsthand, too.

The centerpiece of the Bonn protest was a staged funeral for West Germany’s “radiant future,” complete with tearful eulogies and a coffin borne by gas-mask-wearing pallbearers. The Badensian participants brought signs and banners straight from the occupied site in order to “show that the Citizens’ Initiatives were demonstrating against nuclear reactors.” The protesters set up in front of the Federal Ministry for Research just in time to pass out literature to startled reporters and officials headed into the Ministry for a press conference on nuclear safety. Bringing this small piece of Wyhl to the West German capital was enough to shock Bonn bureaucrats and politicians. Taken aback, most of the passers-by either looked at the protesters with “condescending smiles” or “simply took a flyer and

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80 Christa aus Offenburg, “Unsere Demonstration in Bonn.”
moved on.” Yet the action did succeed in startling Minister Matthöfer, who eventually agreed to meet with a delegation of protesters.81

Though it was hastily organized, and a far cry from the mass protests taking place in the Upper Rhine Valley, this outgrowth of the grassroots Rhenish anti-nuclear movement achieved some notable successes. On short notice, a few dozen activists organized an action that got the attention of West Germany’s top nuclear official, received coverage in fourteen West German newspapers, and was reported on by five television and radio broadcasters located all across the Federal Republic.82 Perhaps more importantly, however, the protest set a new precedent for coordinated anti-nuclear action. Roland Burkhart thanked the Young European Federalists, and Hartmut Gründler of Tübingen for their parts in setting up the demonstration. The Stuttgarter Zeitung reported an even broader collaboration. Members of “the Offenburg Citizens’ Initiative against Nuclear Reactors, the Tübingen Working Group for the Protection of Life, the Kalkar Citizens’ Initiative, the Freiburg Working Group for Environmental Protection, and the Young European Federalists” all took part, the newspaper noted.83 By targeting the Ministry for Research, which oversaw Federal nuclear energy policy rather than a single reactor

81 Walther, “Bonn: Aktion gegen KKW.”

82 Junge Europäische Föderalisten, Presseecho auf die Bonner Antikernkraftwerke-Aktion.

site, the protesters were pointing out the wide geographic implications of their localized protests and adapting them to yet another new context.

Though it was only a single minor action, the 18 July 1975 protest in Bonn reveals the networking of the anti-nuclear struggle during the spring and summer of 1975. Bringing firsthand experience of the occupation—as well as the years of protest that had led up to it—to unlikely people and places far from the Upper Rhine Valley was essential to spreading awareness amongst the West German public and engaging activists all across the Federal Republic in what appeared to be a geographically limited and thematically narrow grassroots protest movement. In one sense, therefore, these efforts were part of what Vogt and Ebert had referred to as the “de-provincialization” of the anti-nuclear struggle. In another sense, however, taking Wyhl on the road was a means of turning the entire idea of provincialization on its head. By connecting their movement to grassroots protest campaigns across western Europe and gaining pride of place at the top of social activists’ agendas, the local anti-nuclear movement in Wyhl became more than just a “de-provincialized” struggle in a rural hinterland. It now stood at the center of rapidly developing network of local initiatives with growing influence even in capitals like Bonn and Brussels. By directly translating the Rhenish campaign into these myriad contexts, anti-nuclear protesters adapted their message and caused their struggle to have far greater effects elsewhere than it might otherwise have had on its own.

**Losing the Site**

Even as travels to and from the Upper Rhine Valley helped to spread the anti-nuclear message throughout the Federal Republic, the site itself continued to play a
key role in the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement. "The occupied site was the central point," one activist wrote, "both on the ground and in the press."\textsuperscript{84} As we have seen, the site became "the central point" of the Rhenish anti-nuclear movement because it served as a meeting spot and a place where activists could talk and exchange ideas. Institutions that developed on the site, such as the Wyhl Forest Community College and \textit{Was Wir Wollen}, the "Occupiers’ Newspaper," helped draw new people into the movement and bring together people who might otherwise have had little do with one another. The site even played a key part in the spread of anti-nuclear activism beyond the Upper Rhine Valley, capturing the imagination of people throughout the Federal Republic and serving as a goal for visitors from outside the region.

Despite the many purposes that the occupation had come to serve within the anti-nuclear struggle on the Upper Rhine Valley, it had originally been conceived as a last ditch measure to stop construction. This initial goal might have been considered obviated as early as 21 March 1975, however, when the Administrative Court in Freiburg ordered an injunction against further construction work while the challenges filed against the initial construction license were addressed. Though the \textit{Badenwerk} immediately appealed this decision to the Administrative Appeals Court in Mannheim, the Freiburg court order was in effect throughout the summer of 1975. It could be argued, in other words, that it was unnecessary for the citizens’ initiatives to remain on the site throughout the summer in order to prevent a resumption of construction. As we have seen, however, it was during this time that

\textsuperscript{84} Eine Platzbesetzerin, "Das Leben auf dem Platz," 145.
the occupation took on broader significance and began to serve as a hub for anti-nuclear activism not only in the Upper Rhine Valley, but throughout West Germany.

Focused first and foremost on “preventing the construction of the Wyhl reactor and other reactors, and not starting a revolution,” Reverend Richter of Weisweil, one of the leading figures within the International Association of Citizens’ Initiatives, pushed for communication with government officials throughout the occupation.85 To this end, he advocated the formation of a negotiating commission as early as May 1975.86 Throughout the summer, at the same time as the citizens’ initiatives were coordinating the occupation and visitors from throughout the Federal Republic were traveling to the occupied site, Richter and six other citizens’ initiative members met sporadically with government officials in an attempt to find some common ground for negotiations.

The expectation that the Administrative Appeals Court in Mannheim would end the Freiburg court’s injunction, since “no administrative court has decided for citizens on an appeal, neither in the case of nuclear reactors nor other industrial projects” further motivated citizens’ initiative members to bolster their negotiating position. In fact, by early October 1975, members of the citizens’ initiatives suspected that the Mannheim court decision, which was to be handed down that month, would be used by the government of Baden-Württemberg to offer carrots


86 “Protokoll ... 24. Mai 1975.”
like new municipal facilities in communities surrounding Wyhl and a scaling back of other plans for industrial development in the region.87

When the Mannheim court overturned the Freiburg court’s injunction on 14 October 1975, the worst fears of the citizen’s initiatives seemed close to being realized. Though the government announced that it would not order an immediate evacuation of the site, and that it was willing to enter into negotiations, the Citizens’ Initiatives’ initial reaction was to proclaim that the site would remain occupied until the initial complaints against the construction permit had been resolved. At the same time, however, the Badenwerk stated that it was ready to use any legal means necessary to resume construction and warned of consequences for a continued occupation. Five days after the Mannheim decision at a mass rally on 19 October, the citizens’ initiatives declared their willingness to negotiate with the government.88

Later that same month, representatives of 43 citizens’ initiatives met in the village of Forchheim to vote on whether or not a paper that had been devised over the summer by Reverend Richter and his negotiating team should serve as the basis for these negotiations.89 By a final vote of 28 to 7, with 8 abstentions, the citizens’ initiatives adopted Richter’s paper. On the basis of this vote, the Citizens’ Initiatives


agreed to end the occupation for the duration of negotiations on three conditions. First, the Badenwerk was not allowed to carry out work of any kind on the site; second, the site was not to be fenced in; and third, all the infrastructure created by the citizens’ initiatives was to be left on the site. Ten members of the Citizens’ Initiatives and ten representatives of the state government were to remain on the site around the clock throughout the negotiations in order to ensure that these conditions were upheld. The negotiating paper was quickly accepted by the state government, and on 7 November 1975, the occupiers quietly abandoned the Wyhl forest.

The end of the occupation was hardly the end of the movement, however. In fact, clearing the site could well be considered in line with the very goals that had initially caused anti-nuclear activists to occupy it. Because the government and the Badenwerk had agreed that no further construction would take place during the negotiations, it might be argued that the negotiations themselves were continuing to serve the purpose for which the occupation had initially been designed. For many reactor opponents, however, the decision to leave the site was a difficult one and seemed to be a big step backwards. Jean-Jacques Rettig voiced strong opposition to any plans to abandon the site. “Filbinger wants to build,” he explained, “and we want the reactor not to be built.” Given these diametrically opposite positions, Rettig had no hope that a settlement could be negotiated. When it came to leaving the site and

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entering into negotiations, he warned his fellow activists, “we don’t have the right to be so naïve.”

Indeed, the terms of the “Offenburg Agreement” that the citizens’ initiatives finally reached with the government in January 1976 seemed to be the product of particular naiveté. The agreement called for no further construction until new scientific studies of the reactor’s effects on the region could be carried out. Yet, determining whether or not these studies showed that the reactor threatened the region was left to the government alone. In other words, whether the citizens’ concerns had been resolved or not would, in the end, be decided by the government. As Bernd Nössler put it, this “lack of a veto-right for the directly affected population” meant that “the largest citizens’ protest of the post-war period in the FRG is paused on account of an agreement.” And yet, he proclaimed, “Our motto is, ‘No reactor in Wyhl, because the people don’t want it.’ The fire of resistance is weak but the embers are still glowing.”

Indeed, by looking just beyond the negotiations and the legal processes that framed the Offenburg agreement it was possible to see the embers of which Nössler spoke. Though protesters ended the mass occupation in November 1975, many considered the team of observers mandated by the Offenburg Agreement, to be a continuation of the occupation. Indeed, a schedule quite similar to the initial

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92 No author, “Wie geht es weiter?” in Wyhl (see note 2), 297.

occupation plan organized the new “Watch in the Wyhl Forest.” Various villages undertook 24 hour shifts just as they had throughout the spring and summer. As we will see in the next chapter, important institutions, including the Wyhl Forest Community College and Was Wir Wollen, that had developed on the site remained active after the site was cleared.

Thus, at a rally on the banks of the Rhine on 22 February 1976, Annemarie Sacherer, an Oberrotweil vintner, celebrated “369 days of occupation.” In thick dialect, she described the “Offenburg Agreement” as a loss for the people of the Kaiserstuhl, though it mandated no further construction for at least nine months. Instead of reactor opponents having “won nine months,” she explained, the government believed it had won “a peaceful Kaiserstuhl” just before the upcoming elections to both the state parliament and the Bundestag. In fact, she proclaimed defiantly, “we won’t be peaceful and quiet until the atomic reactor won’t be built.” In fact as we will see in the following chapter, the defiant attitude of which Sacherer spoke, would continue to shape politics on both sides of the Rhine for years to come.

**Conclusion: Local Action, Global Ramifications**

Occupying a construction site may seem, first and foremost, to be a means of physically preventing construction work from proceeding. This certainly was the reason that activists in Wyhl stated for their proposed occupation of the reactor site. Yet beginning on Sunday 23 February 1975, when Roland Burkhart and his family traveled to Wyhl for a Sunday outing, the occupied site in the Wyhl forest became an

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94 Annemarie Sacherer “369 Tage Platzbesetzung,” in Wyhl (see note 2), 161.
outdoor community center for the people of the Upper Rhine Valley. By spending time together in the woods, rural and urban people got to know each other better. Unemployed youth talked with middle-aged vintners around the campfire. A wide range of people contributed to the occupation by carrying out mundane tasks. As a result, personal interactions and daily life became political actions in Wyhl. Occupying the site turned out to be about far more than stopping construction.

It was not just locally that the occupation had such impressive, if unexpected, effects. Curious people from across the Federal Republic travelled to Wyhl and left the woods with changed ideas about the movement taking place there. In contrast to mainstream press reports focused on major protests, these visitors found an alternative community developing in the woods outside of Wyhl. Their letters and descriptions reveal the ways that actually experiencing the occupation changed them. They were impressed by the community they encountered on the site and moved by the stories that they were told by the occupiers. The locally rooted movement against the Wyhl reactor gave these visitors new ideas about how they might move forward with their own struggles.

Rhenish anti-nuclear activists promoted the global ramifications of their struggle by travelling far and wide to tell others about what was going at Wyhl. They pushed connections between what was going on in Wyhl and other local movements, encouraging local people elsewhere to follow their example. Despite its “provincial” location, then, Wyhl had become a clear center for anti-nuclear protest and the locus of many activist networks. The minor protest organized by the Young European Federalists and others during July 1975 in Bonn was evidence of the way
that the Upper Rhine Valley, not the Federal capital was the physical center of anti-nuclear activism. It was as emissaries of what was going on in Wyhl that activists approached federal officials in the capital city. Other activists’ declarations that “the Wyhl struggle is our struggle,” reinforced the far-flung resonances of this local action. Clearly the longstanding struggle over the Wyhl reactor had become a local action with global ramifications.

Significantly, however, this focus on Wyhl was linked almost exclusively to the occupation itself. Determining what was to be done after Rhenish activists abandoned the site was another, more difficult problem. In fact, this entire situation was problematic for outside activists, who saw no reason for the occupation to end. Local activists, too, were demoralized by the loss of the site. Yet, as Annemarie Sacherer suggested in February 1976—and as we will see in the next chapter—they found ways to keep the embers of resistance glowing in the Upper Rhine Valley. In fact, for people like Sacherer, who had experienced the occupation in its entirety, and worked hard throughout the decade to make it possible, the Wyhl occupation led to significant life changes and precipitated further impressive anti-nuclear actions.

For outsiders, however, the problem of what to do next was more pointed. The loss of the occupied site as a center of activism forced them to re-think the idea that Wyhl was “their struggle” and that the Wyhl forest was the capital of anti-nuclear activism. In the wake of the occupation, it was time to continue or to begin their own struggles. It was precisely the rootedness of the Wyhl protests that made this such a difficult proposition. Minor protests in Bonn could no longer be easily
described as long arms of the anti-reactor struggle at Wyhl. Instead, the movement appeared to lack a center. As we will see in the next chapter, despite Wyhl’s obvious trans-local effects, activists elsewhere labored mightily to turn this local protest into a national movement.
Chapter Seven
Following “‘Modell’ Wyhl:”¹
The legacy of the 1975 occupation
from the Upper Rhine Valley to the Lower Elbe marshes

Already in March 1975, just weeks after the beginning of the Wyhl occupation, Freia Hoffmann was concerned about outsiders’ perception of what was going on in Southwest Germany. Hoffmann’s concern arose after she “heard that the example of Wyhl has led to resignation elsewhere.” In other places, she elaborated, “they say, ‘the people of the Kaiserstuhl, those are particularly courageous people, something like that [the Wyhl occupation] wouldn’t be possible here.’” In working to explain the situation at Wyhl to people across the Federal Republic, therefore, Hoffmann was “forced to repeat time and again” that in the Upper Rhine Valley “a few people began the painstaking work of pointing out the dangers of atomic power plants, the patient work of organizing countless informational meetings, passing out umpteen-thousand flyers, collecting signatures, etc.” It was this long history of patient effort, Hoffmann told whoever would listen, that had allowed for the successful occupation in 1975.²

¹ KKW Kommission, KB / Gruppe Hamburg, “‘Modell’ Wyhl,” Arbeiterkampf (no. 96), 29 November 1976, 4.
Hoffmann’s concerns about how people elsewhere would understand the Wyhl struggle were quickly borne out. Firsthand reports of the occupation, which reached every corner of the Federal Republic via the travels of Rhenish activists and others’ visits to the site, recruited many West Germans to the struggle against nuclear energy. Wyhl became the organizing model for many of their efforts, which focused first and foremost on the tactic of site occupation.

Echoes of Wyhl were unmistakable in October and November 1976, when anti-nuclear activists twice attempted to occupy a reactor site near the town of Brokdorf in the Federal Republic’s northernmost state of Schleswig-Holstein. Though they mimicked the strategy and tactics that had been used successfully on the Upper Rhine, activists at Brokdorf were unsuccessful in their attempts to take over the site and stop construction. Elaborate fortifications and a massive police presence overwhelmed the protesters, who were unable to gain a secure foothold on the construction site. Almost as quickly as it had been established, in other words, “Modell Wyhl” had hit its first obstacle. The government, it seemed, was just as unwilling to countenance another Wyhl as activists were committed to creating one.

Despite the failures at Brokdorf, soul-searching anti-nuclear activists continued to idealize the Wyhl occupation. Even after a more violent confrontation took place in early 1977 at another reactor site in the Lower Saxony town of Grohnde, Wyhl remained firmly entrenched as a model of the sort of extra-human effort about which Hoffmann was concerned. Scenes featuring farmers, vintners, and city-dwellers bantering around the campfire, free-flowing Kaiserstuhl wine, and
evenings of song in the Friendship house were crowned in northern German activists’ minds by the apparent success of the southwest German occupation. Even the contested decision to leave the site was ignored by these outsiders. Visits to the occupied site in Wyhl, as well as Badensian anti-nuclear activists’ proselytizing tours of the Federal Republic, underlay this perception of Wyhl as the epitome of successful anti-nuclear action. It was precisely this closely cropped focus on the summer of 1975, however, that was responsible for the sort of misunderstandings of the ongoing Rhine Valley anti-nuclear movement that so deeply concerned Freia Hoffmann.

Unfortunately, idealized visions of ‘Modell Wyhl’ served as an empty vessel into which anti-nuclear activists outside the Upper Rhine Valley poured their own ambitions. For those within the region, on the other hand, the occupation was the defining moment in a long process of deep ideological change. The key difference between the ways that the Alemannic people and reactor opponents elsewhere deployed this model was directly related to the Rhenish people’s long experience of anti-nuclear protest since 1971. In the Southwest, this ongoing movement both challenged the nuclear program and continued the process of transformation that affected the activists themselves and the region in which they lived. As a result, democracy matters and environmental issues were becoming increasingly integrated into the daily lives of these “Alemannic people” even without the occupied site.

The stark contrast between the idealized Wyhl occupation and the failed occupation attempts that took place in Northern Germany during the late 1970s has
not been lost on scholars. The traditional narrative of the anti-nuclear movement connects the protests that took place in Wyhl, and then Brokdorf, Grohnde, and later Gorleben as an extended chain reaction. Though different local conditions are acknowledged, the movement itself is considered to have developed step-by-step at these various sites.\(^3\) More recently, sophisticated comparisons of anti-reactor protests at Wyhl and elsewhere have begun to emerge.\(^4\) I will draw on aspects of both of these approaches in order to present a more nuanced description of the development of mass anti-reactor protests in multiple locations throughout the Federal Republic during the late 1970s.

To do so, I will seek to preserve the expansive mosaic of anti-nuclear initiatives and activists after 1975 rather than collapsing them into a single, linear movement. As I will show here, the Wyhl occupation was important for anti-nuclear activists throughout the Federal Republic, yet it was interpreted in many different ways by many different people. In fact, competing visions of “Modell Wyhl” and its significance were used to outline types of anti-nuclear activism that were frequently quite different from the continuing movement in the Upper Rhine Valley. In this

\(^3\) One need not go much further than the titles of works like *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben* (From Wyhl to Gorleben), to grasp the basic premise of this narrative. See the Introduction for more on this historiography.

\(^4\) Roger Karapin’s impressive chapter on “Nuclear Energy Conflict at Wyhl and Brokdorf” in his recent study of West German protest movements is the latest and perhaps most conclusive of these comparisons. In so thoroughly comparing the conflicts at Wyhl and Brokdorf, however, Karapin goes out of his way to disconnect these two conflicts rather than looking at the way that these two events influenced one another. See Roger Karapin, “Nuclear Energy Conflicts at Wyhl and Brokdorf,” in *Protest Politics in Germany: Movements on the Left and Right since the 1960s* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).
chapter, then, I will integrate events in both North and South into an ongoing story of anti-nuclear activism after the 1975 Wyhl occupation. This larger narrative of anti-reactor protest will help to explain how the debate over nuclear energy became so deeply entrenched in West German politics during the later 1970s.

“Wyhl and then what...?”

Responding to “Modell Wyhl” in the North

The International Association of Badensian and Alsatian Citizens’ Initiatives finally signed the Offenburg Agreement in April 1976. That same month, the Young European Federalists were producing a second special issue of their Forum E magazine dedicated to the debate surrounding nuclear energy. Jo Leinen’s editorial statement “Wyhl and then what...?” opened the issue. Leinen’s message described several achievements of “the environmental movement...in the wake of the so-called ‘spirit of Wyhl.’” These included fostering “widespread public interest” in environmentalism and atomic energy, developing a federal “network of Citizens initiatives,” and garnering the attention of the mainstream media and political parties.

On the basis of these achievements, Leinen laid out his vision for the movement’s future. To remain “a long-term element of our political order,” he proposed, anti-nuclear activists would have to approach politics carefully by

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6 The Offenburg Agreement committed the government of Baden-Württemberg to further study the population’s concerns about the reactor before going ahead with construction. The government alone was empowered to decide whether those concerns had been sufficiently addressed (and thus whether construction could begin), however. For more on the Offenburg Agreement, see Chapter Six.
refraining from organizing a separate "environmental protection party" and yet
creating an “overarching environmental concept.” At the same time, the movement
would have to remain as heterogeneous as possible.7

While Leinen was far from alone in desiring to build on the “spirit of Wyhl,”
his grand plans, which suggested the presence of a single, unified anti-nuclear
movement, were unique. In contrast to Leinen’s larger vision, activists living near
potential reactor sites sought to use Wyhl as a model in their own struggles. One
such struggle was taking place in the Wilster Marsh near the town of Brokdorf.
Local people there had been working against a reactor project since 1973. Long
before they had ever heard of Wyhl, these people had been recruiting their
neighbors and colleagues to the anti-reactor cause and voicing opposition to the
project. Despite the longer history of the local campaign against the Brokdorf
reactor, however, it became impossible to exclude “Modell Wyhl” from this struggle
after the Rhenish occupation became known throughout the Federal Republic.

In some ways, the first years of the struggle against the Brokdorf reactor
mirrored the early years of anti-reactor activism on the Upper Rhine. Dairy farmers
and other residents of the “fertile marshland” near the mouth of the Elbe river had
expressed opposition to the Brokdorf project as soon as it was proposed.8 The
mayor and several citizens of one neighboring town founded the Lower Elbe

7 Leinen, “Wyhl und was dann...?”
8 Bürgerinitiative Umweltschutz Unterelbe (BUU), Brokdorf. Der Bauplatz muß
Citizens’ Initiative for Environmental Protection (Bürgerinitiative Umweltschutz Unterelbe – BUU) just two weeks after the Brokdorf project was announced.9

Much like the Upper Rhine Valley, the 110 kilometer stretch of the Lower Elbe between Hamburg and the North Sea had been selected as a site for a string of nuclear reactors during the late 1960s. In a turn of phrase strongly reminiscent of the oft-maligned declaration that the Upper Rhine was slated to become a “second Ruhr,” one planner giddily predicted that the “Elbe can bear 40 nuclear reactors.”10 One of these projects, at Stade, was already in operation when the Brokdorf reactor was proposed in late 1973. In neighboring Brunsbüttel, yet another reactor was nearly complete.

Despite what was quickly becoming an “unprecedented concentration of nuclear reactors,” the initial plans for the nuclearization of the Lower Elbe had designated the region around Brokdorf a “local recreation area” and thus spared it from development.11 The idyllic green landscape, and the paths atop the high dikes that lined the Elbe near Brokdorf made the Wilster Marsh a perfect spot for walkers

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10 Aust, 31.

11 The German newsmagazine Der Spiegel referred to the numerous reactor projects as steps towards this “unprecedented concentration.” “Wehren, versteken, weglopen,” Der Spiegel, 5 April 1976, 90. Ekkehard Sachse, mayor of nearby Wewelsfleth noted the decision to turn the region into a local recreation area. Aust, Brokdorf, 188 – 189.
and cyclists.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, the 1973 oil shock prompted rapid action by government planners, who immediately called for two more reactors to be built along the Lower Elbe.\textsuperscript{13} Perhaps in part because people in the Wilster Marsh had said little about the Stade and Brunsbüttel projects, government planners selected Brokdorf as the site for one of these two new power stations.\textsuperscript{14} Despite its beauty, the state government was convinced that this spot would be one of the easiest places between Hamburg and the North Sea to push through a reactor project.\textsuperscript{15}

Though people living near Brokdorf had not protested other reactors planned for the region, the sudden announcement that a new reactor project would be built close to their homes on land that planners had set aside for recreation did not sit well with them.\textsuperscript{16} Local farmers moved quickly to challenge this new project. As had been the case at Wyhl, licensing hearings were key opportunities for recruitment and for the expansion of local people’s critique of their government. After the first hearing in 1974, one farmer complained that though he had helped to collect some 20,000 signatures against the Brokdorf project, his arguments had

\textsuperscript{12} After the project was announced, local officials were assured that the reactor would be "harmoniously integrated into the landscape" so that it would not interfere with the region's natural beauty or its conduciveness to outdoor activities. "Ein unbequemer Bürgermeister," \textit{Die Zeit}, 13 March 1981.


\textsuperscript{14} The Brunsbüttel reactor, already under construction just 15 kilometers from Brokdorf, faced little initial opposition. It was not until after people began to speak out against the Brokdorf project that they also started to contest the then nearly finished Brunsbüttel reactor. BUU, \textit{Brokdorf}, 21.

\textsuperscript{15} Deutsche Presse Agentur, 29 January 1974, quoted in Aust, \textit{Brokdorf}, 23.

\textsuperscript{16} Aust, \textit{Brokdorf}, 188 – 189.
been “swept off the table” by the authorities. Another resident, in an explanation that echoed Badensians’ descriptions of the Wyhl hearings, said that the 1974 hearing was no more than a “piece of theater” that had been organized only “because it was mandated by the letter of the law.”¹⁷

Local people had long supported the CDU, which governed in Kiel, but frustration with the Stoltenberg administration’s “alibi democracy” was well established in the Wilster Marsh when reactor opponents there learned of the Wyhl occupation.¹⁸ After discussions, they determined “to occupy the construction site if legal steps proved insufficient.”¹⁹ In December 1975, the BUU publicly reaffirmed this commitment with a statement declaring their intention to occupy the Brokdorf site that closely mirrored the August 1974 declaration of the Badensian and Alsatian citizens’ initiatives. This “Declaration of the North German Citizens’ Initiatives and Organizations for the Protection of Life to the Population” used the same three sections, “because we know,” “because we see,” and “because we have learned” to articulate local opposition to the reactor project. In fact, many of the individual arguments used to justify this call for occupation were taken word for word from the statement of the Badensian and Alsatian Citizens’ Initiatives.²⁰


¹⁸ BUU, Brokdorf, 71.

¹⁹ Ibid., 58.

Wilster Marsh reactor opponents’ sense that government officials were only going through the motions as they hastened to break ground at Brokdorf was reinforced when construction began in the early morning hours of 26 October 1976. Anti-reactor activists went so far as to dub this midnight maneuver a “night and fog” action.\(^{21}\) They were particularly incensed that it had taken place less than a week after Federal Minister for the Interior Werner Maihofer had announced that no further reactor construction licenses would be issued “so long as there were still open questions regarding the reprocessing and storage of atomic waste.”\(^ {22}\)

Just hours after the nocturnal groundbreaking, reactor opponents met at a local farm and called for a mass demonstration to take place the following Saturday.\(^{23}\) This demonstration revealed influences of “Modell Wyhl” that went far beyond rhetoric. The 8,000 reactor opponents who heeded the BUU’s call to protest included many people from outside the reactor’s immediate vicinity. Many of them had been drawn to Brokdorf on account of their understanding of the Wyhl occupation.

These outsiders included urban activists like the Hamburg student Wolfgang Ehmke, whose introduction to the Wyhl protests had come through Nina Gladitz’s popular documentary, *Lieber heute aktiv als morgen radioaktiv*. One scene in particular, which showed Badensian vintners discussing the relative merits of “real existing socialism” in Honecker’s East Germany and Mao’s China, had contributed to

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\(^{22}\) Aust, *Brokdorf*, 27.

\(^{23}\) BUU, *Brokdorf*, 68.
Ehmke’s “glorification” of the Wyhl occupation and its protagonists. Impressed by the farmers’ sentiments that Mao was a “practitioner” while the GDR was filled with useless theorists and bureaucrats, Ehmke felt compelled to join the nascent anti-nuclear movement. Thus, as he “travelled with friends in October 1976 to the first Brokdorf demonstration,” he was reflecting on these scenes from Wyhl and thinking “that’s just how one has to do it.”24 The Wyhl model—or at least Ehmke’s understanding of it—framed his hopes for Brokdorf.

When Walter Mossmann bestrode the podium on the afternoon of 30 October to offer greetings from Wyhl to the thousands of demonstrators assembled at Brokdorf, a physical link between the powerful anti-reactor movement in the Upper Rhine Valley and the latest protest in the Wilster Marsh was established. Together with other speakers from the Southwest, Mossmann emphasized the “legitimacy and the necessity” of an occupation at Brokdorf.25 Their presence and their words of encouragement were far from the only means by which the Wyhl occupation and its legacy affected the protest at this distant construction site, however.

In fact, the 30 October protest at Brokdorf followed closely blueprints that had been drafted at Wyhl. Throughout the speeches, Mossmann recalled, “a group

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25 BUU, Brokdorf, 107.
of very young people chanted, ‘Do it like Wyhl! Do it like Wyhl!’”26 Immediately afterwards, the crowd drifted closer to the site itself for what one activist referred to as the “already obligatory ‘stroll around the construction site.’” If, after Wyhl, protesters knew how to descend on the site without loudly declaring the coming occupation, the police, too, knew to expect such an action. Both a water-filled moat and a barbed wire fence “à la Wyhl” ringed the site.

As at Wyhl, however, water and barbed wire proved insufficient to keep anti-nuclear activists off the site. Protesters forded the moat, knocked over the hastily constructed fence in several places, and made their way onto the site. Unable to stop this onslaught with “truncheons, chemical mace, and the reckless use of horses,” the police eventually changed their tactics and pushed the protesters into one corner of the construction site which they then surrounded with barbed wire.27 As the twilight faded, activists pitched tents, lit campfires, and established a first aid station on this section of the site. Local farmers supplied the occupiers with a meal of soup, sausage, and bread. The repetition of “Modell Wyhl” seemed complete.28

The similarities between the first Brokdorf protest and the Wyhl occupation ended later that same evening, however. At around 8.30pm, just hours after they had pitched their tents, the occupiers faced an “unimaginably brutal police

27 Ibid., 107 – 108.
counterattack.”29 Some 600 police officers surrounded the roughly equivalent number of protesters who were camped on the site. After launching smoke bombs in an attempt to disperse these occupiers, police made liberal use of truncheons, chemical mace, and tear gas to rout the remaining demonstrators. Those who weathered this storm of physical abuse were arrested en masse.30 “Together with leftover items, including clothing, sleeping bags, and identity cards,” the tents that protesters had hastily erected were “gathered together by the police and immediately burned.”31 Thus, the Brokdorf occupation, unlike the nine-month Wyhl occupation, went up in smoke within hours of its initiation.

When activists tried once again to occupy the site two weeks later, the descent into violence was even more immediate. This time, hundreds of heavily armed police officers were joined by Federal Border Control agents in their defense of the site. A report on this second Brokdorf demonstration in the popular weekly magazine Stern sounded more like the description of a military engagement than a protest:

Blinded by tear gas and soaked by water cannons, the citizens responded to the force behind the border fence – which not only looked like [its counterpart] in Berlin, but was equally ugly and equally impassable – with impotent rage. They threw clumps of mud at water cannons and police officers. Professional hooligans were also on hand; these small armed bands, which were repeatedly admonished by sober-minded demonstrators, threw rocks and poles. Water cannons were sometimes made inoperable, a police cruiser was set alight. Demonstrators cut holes in the fence at multiple locations.

29 BUU, Brokdorf, 111.

30 Aust, Brokdorf, 29.

31 BUU, Brokdorf, 111.
The police countered with stones of their own and with tear gas. As night fell, federal border troops made their first massive attack. They came by land and from the air. The ground troops cleared the streets around the site. Helicopters nose-dived towards demonstrators who had drifted away from the group. They dropped tear gas grenades amongst people who had been thrown to the ground by the air pressure.32

This unprecedented display of police power both physically and emotionally overwhelmed the demonstrators it targeted. The state government’s will to build the Brokdorf reactor, and its awareness that at least some protesters were willing to use force in order to get onto the construction site, motivated a response that dwarfed the defensive measures that had been successfully deployed just two weeks earlier. Perhaps due to the scale of the brutal police reaction, even the mainstream news media—as Stern's willingness to differentiate between “hooligans” and “sober-minded demonstrators” suggests—was not without sympathy for the protesters.

For the reactor opponents themselves, the two Brokdorf demonstrations led to a re-focusing of their thoughts and energies on the issues of police brutality and construction site fortifications, not the dangers of nuclear energy. Wolfgang Ehmke, for example, remembered that he had had “no time to come up for air” after experiencing the brutality of 30 October. As he prepared for the 13 November demonstration, his focus was “first and foremost on technical details: the properties and height of the perimeter fence, which had been put up in quite a hurry, etc.”33

The cover page of the December 1976 edition of graswurzelrevolution, printed on special red newsprint, even more powerfully highlighted activists’


concerns about police brutality after Brokdorf. On the basis of the deployment of water cannon “before anyone had even begun [to protest]” and the attacks by “tear-gas bombs from low-flying helicopters,” author Marianne Horbelt questioned the West German state itself. “I have no idea what sort of country this is, where I live!” she exclaimed, “Can one even really live here?” Like Ehmke, Horbelt’s thoughts were clearly far from the dangers posed by nuclear reactors. Instead, she wrote, she had struggled to ensure the safety of her fellow protesters and wondered whether she would still be allowed to become a teacher in Germany after having participated in the protest.\(^{34}\) Given the violence that they had experienced, it was hardly surprising that outrage about police power, not concerns about nuclear energy, quickly consumed activists’ thoughts after each of the two struggles at Brokdorf.

Though it drew the attention of anti-nuclear activists away from the matter of nuclear energy, the police repression at Brokdorf did serve to recruit new activists to the anti-nuclear movement. “For many students, intellectuals, leftists,” Reimar Paul explained, “experiencable or experienced injustice was the determinant factor in the decision to become active.” In particular, Paul noted, it was “outrage about police actions and about construction sites that had been turned into fortresses that often served as catalysts for the founding of anti-nuclear initiatives, which only later took up the matter of nuclear energy.”\(^{35}\)

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\(^{35}\) Reimar Paul, “Die Anti-AKW-Bewegung: Wie sie wurde was sie ist,” in *...und auch nicht anderswo!* (see note 24), 18 – 19.
The Göttingen Working Group against Nuclear Reactors exemplified this dynamic. The group was founded in December 1976 because “even here [in Göttingen] people were woken up by the demonstrations in Brokdorf and they have developed strong doubts about atomic energy.” Yet this initial focus on police brutality soon gave way to deep-seated interest in nuclear energy and its dangers. In the spring of 1977 the Göttingen Working Group launched a new publication called Atom-Express. It was intended to transmit “concrete information to as many people as possible about the dangers of reactors and reprocessing facilities,” to promote the “discussion of alternative, environmentally friendly energy sources,” and finally to further calls for “an immediate stop for all reactor construction projects.”

Thus, from the initial anguish over the brutal battles at Brokdorf developed new anti-nuclear organizations and new interest in spreading the “facts” of nuclear energy.

Even the hopeful and decidedly proactive editorial statement that opened the initial issue of Atom-Express turned almost immediately away from the matter of nuclear energy, however. It focused instead on the “difficult position” in which citizens’ initiatives across the Federal Republic found themselves on account of the federal government’s willingness to “do everything in order to stamp the citizens’ initiatives as criminal associations.” Accordingly, the editors concluded, “the public relations work that we must do to counteract this is that much more important.”

Indeed, in light of the spree of Left-wing violence carried out by the Rote Armee


37 Ibid.
Faktion [Red Army Faction – RAF] during the “German Autumn” of 1977, violent anti-nuclear demonstrations were unlikely to garner much sympathy from West German citizens.

In an article for graswurzelrevolution, Gerhard Panzer echoed this concern about public perception of anti-nuclear initiatives. He criticized the fact that protesters had “become fixated on [playing] the attackers’ role.”38 Instead of staging yet another pitched battle, he suggested a range of alternatives to “30,000 reactor opponents wandering around the marshlands like hunted hens...and risking life and limb on account of police brutality, without even convincing one more person [to join the anti-nuclear struggle].” If the protesters who had come to Brokdorf on 13 November had instead canvassed neighbors, set up information booths, or discussed nuclear energy on the street, he asked, then “how many times would the energy of the 30,000 have multiplied itself?” Both of these criticisms seem reasonable enough, yet the experiences of activists like the members of the Göttingen Working Group suggest that the two attempted occupations had, in fact, succeeded in adding to the energy of the 30,000 at Brokdorf, even if they had failed to multiply it.

Though some trumpeted the boost that Brokdorf had given their movement, the basic disconnect between the fixation on brutality and the citizens' initiatives' need to focus on recruiting and “public relations” was clearly consuming anti-nuclear activists during the winter of 1976 – 1977. In contrast to glorified images of

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the Wyhl struggle, the reality in the Wilster Marsh was divisive and problematic.
After another failed occupation attempt in early 1977, the fact that “site occupation
as a recipe for success” had so immediately “hit a bump in the road since Wyhl,”
forced anti-nuclear activists to rethink what had become their movement’s most
basic tenet.39 No longer did “Modell Wyhl” provide an impetus for collective action
by a diverse coalition of anti-nuclear activists. Instead, each group’s re-
interpretation of what had worked at Wyhl and what was not working now directed
its further activism.

From Road Bump to Traffic Wreck: Abandoning occupation

In early 1977, it became readily apparent that the Wyhl “recipe for success”
had hit more than just a “bump in the road.” As the Lower Elbe Citizens’ Initiatives
planned for yet another mass demonstration at Brokdorf, which was scheduled to
take place on 19 February 1977, differing interpretations of strategy and tactics
divided activists and prevented them even from protesting together against the very
reactor project that they all sought to stop. For the moment, therefore, the idea that
the movement was comprised of a broad spectrum of people who worked together
on the basis of their shared opposition to nuclear energy seemed inoperable.

All told, North German anti-nuclear activists organized three separate actions
for 19 February 1977. While one group of urban radicals called for yet another go at
the perimeter fence, a narrow majority of Wilster Marsh citizens’ initiatives and
many moderate outsiders called for a protest in the nearby town of Itzehoe. In

39 Ibid.
contrast to the confrontation advocated by the former group, the latter
demonstration would not even be visible from the reactor site at Brokdorf. The
third action was even further afield from Brokdorf. Rather than participate in either
Brokdorf protest, members of the nonviolent action groups associated with
_graswurzelrevolution_ organized yet another anti-reactor demonstration to be held
the very same day at a construction site in the village of Grohnde, some 300
kilometers from the Wilster Marsh.

This division of the anti-nuclear movement must be seen first and foremost
as a split over tactics and strategic goals. Though the idealized vision of an
occupation along the lines of Wyhl maintained pride of place in the anti-nuclear
canon, many activists had begun to realize that an occupation was no longer a
workable means of preventing construction on a reactor site. In fact, though the
Brokdorf reactor was eventually built, construction was briefly halted in late 1976
not by occupation, but rather by a court order. This pause in construction further
challenged the monopoly of the idea that following “Modell Wyhl” meant preventing
construction via occupation. If it was possible to prevent construction through the
courts, what then, was the point of attempting occupation?

The tactical failure of occupation also burnished the idea of a broad, all-
inclusive anti-nuclear movement, which had been legitimized by Wyhl. In fact, as
we have seen, even the Wyhl occupation was arguably more valuable as an
opportunity to build a larger, more inclusive, trans-local movement against nuclear
energy, than it was as a means of preventing construction.\textsuperscript{40} The significance of this

\textsuperscript{40} See Chapter Six for more on the effects and uses of the Wyhl occupation.
integrative function of the Wyhl occupation became increasingly evident in early
1977 as the anti-nuclear movement in Northern Germany devolved into a handful of
bickering factions, each with a different interpretation of Modell Wyhl and its
lessons.

There were many reasons that occupation attempts in Northern Germany did
not succeed. An article in Atom-Express cited the “thinly settled Wilster marshes,”
where farmers were not “struggling for their very existence [as the vintners had in
Wyhl]” and the “fortification” of the Brokdorf reactor construction site as the
primary reasons that the “success of Wyhl could not be repeated on the site in
Brokdorf.”41 Changes to police tactics were possibly the most important reasons
that activists could not physically force their way onto the Brokdorf site. The way
that various groups of anti-nuclear activists chose to act on this knowledge
crystalized the divisions forming within the movement.

Protesters planning a demonstration to take place at the perimeter fence in
Brokdorf, for example, were unimpressed by the fact that their action would
undoubtedly hit a rather literal wall. The Communist League (Kommunistischer
Bund – KB) loudly supported a new occupation attempt at Brokdorf in its
newspaper, Arbeiterkampf. Despite the failed sieges of “Fort Brokdorf” that had
taken place the previous fall, the KB saw yet another clash on the site’s perimeter as
an opportunity to force the “police apparatus” to “massively concentrate its forces at
the construction site fence (with the associated costs in terms of personnel and the

41 “Thesen zum Stand der Bewegung gegen AKWs und zur Weiterarbeit,” Atom-
associated political consequences).” The KB even rationalized this position by explaining that after the occupation attempt had forced the police to take such costly action, protesters’ mission would be accomplished, and it would be time for an “orderly retreat.”

In stark contrast to the Communist League’s emphasis on engaging the police, other anti-nuclear groups advocated a mass demonstration in the nearby town of Itzehoe in order to circumvent such a confrontation. The BUU, which had voted by a narrow margin to endorse the Itzehoe rally as opposed to the Brokdorf protest, explained its decision as the result of cool-headed political calculus:

a demonstration at the construction site is not supported by the local population at the present moment. This is because a violent confrontation at this moment, which simply cannot be avoided, would give the state government the opportunity to turn away from the discussion of atomic energy and to focus instead on violence. We do not want that!

Though the BUU carefully noted that it would not permanently give up its right to protest on the reactor site, its reasoning for avoiding such a protest now had everything to do with the way that such a confrontation might be used against anti-nuclear protesters by the government. “Modell Wyhl,” in other words, no longer seemed to be a means of garnering broader support for the anti-nuclear movement.

42 “Schafft zwei, drei, viele Brokdorf,” Arbeiterkampf (no. 96), 10 January 1977, 3.

43 BUU, “Demonstration und Kundgebung am 19.2.1977 in Itzehoe.” ASB 9.4.1.1 XVII. The close vote can be explained in part by changes to the BUU that took place after the 13 November protest. At that time, a wide range of Hamburg groups, as well as citizens’ initiatives from as far afield as Flensburg, Kiel, and even the North Sea islands of Sylt and Föhr had become part of the BUU. As a result, the groups from the Wilster Marsh, now grouped within the organization as the “Marschen Konferenz,” no longer had complete control over the larger BUU. See “Organisationsstruktur der BUU nach dem 13.11,” reprinted in BUU, Brokdorf, 192.
Instead, it appeared to BUU members that the blueprints from Wyhl led straight into a government-devised trap.

The conflict over what model ought to replace a Wyhl-style occupation resulted in two separate and quite different demonstrations in the Wilster Marsh on 19 February 1977. Together these two protests drew tens of thousands of activists to the Lower Elbe, yet they were starkly divided between a faction that was determined to protest at Brokdorf and another that was content to stage a demonstration at Itzehoe.\(^44\) The sort of broad coalition that stood at the heart of idealized conceptions of the Wyhl occupation had melted away altogether. The group of protesters who decided to take their protest to the Brokdorf construction site on 19 February did not actually mount an occupation attempt, and thus avoided the sort of extreme violence that had characterized the fall protests on the site. This group did, however, manufacture a “show-down” of sorts by marching right up to the veritable army of police that was guarding the site.\(^45\)

The Itzehoe rally on the other hand, though it was held nowhere near the construction site itself, had much more in common with the communal atmosphere that evolved at Wyhl. In contrast to the confrontation and military-style preparations that characterized the occupation attempts at Brokdorf, the Itzehoe

\(^{44}\) Accurate estimates of how many protesters attended each of the two demonstrations are very hard to come by. Organizers of each demonstration estimated that it was far larger than the other. All estimates seem to suggest, however that between 30,000 and 40,000 activists were in the Wilster Marsh on 19 February 1977. See, for example: BUU, *Brokdorf*, 116; Petra Kelly and John Lambert to Hans-Helmuth Wüstenhagen and Freimut Duve, 23 February, 1977. PKA 2879.

\(^{45}\) Paul, *...und auch nicht anderswo*, 54.
rally featured a cultural program, several roundtable discussions, free childcare, and even a “marketplace of ideas” where local people could share their thoughts with anti-nuclear activists from Wyhl, Lower Saxony, and Denmark. Even these inclusive activities, however, could not overcome the divisions within the anti-nuclear movement. Nor did they seem on par with the sorts of inclusive actions that had taken place at Wyhl.

The nonviolent action groups’ decision to protest at Grohnde, where they had found yet another reactor project to challenge, precipitated the further splintering of the movement. The approximately 1,000 protesters who demonstrated at Grohnde on 19 February 1977 were the only group of anti-nuclear activists to make their way onto a North German reactor construction site that day. After successfully cutting a hole through the perimeter fence, the nonviolent action group members at Grohnde refused to scuffle with police, however. Eventually, they agreed to leave the site peaceably. The price of avoiding violence was a quickly foiled action.

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46 “Aktionstag in Itzehoe (19.02.77).” ASB 9.4.1.1 XVII.


48 These groups, associated with the publication graswurzelrevolution, had been closely following the struggle on the Upper Rhine since before the Wyhl occupation and had worked to promote cooperative, nonviolent anti-nuclear actions in the Southwest; clearly their Grohnde action on 19 February did not further cooperation. For more on the nonviolent action groups, particularly Gewaltfreie Aktion Freiburg (Nonviolent Action Freiburg – GAF), see Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

Far from seeking any sort of reunion after the failed actions of 19 February, all three groups voiced contentment with the day’s work and derided the other protests. The KB proudly proclaimed its demonstration an “enormous victory for the militant anti-nuclear movement.” With the same breath, it discredited every other leftist group engaged in anti-nuclear protest.\(^{50}\) Two local farmers, whose property directly abutted the future reactor site, were pleased with the rally at Itzehoe. “We proved that we’re not crazy,” they explained, “Nonviolence was the most important result, in order to bring the debate back to the future.”\(^{51}\)

Meanwhile, the cover story in *graswurzelrevolution* described the nonviolent action groups’ protest at Grohnde as “a successful example of our action form next to Wyhl, Larzac, etc.” Though not nearly as pointedly as the KB, the *graswurzelrevolution* article went on to criticize the left-leaning alternative press which, it complained, had mentioned the Grohnde protest “only as an ornamental attachment to the main articles about Brokdorf and Itzehoe.”\(^{52}\)


\(^{51}\) “Das ist unser nächstes Ziel: Grohnde 19.3,” *Arbeiterkampf* 7 (no. 100), 7 March 1977, 1.

In fact, the inability of these groups to protest together called into question the very idea that the “basis of this [anti-nuclear] movement is an awareness that winning energy from atomic fission is linked to countless dangers that still cannot be controlled today.” It went without saying that all of the groups participating in anti-reactor campaigns were, at some level at least, opposed to nuclear energy. Other concerns seemed now to have taken center stage, however. In describing its anti-nuclear strategy after the 19 February Brokdorf demonstration, the KB called immediately for a “second Brokdorf” at Grohnde. This site, the Communists gleefully reported, was being “built up into a fortress” after the nonviolent action groups’ 19 February occupation attempt.53 Far from seeking out a weak spot where an occupation might be possible, the KB relished this newfound opportunity to clash with police.

Some 20,000 anti-nuclear activists heeded the KB’s battle cry and travelled to Grohnde on 19 March 1977. As one chronicler of the movement put it, despite the impressive number of activists present, “a demonstration did not occur [that day].” Rather than mounting any sort of protest, he explained, “the activists immediately attacked the fence with the necessary tools.”54 The result was the most brutal struggle between protesters and police at a reactor construction site to date.55 Despite the fact that the Grohnde “demonstration” was really little more than a

53 “Das ist unser nächstes Ziel,” Arbeiterkampf.


55 Joppke, Mobilizing against Nuclear Energy, 106.
pitched battle, the Communist League trumpeted it as “a step forward in the struggle against the nuclear program.” At the “highpoint” of the demonstration, the group crowed, reactor opponents had “ripped an approximately ten meter breach into the construction-site fortifications.”\(^{56}\) Clearly, site occupation had become an inoperable tactic due to enhanced barricades and expanded police forces. Its advocates, however, made little effort to think of alternatives to laying siege to reactor sites that purposefully been developed into fortresses. In fact, they seemed to relish the opportunity such conditions provided to scuffle with police.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Grohnde protest even the KB seemed to acknowledge that its conception of anti-nuclear activism had to change. Though the same focus on victories won on account of confrontations at the “perimeter fence” dominated \textit{Arbeiterkampf’s} description of the protest at Grohnde, its cover story on the action ended with some considerations as to how the anti-nuclear movement might now move forward. In a shocking departure, the article’s conclusion called for a “reprieve” from such actions. This break in the action was to be used by protesters in order to “strengthen themselves” and also to “massify the struggle by bringing political agitation and propaganda into the villages, towns, and cities.”\(^{57}\)

In a sense, this assessment of the situation was shared by the Göttingen Working Group’s \textit{Atom-Express}, which in July 1977 called for protesters to stop dwelling on how they could complete a successful occupation by overcoming the

\(^{56}\) “Grohnde am 19.2. Ein Schritt voran im Kampf gegen das Atomprogramm,” \textit{Arbeiterkampf} (No. 101), 21 March 1977, 1.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 3.
defensive tactics that “the state had learned from the events at Wyhl.” Instead, the Atom-Express team was interested in “strengthening the efforts at workplaces, neighborhoods, schools, and universities.” In this shared retreat into grassroots recruiting efforts, it appeared that the idea of site occupation had run its course. It was time, activists of many stripes agreed, to find a new more workable form of anti-nuclear protest.

**Going Deep Green? The Upper Rhine Valley after the Wyhl occupation**

As anti-nuclear activists in Northern Germany were struggling amongst themselves to prevent the 19 February 1977 demonstration at Brokdorf from splintering into two separate actions, reactor opponents in Freiburg looked on with concern. At a meeting sponsored by the “Working Group for Environmental Protection at the University of Freiburg,” 100 Freiburg anti-nuclear activists determined to send two delegates to the Wilster Marsh in order to advocate the maintenance of anti-nuclear activists’ right to protest on or near reactor construction sites. After all, one participant in this meeting pointed out, the ongoing occupation in the Alsatian village of Gerstheim, which was preventing EdF officials from carrying out preliminary construction work for a planned “nuclear park” revealed the ongoing importance of demonstrating on reactor sites.59

Freiburg activists’ perception of the debate that was currently hamstringing the northern German anti-nuclear movement did not just reveal their interest and

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58 “Zehn Thesen,” Atom-Express.

59 Arbeitskreis Umweltschutz an der Universität Freiburg, “Freiburger KKW-Gegner!” ASB 9.4.1.1 XVII.
concern in anti-reactor actions taking place 800 kilometers to the north. It also highlighted the significant differences in the development of the anti-nuclear struggle in the Upper Rhine Valley on the one hand and in marshes of the Lower Elbe on the other. While Rhenish activists succeeded in launching yet another successful anti-nuclear occupation in early 1977, reactor opponents along the Elbe had proven unable even to undertake a joint protest. Looking to the ongoing anti-nuclear struggle Upper Rhine Valley during the later-1970s, therefore, may shed light on the nature of anti-nuclear protest in northern Germany at this time. More significantly, this perspective will help us to understand the struggle to come up with a more viable means of anti-nuclear action that transcended the local level.

The anti-nuclear movement in the Upper Rhine Valley remained remarkably strong and continued to play an important role in local politics long after the conclusion of the Wyhl occupation. The prolonged struggle in the Southwest highlights the significance of the long process by which individuals engaged in anti-reactor activism became both ardent opponents of nuclear energy and committed activists. Almost contradictorily, the story of anti-nuclear activism in the Upper Rhine Valley seems to suggest that it was the very experience of working against reactors that made the people of southern Baden and the Alsace into such stalwart opponents of nuclear energy. By participating in numerous anti-nuclear actions, people along the Rhine became surer of themselves as activists and more deeply committed to environmental ideals. It was these changes that underlay the efficacy of continued anti-nuclear protests in the region, despite the new anti-nuclear
strategies of government officials and police. Significantly, however, these locally successful actions had lost much of their salience outside Upper Rhine Valley.

The long term effects of Upper Rhine Valley activism were perhaps most evident amongst individuals and families. Annemarie Sacherer, a vintner in the village of Oberrotweil, was asked in 1981 to describe the way that she and her family changed on account of their participation in the anti-reactor struggle. The transformation she described could hardly have been more fundamental. “We came to realize,” she explained, “that the values of health, life, and peace are not to be taken for granted.” This re-assessment coincided with Sacherer’s changing perception of politics, since she had now seen that these basic values “may not even be guaranteed by democratically elected governments.” In 1975, therefore, Sacherer determined to run for the village council in Oberrotweil in order to change the system from the grassroots up.60

It was not just Sacherer’s faith in the government that was shaken on account of the struggle at Wyhl, however. “The discussion about atomic energy,” caused her and her family “to open up their eyes.” All at once, they saw environmental destruction all around them. The re-structuring of local vineyards, which they had formerly celebrated as a boon for local viticulture, was now grouped together with

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60 Annemarie Sacherer, ”Zehn Jahre danach,” Wyhl. Der Widerstand geht weiter. Der Bürgerprotest gegen das Kernkraftwerk von 1976 bis zum Mannheimer Prozeß, ed. Christoph Büchel, Irmgard Schneider, and Bernd Nüssler (Freiburg: Dreisam-Verlag, 1982), 38. Sacherer won election to the village council. Walter Mossmann saw her as one of the most important anti-nuclear activists of his age group (i.e. around 30 years old in the mid-1970s). Walter Mossmann, realistisch sein: das unmöglich verlangen. Wahrheitsgetreu gefälschte Erinnerungen (Berlin: der Freitag, 2009), 186.
“exaggerated road construction, pollution of the Rhine, and the reckless use of pesticides” as wasteful and destructive. This newfound consciousness of environmental threats led Sacherer to begin baking whole-grain bread, adopting organic gardening methods, and utilizing medicinal plants that she had previously considered weeds. It was, in other words, on the basis of their experience speaking out against the Wyhl reactor project that the Sacherers’ family values began to shift.\textsuperscript{61} Such transformations occurred throughout the region, where farmers and vintners had begun to describe themselves as environmentalists and to act on that conviction.

The fact that the Sacherers became involved in the anti-nuclear struggle before their ideas about politics and the environment fundamentally changed may seem backwards, but a similar process was clearly taking place for others in the region, as well. Werner Mildebrath, an electrician in the village of Sasbach, was the sort “young, crazy avant-gardist” who faced the “scornful laughter of the neighbors” for his dabbling in new technologies and gadgetry. At the same time as mass protests were taking place in the Wyhl forest, Mildebrath pieced together a solid, homemade “solar thermal system” and affixed it to his roof. By 1975, “a number of reactor opponents in Sasbach, Weisweil, [and] Königschafhausen” had overcome their scorn for Mildebrath’s tinkering. They, too, “had solar systems designed by [Mildebrath] put on their own roofs.”\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{61} Annemarie Sacherer, “Zehn Jahre danach,” 38.

\textsuperscript{62} Mossmann, \textit{realistisch sein}, 187 – 188.
Local interest in alternative energy became even more pronounced after the occupation. In 1976, the region’s first Solar Energy Expo was held in Mildebrath’s hometown of Sasbach. More than 12,000 people attended this event though it was held in a small village far from Freiburg.\(^63\) The exhibition was held again in Sasbach in 1977 and 1978, before moving to larger venues in Freiburg and Constance in the early 1980s.\(^64\) As this growing interest in solar energy suggests, changes in the ideational landscape of the Upper Rhine Valley, much like personal transformations, did not so much precipitate the initial round of anti-nuclear protests as they reflected those protests’ consequences throughout the region.

The Wyhl Forest Community College, which was created first and foremost as a means of keeping occupiers on the reactor construction site on chilly spring evenings, is perhaps the best example of the way that the political landscape of the region was changed by the Wyhl occupation. The Community College endured for more than a dozen years after the conclusion of the occupation.\(^65\) Meetings rotated between Kaiserstuhl village pubs and locations in Freiburg. The film screenings and evenings of folk songs that had so been successful in attracting local people to the Wyhl forest continued to highlight the monthly programs. At the same time, however, the Community College also hosted technical and political discussions.

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\(^{64}\) Georg Löser, “Alternativen und Arbeitsplätze statt Kernenergie,” in *Wyhl* (see note 60), 66.

\(^{65}\) Organizers created more than 80 monthly programs and set-up some 800 meetings. Frank Baum, interview with the author, Staufen, 19 February 2010.
Topics like “Citizens’ Initiatives, Parties, and New Energy Policies,” “Dialect as a weapon?” and even “Why do workers Demonstrate FOR nuclear reactors” attracted crowds to the Community College long after the occupation had ended. Their interest in such topics clearly attests to local people’s continuing engagement in the ongoing struggle against nuclear reactors.66

Though the Community College was no longer needed as a tool to keep protesters on the site, it had come to serve as an important forum for discussion and the transfer of information from the region and from elsewhere. It also remained a meeting place for local people concerned about nuclear energy. Its events kept people throughout the region up to date on the ongoing Wyhl legal proceedings. Guest speakers from outside the region also continued to come to the Upper Rhine Valley and to inform local people about anti-nuclear struggles taking place elsewhere in the Federal Republic and even beyond the country’s borders.67

Like the Community College, Was Wir Wollen, the “occupiers’ newspaper,” remained in existence after the site was cleared. Nevertheless, changes to WWW reflected the significance of the loss of the occupied site, and the difficulties of preserving the close communications that had existed there. The interval between editions of the newspaper grew much greater after protesters left the site. In April 1976, just six months after the occupation ended, WWW reported that re-locating


67 Baum, interview.
from the Wyhl forest to Freiburg had caused the staff to “see problems at a distance differently than on the Kaiserstuhl.” This change of scenery had led to “urban-focused discussions” and caused alterations in the style and content of the newspaper. Thus, while institutions like the Wyhl Forest Community College and WWW endured, links between urban and rural people became markedly less vibrant than they had been during the occupation.

Despite its growing distance from the formerly occupied sites, however, the newspaper continued to bill itself as the “Occupiers’ Newspaper – Marckolsheim – Wyhl – Kaiseraugst – ……….” More than just a statement of where the movement had been, this masthead reflected local people’s readiness to engage in another site occupation. It was borne out in 1977 when the newspaper added the Alsatian village of Gerstheim to this list of local occupations.

This new occupation began in late January 1977, just one week after the EdF erected a 70-meter tall meteorological measuring tower near Gerstheim. The tower had been built on the site of a hydro-power plant controlled by the utility, but the EdF was soon forced to acknowledge that the measurement station was intended to collect meteorological data for a 180-hectacre nuclear park that would include reprocessing facilities. Local people responded, as one activist put it, with a “textbook occupation.” On 26 January 1977, one-hundred and fifty activists occupied the area around the tower, forcing EdF technicians to disperse. Much like the Marckolsheim occupation, this gathering also drew the support of local officials. Village councilors and the mayors of both Gerstheim and nearby Erbheim came to

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the occupied site and called for a mass demonstration. On 30 January 1977, more than 5,000 activists, including “many Alemannic people from the right bank of the Rhine” traveled to rural Gerstheim to rally against the project. These protesters demanded that the EdF release its exact plans for the site and remove the measuring station. A defiant spokesman for the utility declared, however, that the “measurement tower will not be taken down. Not in a half year, not in two years!”

The occupiers, too, dug in for the long haul. Very quickly, the Gerstheim occupation was organized along the lines of the Marckolsheim and Wyhl occupations that had preceded it. “Naturally,” one activist explained, “a Friendship House was built.” This meeting place “was always full during the obligatory Sunday events.” As the occupation continued, new citizens’ initiatives formed in the Badensian villages directly across the Rhine from Gerstheim in order to organize participation in the occupation. Finally, in August 1977, the Prefect of the Lower Rhine Department announced that the “Weather Station” in Gerstheim was going to be removed; plans for the nuclear park would not proceed. Remarkably, despite the tremendous success of the “textbook occupation” at Gerstheim, and despite the fact that it was taking place at the same time as attempts to occupy reactor sites in northern Germany were failing due to heavy police fortifications, the Gerstheim occupation received relatively little coverage outside the Upper Rhine Valley.

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70 Peringer, “Gerstheim – eine Bilderbuchplatzbesetzung.”
The Gerstheim occupation’s lack of resonance outside the region sheds light on two important aspects of the readily apparent division between anti-nuclear activism in Northern Germany on the one hand and in the Upper Rhine Valley on the other. While the Gerstheim occupation was so successful because people in the region were well versed in the tactics and technique of site occupation, it would not have been possible if hundreds of heavily armed police officers, not to mention border patrol units and attack helicopters, had been mobilized at Gerstheim. Thus, the Gerstheim occupation’s very success evinced the problem that anti-nuclear activists in northern Germany were confronting in 1977. Namely, while occupations worked well in the Upper Rhine Valley, where protesters were willing to confront government officials before reactor plans were even formally announced, they were not necessarily the best means for preventing the construction of nuclear facilities elsewhere.

It was this realization to which north German anti-nuclear activists were coming in the spring and summer of 1977 as they stepped back to consider the state of their movement during the “reprieve” after the extraordinarily violent 19 March demonstration at Grohnde. Two years after the Wyhl occupation, in other words, that action seemed all but spent as a model for future protests outside of the Upper Rhine Valley. Yet, both within this region and all across the Federal Republic, “Modell Wyhl” had served as a means of recruiting new activists to the anti-nuclear cause, and in the process it had deepened West Germans’ concern about nuclear energy and the environment.
Conclusion

The “example of Wyhl” both precipitated increased discussion of nuclear energy and fostered the growth of anti-nuclear activism throughout the Federal Republic during the later 1970s. More precisely put, without Wyhl the protests at Brokdorf and Grohnde would not have happened the way that they did. Residents of the Wilster Marsh had their doubts about the proposed Brokdorf reactor project, and they worked tirelessly to force government officials to take seriously their concerns. Yet their determination to occupy the site in fall 1976 was not the logical continuation of this early activism. While the tactic of site occupation had developed deep roots in the Upper Rhine Valley, roots which spanned the Rhine and thus incorporated French models for activism into the genealogy of a West German protest movement, occupation was rather rootless elsewhere in the Federal Republic.

The different trajectories of anti-nuclear protest in the Upper Rhine Valley and elsewhere are perhaps the best evidence of the different ways that occupation functioned and resonated in different places. In the Upper Rhine Valley, the continuing success of this model was due in large part to the way that local people approached anti-nuclear activism by the late 1970s. As we have seen, their lives and values had been significantly changed by their anti-nuclear experiences. Not only were they strongly opposed to nuclear energy, they were also deeply committed to creating workable alternatives to nuclear projects. Their willingness to quickly occupy sites and to turn these liberated areas into veritable outdoor community centers made this tactic effective in the region. Having released Modell Wyhl into
the world, the people of the Upper Rhine Valley continued to develop their own concept of anti-nuclear protest and to incorporate activism and environmentalism into their daily lives. Despite their best efforts, however, they did not always succeed in expressing these experiences to activists elsewhere, or in creating a universalizable model of anti-nuclear activism.

A lack of familiarity with occupation does not fully explain the failures of later occupation attempts in West Germany, however. It is important to note that in addition to the high profile failures at Brokdorf and Grohnde, there were also less well known yet tactically more successful occupations elsewhere in the Federal Republic. Short-lived occupations took place at proposed nuclear sites near Lichtenmoor and Hamm during 1976. At Lichtenmoor, by striking early in the siting process, fifty protesters managed to stop the work of measurement crew. Meanwhile at Hamm, protesters built up an encampment next to the reactor site and attempted to recreate the sort of structures and institutions that had defined life on the occupied site at Wyhl.71

Perhaps the most successful West German occupation to take place in the aftermath of Wyhl was tactically similar to the Hamm encampment. This “cooling tower site occupation” was carried out by members of the nonviolent action groups at Grohnde during the summer of 1977. By occupying a piece of territory outside the heavily guarded perimeter fence, which surrounded the reactor building but not the entirety of the expansive construction site, the nonviolent action groups were

71 50 people stopped measurement work at Lichtenmoor on 16 July 1976. Protesters set-up an encampment next to the Hamm construction site in August and September of 1976. Paul, ...und auch nicht anderswo, 50.
able to avoid brutal confrontations with police. By occupying only a part of the site that was not currently under construction, in other words, these activists created a situation that allowed their occupation to continue for several months.

The failure of the occupations that succeeded Wyhl, then, was due not so much to the fact that activists could not actually create occupations that followed some aspects of the Wyhl model. Instead, the problem was that these locally executed actions no longer had the same sort of global ramifications as had the Wyhl occupation. Trans-local action, however, was exactly what was needed in order to fully challenge the Federal atomic program—not to mention the German state’s repression of protesters.

By the spring of 1977, as we have seen, a broad swathe of north German anti-nuclear activists from the KB to the Göttingen Working Group had realized occupation’s lack of global effects. They were in agreement that new tactics were necessary if the federal government’s nuclear program were to be stopped. It was to this end that representatives of a wide range of anti-nuclear groups called for a Federal Conference of Reactor Opponents in May 1977. At the conference, more than 250 activists representing a broad swathe of local anti-nuclear groups met and discussed the state of the movement.72 In coming together as a federal movement, these activists had finally adopted Jo Leinen’s suggestion of early 1976 that reactor opponents create an “overarching environmental concept” and find ways to voice their concerns at the national level without entering into partisan politics.

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In and of itself, this realization—not to mention the decision to act on it—shows a marked difference from many of these same individuals’ position the previous fall. Those who had joined the movement after Brokdorf were concerned primarily with police brutality and site fortifications, not nuclear energy itself. It is unsurprising then, that developing a workable alternative to exemplary local actions as the best means of advocating change at the federal level was not an immediate consequence of the Wyhl struggle. As had been the case in the early days of anti-nuclear protest in the Upper Rhine Valley, a variety of failed attempts paved the way towards later successes.
Conclusion

Leaving the Site: 
Anti-nuclear politics on the national stage

The “reprieve” from perimeter fence protests announced in *Arbeiterkampf* and *Atom-Express* did not last very long. In July 1977, just four months after the brutal battle at Grohnde, 60,000 anti-nuclear activists from all across Western Europe descended on the village of Malville in Southern France. Among them were thousands of West German activists who had come to participate in a protest against the construction of the “Super-Phênix” Fast Breeder Reactor. Like the Northern German authorities, however, the French government was well prepared for the onslaught. The 5,000 troops assigned to protect the site, whose ranks included *Gardes Mobiles* and paratroopers, were armed with grenades and tear gas and outfitted with helicopters and amphibious vehicles. Despite this overwhelming force, anti-nuclear activists laid siege to the site. In the ensuing battle, one protester, the teacher Vital Michalon, was killed. Several others lost limbs. Hundreds more were injured.¹

On both sides of the Rhine, the bitter violence at Malville further dampened the erstwhile allure of site occupation as a means of anti-nuclear protest. In France, in fact, the attempt to occupy the Super-Phenix site was the last of its kind. Vital

Michalon’s death and the hundreds of casualties inflicted on protesters by heavily armed police played a major part in the turn away from this tactic in France.\(^2\) In fact, Alain Touraine has argued that along with the crushing electoral defeat experienced by ecological candidates in the 1978 national elections, the disorganization that led to such bitter violence at Malville “demonstrated the inability of the anti-nuclear current to organize itself into a political force.”\(^3\)

Violence had also taken a prominent place in the West German news, but it was the Red Army Faction—not Malville—that dominated the headlines there. The RAF began a spree of violence in April 1977 after life sentences were handed down to three of the Left-wing terrorist organization’s members. In retaliation, RAF members kidnapped and later killed Hanns Martin Schleyer, president of both West Germany’s Employers’ Association and the Federation of German Industry. While holding Schleyer hostage, the group highjacked a Lufthansa Boeing 737 and flew the jet to Mogadishu, Somalia. The historian Jeremy Varon has described this so-called “German Autumn” of 1977 as one of the most dramatic episodes in “West Germany’s only war;” that is, the war that the Federal Republic waged against “self-styled ‘urban guerillas’ seeking its overthrow.” In a funeral oration for the murdered


business-leader, Federal President Walter Scheel described the period of Schleyer’s kidnapping as “the worst [six weeks] in the history of the Federal Republic.”

The pall cast across the country by Schleyer’s kidnapping, and the increasingly obvious futility of protests at reactor fences overshadowed anti-nuclear protests in the FRG, but they did not obliterate the anti-nuclear movement. Walter Mossmann remembered that anti-reactor citizens’ initiatives actually, “drew far more interest than they could bear” during the summer of 1977. “The more acceptable to the majority that the citizens’ initiatives became,” he explained, “the fewer new ideas they had, the more ritualized and futile the demos at the perimeter fences became, the more martially the fighters appeared in the arena, and the more dim-witted were their victory announcements.” Thus, even an impressive influx of interest did not solve the problems facing anti-nuclear activists outside the Upper Rhine Valley. New ideas were needed to move beyond site fights and towards a united, trans-local movement.

As we have seen, actions in the Upper Rhine Valley were successful in large part because they built a transnational community. Even anti-reactor protests at sites located far from national borders, like Brokdorf and Malville, incorporated people from across Western Europe. Yet these forms of protest did not contain within themselves obvious models for enduring cooperation beyond the regional

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5 Mossmann, *realistisch sein*, 245.
level. In May 1977, West German activists organized a Federal Congress of Reactor Opponents organized as one means of working through the difficult link between local action and trans-local thinking. Much of the Congress, however, which took place in Hannover, was consumed with heated procedural discussions. When the delegates finally moved on to discussions of specific proposals, the agenda was dominated by theoretical resolutions put forward by representatives of the KB and several other Communist splinter groups. Thus, Atom-Express reported, “there would be no sense in detailing the many resolutions, since they will have no effect on the further struggle against reactors... In conclusion, one can say that this Federal Conference was no step forward.” What is more, the Conference was a definitive step away from further transnational anti-nuclear cooperation.

Though the Hannover conference did not further West German activists’ search for a new, more workable mode of action, there was forward motion elsewhere. Just 35 kilometers outside the city, Carl Beddermann was discussing his plans to create an Umweltschutz Partei (Environmental Protection Party – USP) with fellow members of the anti-nuclear citizens’ initiative in Schwarmstedt. Like many other reactor opponents, Beddermann had been deeply frustrated by the Grohnde demonstration of 19 March 1977. Site occupations, he thought, were incapable of achieving the movement’s goals. Perhaps more importantly, the 36-year old state-

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employed financial attorney felt like the movement was “being discredited by the big police interventions.”

Beddermann’s USP was primarily of interest to people in small Lower Saxony towns “near planned atomic reactors or other major projects.” In many of these places, activists who had experienced police brutality and the discrediting of the anti-nuclear movement saw Beddermann’s new party as a respectable alternative to site occupation. In preparation for the 1978 elections to Lower Saxony’s state parliament, the USP merged with another recently created environmental party and became the Grüne Liste Umweltschutz (Green List for Environmental Protection – GLU). The new party launched the 1978 campaign with focused recruiting efforts at sites of local anti-nuclear protest. GLU branches “shot up like mushrooms” in these targeted districts during January and February 1978.

Despite the impressive growth that followed the party’s successful recruiting efforts, the GLU did not solve the anti-nuclear movement’s problems in and of itself. The same infighting between reactor opponents of various political stripes bogged

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10 Ibid., 63.

11 In fact, the GLU’s founder, Georg Otto, had originally founded a district branch of the USP in Hildesheim. A dispute arose as a result of the October 1977 local elections in Hildesheim, and Otto’s group chose to contest those elections as the GLU. Because of their success (the GLU received 1.2% of the vote and thus elected one member to the district parliament), Beddermann’s group merged once again with Otto’s and took the GLU name. Ibid., 64 – 65.

12 Ibid., 73.
down attempts to grow the party beyond rural regions.\textsuperscript{13} Still, GLU activists were able to prevent the formation of a rival \textit{Bunte Liste} (Rainbow List), intended to draw the support of Left-leaning reactor opponents in the upcoming election. In so doing, the GLU managed to attract leftists to itself, briefly overcoming some of the tensions between various anti-nuclear factions.\textsuperscript{14} The strengthened party scored a “notable success” at the 4 June 1978 State Parliament election, where it received 3.9\% of the vote across Lower Saxony.\textsuperscript{15} Though it was noteworthy, West Germany’s “5\% hurdle” meant that this result was insufficient to actually elect any GLU candidates to parliament.\textsuperscript{16} Just like protests at perimeter fences, the GLU could do relatively little to actually stop the West German nuclear program.

In spite of its initial failure to gain seats in Lower Saxony’s \textit{Landtag}, the GLU’s 1978 campaign was significant for two reasons. First, in receiving 3.9\% of the statewide vote, the GLU positioned itself as the most important minor party in the state. Its result outstripped the eight other minor parties participating in the

\textsuperscript{13} The KB, for example, denounced an USP meeting in Hannover that was intended to bring in activists from across the state. The Communist organization alleged that the meeting’s participants were “predominantly Right-radical or at least open to Right radicalism.” As such, its own representatives spent most of the meeting criticizing the new organization and attempting to derail the proceedings. “‘Umweltschutzpartei’ in Vorbereitung?” \textit{Arbeiterkampf} (No. 105), 31 May 1977.

\textsuperscript{14} Environmental parties in Hamburg and Hessen were unable to avoid such splits.

\textsuperscript{15} Hallensleben, \textit{Von der Grünen Liste}, 97.

\textsuperscript{16} According to \S 6 of the FRG’s Federal Election Law, a party must receive at least 5\% of the vote in order to be apportioned seats in the Bundestag. The same law is applied in most states, including Lower Saxony.
election, who together garnered only 1.2% of the vote. Second, the electoral campaign suggested a new direction for the anti-nuclear movement. As a result, during the final years of the 1970s, “numerous local and regional green electoral movements were founded.” Just 18 months after the Lower Saxony elections, the *Bremer Grüne Liste* (Bremen Green List) received 5.14% of the vote in that city-state’s October 1979 elections and became the first Green party represented in a state parliament.

By its very nature, the creation of Green parties directed the anti-nuclear movement back towards national politics and established state structures—and thus away from new transnationally-minded coalitions. In fact, even before the Bremen election took place, members of local and regional Green electoral groups met in Frankfurt in March 1979 to contemplate a coordinated national electoral campaign. The impetus for their meeting was not a typical federal election, but rather the first direct election to the European parliament, which was to be held that June. As had been the case in the Upper Rhine valley, thinking and acting beyond national borders offered access to a wide range of new opportunities. In fact, it was the special nature of the European election that convinced the “representatives of

17. The GLU also nearly matched the result of the F.D.P., which received only 4.2% and thus lost its place in the state parliament. Hallensleben, *Von der Grünen Liste*, 97.


19. Successes followed in Baden-Württemberg in 1980, where the Greens won 5.3% of the vote and Berlin in 1981 where they won 7.2%. For Green electoral returns at the state level, see Andrei S. Markovits and Philip Gorski, *The German Left: Red, Green, and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 291.
various citizens’ initiatives and organizations” as well as the delegates from a range of Green slates and state parties, who had many reservations about cooperating with one another, to reconsider their concerns about founding a centralized national political party.²⁰

There were two reasons that the European election offered Green activists a special opportunity to leave behind their doubts and work together. First, the election itself stood outside the “power politics” of normal national elections. If a Green party were to garner even a few percent of the vote in a Bundestag election, the new party might actually alter the electoral landscape enough to push the ruling SPD out of power and thus replace Chancellor Helmut Schmidt with the arch-conservative Bavarian Premier Franz Josef Strauß. Such political calculus was irrelevant in the European elections, however, since the European Parliament was largely powerless and it would not actually elect a government for Europe.

Second, a special exception to West German electoral law allowed for “alternative political associations,” as well as established parties, to stand in the European elections. On account of these two conditions, Silke Mende has shown, those present at Frankfurt determined to establish the Sonstige Politische Vereinigung: Die Grünen (Alternative Political Association: The Greens – SPV: Die Grünen) and enter the 1979 election.²¹ They named Petra Kelly, the EEC official

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²⁰ In fact, many of the Left-leaning “Green” organizations did not even take part at this initial congress. Mende, “Nicht rechts, nicht links, sondern vorn,” 284.

²¹ Ibid., 282.
who had become involved in the anti-nuclear movement via her visit to the occupied site at Wyhl, their lead candidate.22

Those present at the March 1979 Frankfurt meeting where SPV – Die Grünen was founded were not the only anti-nuclear activists with concerns about the creation of a Green political party. Throughout the late 1970s, many activists felt that forming a party would actually increase tensions and damage the movement. Walter Mossmann, for example, was not against running anti-nuclear candidates, but he was also unconvinced that the structures of a new party were necessary to do so. Creating a "movement party," he feared, "could blur the boundaries between the network of citizens’ initiatives (which cut across all parties!) and the new parliamentary party."23

By 1979, Mossmann and other proponents of the citizens’ initiatives had also found an effective means of bringing anti-nuclear activism from the site to the centers of power. Their strategy stemmed from Lüchow-Dannenberg, the most sparsely populated county in the Federal Republic. Located in the easternmost reaches of Lower Saxony and thus directly on the border with the German Democratic Republic, the county seemed just as politically remote as the rural Upper Rhine Valley. For this reason, it had been announced in February 1977 as the possible site for a nuclear waste reprocessing center and storage facility.

Thus, at the same time as protesters clashed with police at Brokdorf and Grohnde, people living near the town of Gorleben in Lüchow-Dannenberg County

22 See Chapter Six for more on Kelly’s role at Wyhl.

23 Mossmann, realistisch sein, 246.
began to organize a smaller, less violent anti-nuclear campaign. Since there was no
collection site in Gorleben to occupy in 1977—and therefore also no site to
protect—the initial protests in Lüchow-Dannenberg could not follow the
confrontational interpretation of Modell Wyhl en vogue elsewhere. As a result, the
KB left Gorleben to the “local citizens’ initiatives, in which,” it complained,
“bourgeois forces were clearly in the driver’s seat.”

Though the protests at Gorleben were dismissed by dogmatic leftists in early
1977, Atom-Express could report the following winter that “the work of the Citizens’
Initiative for Environmental Protection Lüchow-Dannenberg continues with great
engagement despite all the rumors.” This engagement, Atom-Express explained, “is
not only evident in the actions and activities taking place on the site of the planned
Reprocessing Facility, but also in the growing and recently strengthened outreach
work.” During the June 1978 Lower Saxony State Parliament elections, the success
of this work became obvious when the GLU received 17.8% of the vote in Lüchow-
Dannenberg—a result nearly 14% higher than its statewide average.

Yet activists in the region were not content to vote Green. They sought other
ways to get their message to the state capital. On 25 March 1979 opponents of the
proposed Gorleben nuclear facilities mounted their tractors and set out on a week-
long “Trek” to Hannover. Three days into their journey, Reactor Two at the Three

24 “Einheit und Kampfkraft der Anti-AKW-Bewegung stärken,” Arbeiterkampf (Nr.
100), 8 March 1977.

25 “Gorleben,” Atom-Express (No. 5), November / December 1977.

26 Hallensleben, Von der Grünen Liste, 97.
Mile Island nuclear facility near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania underwent a partial meltdown. Reports that this accident had led to the discharge of radioactive steam as well as 100,000 liters of water “with a radioactivity eight times the deadly level” highlighted the next morning’s news in Europe.27 By the time protesters from Gorleben reached Hannover on 31 March, their ranks had swelled to include more than 100,000 activists.28

The near meltdown in Harrisburg undoubtedly contributed greatly to the impressive size of the protest in Hannover. Yet, it was by planning to bring their fight to the centrally located state capital long before the accident that anti-nuclear activists had created the opportunity for such an immediate and massive response to the disaster at Three Mile Island. Physically departing the rural site in Gorleben and taking the anti-nuclear struggle to Hannover had opened up new modes of trans-local action for anti-nuclear activists and they did not look back. Just a few months later, on 7 October 1979, Walter Mossmann addressed a crowd of 150,000 anti-nuclear protesters at the Hofgarten in Bonn. As “speaker of the West German citizens’ initiatives,” Mossmann used his speech as an opportunity to “proclaim ‘resistance at every level’” and thus, he added, to “belittle the Green Party.”29


29 Mossmann, realistisch sein, 248.
Yet Mossmann’s call to take the resistance to every level—including the federal government in Bonn—meant that his grassroots strategy had much in common with the parliamentary initiatives of the Greens. Petra Kelly, *SPV – Die Grünen*’s lead candidate in 1979, counted the string of protests that had taken place at “LIP, Larzac, Marckolsheim, Wyhl, Brokdorf, and Kaiseraugst” as a “political and social chain reaction.” This reaction’s ultimate objective, she declared, was the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The direct election to the European parliament, therefore, was to be fought as a “decisive battle against atomic power plants.”

Experience garnered at rural reactor sites, Kelly proposed, ought to propel anti-nuclear protests to parliament.

Attempting to recast the narrative of localized anti-nuclear activism towards a new goal was certainly nothing new in the Federal Republic in 1979. As we have seen, all sorts of activists had harnessed anti-reactor struggles to their own ends during the 1970s. Yet the visions espoused by Mossmann and Kelly, unlike those of 1976 and 1977, clearly resonated with people across the Federal Republic. Though they directed the movement towards centers of power within the Federal Republic, they talked about activism on multiple levels and attempted to maintain a transnational outlook. Like the massive crowds in Bonn and Hannover, the Greens’ impressive 1979 election returns speak for themselves. Running “without the usual party machinery...even without motor cars,” the party collected the votes of nearly 900,000 West Germans in their first national campaign, a result equal to 3.2% of the

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ballots cast. As these figures show, Mossmann and Kelly articulated two strategies capable of bringing anti-reactor activism off the site and recruiting broad swathes of the West German population to take part in a national movement against nuclear energy.

**From the Upper Rhine Valley to Bonn? Evaluating the part of Rhenish anti-nuclear protest in the creation of the West German Green Party**

The fact that anti-nuclear activists had to leave Modell Wyhl behind in order to build a national movement raises questions about the lasting significance of the protests that had taken place in the Upper Rhine Valley earlier in the 1970s. The organization of massive anti-nuclear protests in Hannover and Bonn, not to mention the formation of a nationally organized Green Party, were certainly not the foreordained conclusions of those localized protests. On the contrary, Bonn was not even on the radar screen of the protesters who worked tirelessly to stop a string of reactor projects in Southwestern Germany, the French Alsace, and Northwest Switzerland. As we have seen, their movement was a regional one. Rather than taking their fight to far-off government centers, they imagined themselves as an “Alemannic community” in order to circumvent the control of Stuttgart and Paris. It was by declaring their independence from politics-as-usual that these activists built such a broad-based movement. These aspects of the movement excited even

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31 Petra Kelly, “My dear Friends and Comrades” (Brussels, March 24, 1979). PKA 540.6. Emphasis from original. Due to the five percent hurdle, this result was not enough for the Greens to win seats in Strasbourg. It did qualify the party for more than 4.5 Million Marks in Federal election financing, however.
outsiders with no interest in nuclear energy and drew West Germans’ attention to Wyhl.

It is perhaps for this very reason that the fate of the Wyhl reactor itself faded from view even as the Rhenish movement became increasingly visible. People in the Upper Rhine Valley continued their struggle against the Wyhl reactor well into the 1980s. As late as March 1982, when the Mannheim Court finally reached a decision allowing for construction at Wyhl to proceed, there seemed to be a real chance that construction would continue as planned. In response, local people mobilized once again. “Spontaneous demonstrations” took place immediately after the Mannheim verdict was announced. Over the following months, activists collected tens of thousands of new signatures against the project and filed further legal challenges. In the meantime, it had become increasingly clear that the Wyhl reactor was not necessary for the state’s electricity supply. Rather than formally scrapping the reactor project therefore, Premier Lothar Späth, who had succeeded Filbinger in 1978, simply announced that there was no longer “time pressure” to build the project and demurred from taking the matter up in the state parliament. As a result, the reactor was never built.32

As we have seen, however, resistance in the region was about far more than the Wyhl reactor by the late 1970s. Far from being read as a retreat into “post material” matters, therefore, I find that anti-nuclear activism should be considered a

bold and inclusive means of contesting a range of issues, including overtly material concerns and also democracy matters. The first protests against nuclear reactors were intended to address the eminently “material” problem of farmers’ threatened livelihoods. Growing distrust of government officials and even doubts about the Federal Republic’s democratic system may not be material issues per se, but they also should not be construed as “post-material” concerns about self-fulfillment through free expression. These concerns, after all, were not derived from some sort of abstract will to express oneself, but rather from the base need to protect one’s livelihood and one’s interests from the capricious authority of the state.

All this does not mean, however, that “post-material” environmental values did not become increasingly important during the 1970s. In fact, it was precisely the experience of working against reactors and thinking about their potential to re-shape the physical and democratic landscape, that furthered anti-nuclear activists’ turn towards environmentalism during the 1970s. The experience of activists in the Upper Rhine Valley best evinces the sort of deep interest in the environment that grew out of anti-nuclear activism. Kaiserstuhl vintners, for example, who had initially protested against the Breisach and Wyhl reactors only because they considered the projects a threat to their livelihoods, were using medicinal herbs and

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33 Heiner Meulemann describes West Germans’ desire for more democracy as a sort of value change. He makes the case for example that a “value change to more co-determination [occurred] in the 1960s.” Yet the demands on their democracy made by anti-nuclear protesters stemmed not from an abstract desire for a more democratic system, but rather they were first and foremost a criticism of officials’ behavior. Thus, Rhenish anti-reactor activists’ demands for democratic reform grew out of their experience as protesters. Heiner Meulemann, Werte und Wertewandel. Zur Indentität einer geteilten und wieder vereinten Nation (Weinheim: Juventa, 1996), 97.
having solar panels installed on their roofs by the late 1970s. They even began to voice concerns about the environmental impact of the re-organization of local vineyards, an undertaking that had formerly been considered an enormous boon for local viticulture.

Other protesters experienced similar changes. The many young leftists and urban activists who became involved in Northern German anti-reactor protests due to their desire to join a popular movement with apparent revolutionary potential soon began publishing sophisticated informational updates about the dangers of nuclear energy and connecting concerns about reactors to other problems of growth and industrial development. In both of these cases, it was the experience of protesting reactor projects and facing the government’s undemocratic responses that led to the growing interest in environmental matters.

This newly emergent interest in the environment has interesting parallels with the “light green” environmentalism that the historian Michael Bess argues has emerged in France. Bess writes of “four particularly pronounced features” that define the French green movement. These are:

A positive and integrative conception of the human place within nature; moderation of goals and methods, coupled with earnest adherence to the principles of democratic change; ardent anti-authoritarianism; and a critical but still enthusiastic embrace of modernity.34

Though Bess asserts that these features define a “a distinctively ‘Gallic green’ identity,” his description of a green movement that links together environmental matters with other issues seems to extend beyond France. Indeed, West German

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ideas about nature seem also to have developed in concert with a deep interest in democracy and anti-authoritarianism.

In spite of its moniker, in other words, the anti-nuclear movement was not built around a single issue. Nor did it always approach nuclear energy from what we might consider a “deep green” environmental perspective. Barely concealed beneath anti-nuclear activists’ focus on reactors was their deep disappointment in West German democracy. At first it was the highhandedness of government officials that connected concerns about nuclear energy with doubts in the democratic system. Police brutality at construction sites, in Wyhl and later elsewhere, strengthened this nexus. These selfsame concerns remained important as the movement grew beyond the Upper Rhine Valley. In fact, Andrei Markovits and Philip Gorski argue, “radical democratic principles” were of “central importance” to the founders of Lower Saxony’s GLU and other state Green parties. Yet these parties, they concede, presented themselves as “ecology” parties not parties of “radical democracy.”35

Accordingly, Markovits and Gorski ask, “why did the GLU continue to present itself as an ecology party?” In light of the deep connections between nuclear concerns and democracy matters that I have described throughout this dissertation, the same question might be asked of the anti-nuclear movement. More specifically put, if democracy was so important to anti-nuclear activists, why did they not choose to present themselves as democratic reformers first and foremost? At some key turning points in the movement, of course, anti-nuclear activists did focus on

35 Markovits and Gorski, The German Left, 194.
democracy over nuclear energy. When they walked out of the Wyhl licensing hearing in 1974, for example, reactor opponents returned with a coffin inscribed with the word “Democracy.” They did not choose to emphasize some potential environmental consequence of the proposed reactor. Yet incidents like this one drew the most outrage from the press and other observers, who believed that in leaving the government-sponsored licensing process and symbolically mourning democracy’s passing, protesters had stepped “out of bounds.” The more explicitly activists challenged the efficacy of West German democracy, they more they exposed themselves to attack.

Appearing to focus narrowly on anti-nuclear matters had other benefits, as well. Speaking for the GLU and other state-level Green parties, Markovits and Gorski answer their rhetorical question by explaining that, “The primacy – and ambiguity – of ecology served as a unifying formula for both Right and Left, a lowest common denominator between two otherwise hostile camps.” This answer could also be used to describe the history of anti-nuclear protest throughout the 1970s. That this movement brought together the Left and the Right, urban and rural people, youthful students and middle-aged farmers is readily evident in my study of protest in the Upper Rhine Valley and beyond. It was precisely in moments where this cooperation began to founder that the movement itself began to struggle.

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36 Ibid., 195. Silke Mende’s findings echo this analysis of the importance of ecology as a binding agent for the nascent Green Party. She sees the “debate about the primacy of ecology” as the “decisive fork in the road at which Herbert Gruhl and his numerous followers...left the party.” Mende, “Nicht rechts, nicht links, sondern vorn,” 447.
As Markovits and Gorski suggest, the very ambiguity of nuclear energy did much to hold the diverse movement together. Like “ecology,” nuclear energy—and therefore anti-nuclear politics—was without a doubt an ambiguous concept for most West Germans early in the decade. As we have seen, few Germans knew more than the fact that atomic fission could be used to produce energy at the outset of the 1970s. Even within the scientific community, there was precious little debate about the potential pitfalls of harnessing this source of power. Focusing on what appeared to be a non-issue initially led to disinterest amongst even future neighbors of nuclear reactors. But after pioneering anti-nuclear activists found ways to connect nuclear energy to the daily lives of local people, this topic provided common ground for the formation of a broad coalition. From the outset, therefore, the anti-nuclear movement actually addressed a variety of specific concerns. The fact that it appeared to be dedicated to an overarching and ambiguous single issue actually helped serve this purpose.

Later in the decade, activists from across the FRG sought to capitalize on the very malleability of the anti-nuclear project. In so doing, they attempted to mimic the Rhenish movement in Northern Germany and sought to utilize new localized actions towards various trans-local ends. In 1976 and 1977, the Wyhl occupation served as both a justification and a model for a range of protests and demonstrations. Each of these actions was tailored to the goals and ideology of specific groups and individuals. Though many of these protests devolved into battles at perimeter fences, media coverage drew attention to popular concerns about nuclear energy—and also to the overbearing tactics of the police and security
forces charged with protecting reactor construction sites. Once again, the broad issue of nuclear energy provided an entry point into other political debates.

In spite of protesters’ diverse motivations, it was the tactic of site occupation itself upon which these actions re-focused the anti-nuclear movement. Rather than seeking to recreate the democratic dialogues that unfolded on the Wyhl site, these protests sought only to follow the pattern of occupation established in the Upper Rhine Valley. Yet the Rhenish occupation plan was not particularly cunning; it certainly could not overcome fortified construction sites and heavily armed security forces. And of course it was the collective inability of later site occupation attempts to actually stop the reactors they targeted that left many of their protagonists looking for another means of anti-nuclear protest. Mass rallies in central cities and electoral assaults on parliaments presented themselves as promising alternatives to sieges of rural reactor sites.

Though it marked a tactical departure from earlier protests, however, moving off of the site and creating a national Green Party still drew on the mythology of Wyhl. Most significantly, this new mode of activism was informed by the sense of widespread cooperation and participatory democracy that had evolved through the Wyhl occupation. Though it was directed back towards the realm of established national politics, the new party depended on unorthodox definitions of politics and even transnational frameworks in order to establish itself at the national level. In that sense, the Greens actually drew more closely on the ideational content of the Rhenish movement than had the increasingly futile attempts to mimic the Wyhl occupation in Northern Germany.
Thus, the extended panorama of activists who helped found the new party is perhaps the best evidence of Wyhl’s lingering effects.\textsuperscript{37} Indeed, the very idea that a coalition ranging from established conservative politicians to anthroposophists and ardent leftists might come together in order to form a political party sounds implausible. Yet, this coalition had already developed on the occupied site at Wyhl. Following the protests at Wyhl, the unlikely convergence of the “founding Greens” was much less of a departure than it seems.

In short, it was anti-nuclear activists’ growing concerns about public input, governance, and even the nature of the West German state that made nuclear energy the unlikely lynchpin that held together a broad new political coalition with many interests and motivations. It was only after protests at reactor sites had been exhausted as a means of treating these concerns that this coalition mounted an electoral challenge to the government at the decade’s end. Thus, my research shows that looking more closely at Markovits and Gorski’s question about the Greens’ decision to self-identify as an “ecology” party rather than a party of “radical democracy” also tells us something about the very reasons that “ecological” protest gained such steam during the 1970s.

The relationship between environmentalism, democracy, and the changes to the West German political landscape of the 1970s was a complicated one. On the one hand environmental matters, such as nuclear energy, were—at the beginning of the decade—politically ambiguous vessels that could be filled with a wide range of

\textsuperscript{37} Silke Mende vividly recreates this mosaic of activists. See: Mende, \textit{“Nicht rechts, nicht links, sondern vorn,”} Part 1.
concerns. On the other hand, however, the FRG’s nuclear program was very real and opposition to reactor projects led to increasingly brutal confrontations with the West German state. This very process, however, exposed what activists perceived as the limits of West German democracy. At the regional level, simply circumventing politics-as-usual proved a fruitful means of pushing ahead towards larger political goals despite these limitations and thus providing space for democratic alternatives.

Creating autonomous political spaces at the national level proved a far more difficult task. For one thing, the more the anti-nuclear movement developed, the less ambiguous the issue of nuclear energy itself became. The more they learned in their struggle against individual reactors, the more anti-nuclear protesters themselves became convinced that the FRG’s entire nuclear program had to be stopped. The inability of site occupations to achieve this goal premised the turn to mass protests in capital cities and direct participation in electoral politics as alternatives. These tactics also proved themselves incapable of immediately ending the West German nuclear program, however. Yet reactor opponents’ effort to enter electoral politics created the first significant new political party in West Germany since the early days of the Federal Republic.

Though the Green party was far different from the sort of autonomous space that had been created at Wyhl, it did briefly serve as a site of interaction and cooperation, much as the occupied site had in 1975. Yet the Greens’ longer term achievements have come in the form of specific reforms and improvements to West Germany’s democratic system, not the replacement of parliamentary democracy.
with a radical alternative modeled on the cooperative atmosphere of the occupied site. Rhenish anti-nuclear protest then, provided not so much a model of action as it did the space for the sort of radical democratic interaction and experimentation that ultimately led to the reform and reinforcement of West Germany’s existing democratic system. These achievements ought to be considered the lasting legacy of the insurgent movement that developed along the Upper Rhine in the early 1970s.
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