PART 2

West Germany's Greens and the Politics of Party Movements

Participants in a social movement, by definition, attempt to restructure their society. They want to remove features they perceive as harmful and immoral, and to establish social institutions and values not yet widely found or accepted, save in their imaginations. Critics sometimes find such commitment to reordering dangerous and fanciful, and accuse movement activists of being unrealistic or cantankerous. Yet research shows that activists are seldom simply utopians or cranks (Clark 1984; Halebsky 1976; McAdam 1988) and often resemble other political actors. They are dreamers in part and malcontents to some extent, but they are also optimistic, reformers who articulate a vision of a better world *and* who believe that they have found the means to move toward its realization.

What sorts of tactics and strategies do movement activists utilize? According to political-process theorists, activists select tactics and strategies partly in light of constitutional arrangements and ongoing intra-elite struggles for power. Political contexts—such as rights to assemble, and free and fair elections—encourage some types of activities and discourage others.

As demonstrated throughout this book, activists within a single movement utilize diverse tactics and strategies, sometimes including armed assaults upon the state's security personnel and wanton destruction of private property. But they do not always (or even typically) engage in violence or illegal actions. They generally first explore legal opportunities to pressure their government into abetting the desired societal transformations.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, many social-movement leaders in North America and Western Europe have argued that because of their countries' liberal-democratic constitutions, elections could function as the Archimedean fulcrum needed to move their societies. In theory, election campaigns offer an invaluable opportunity to educate citizens about issues and to inculcate new values and ways of thinking. Further, victories at the polls enable members of a movement to enter the governance process and "work from within," so to speak, legislating major social change notwithstanding elites' opposition.

The U.S. Populist Party of the 1880s (Goodwyn 1978), the German Social Democratic Party of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries (Schorske 1972), and the Saskatchewan Cooperative Commonwealth Federation of the mid-twentieth century (Lipset 1950) illustrate the recurrent belief among European and North American movement activists that one can remake society through a shrewd use of electoral processes and institutions. The Green Party alliance in the Federal Republic of Germany provides yet another, more recent example of what might be called the party-movement tradition of Western radicalism.

To understand the German Greens' decision to pursue an electoral strategy, let us investigate their political situation—in particular, West Germany's constitutional arrangements, party system, and patterns of elite consensus and conflict. In addition, let us review some recent major changes within West German society. Social-movement theorists immediately after World War II typically argued that rapid social change—especially urbanization, industrialization, and the expansion of big business—generates widespread fear, uncertainty, and anxiety, feelings that enable social-movement activists to attract sizeable followings. If we tentatively accept their reasoning, then an examination of recent social change in Germany may provide us with clues as to how the Greens, a fledgling movement in the 1980s, attracted support.