

CITIZEN ACTIVISM AND THE QUEST FOR THE SUSTAINABLE CITY: BERLIN, 1900 TO THE PRESENT

GHI-sponsored panel at the twenty-eighth Annual Conference of the German Studies Association, October 8, 2004. Moderator: Janet Ward (University of Nevada, Las Vegas). Panelists: Keith Alexander (GHI), Carol J. Hager (Bryn Mawr College), Jeffrey K. Wilson (University of New Orleans). Commentator: Thomas M. Lekan (University of South Carolina).

As environmental historians and political scientists have searched for models of environmental sustainability, one of their tasks has been to describe and analyze environmental protest movements. What sparked environmental activism? How did political and social institutions respond to protests and incorporate environmental concerns? What were the implications of environmental protests for other historical and social processes? This panel sought to address these and other questions.

The papers examined three examples of environmental activism in Berlin. Jeffrey Wilson's paper, "'Save the Grunewald': Environmentalism in the Kaiserreich," focused on efforts to protect the Grunewald from development. In the face of rapid urban growth in the early twentieth century, the Prussian state attempted to take advantage of the increased real estate values of its property near Berlin, trying to sell it for development. Berliners reacted by mobilizing a campaign to preserve the forest. By 1914, the campaign had succeeded in pressuring the state to sell the Grunewald to the city of Berlin for a small percentage of what the state would have received from real estate developers. Wilson asserted that the campaign was not a reactionary attempt to turn back the clock on processes of modernization, but instead represented a progressive attempt to address their outcomes. Moreover, far from fitting the weak image of early environmental protection efforts, the movement to save the Grunewald united a broad coalition of groups and individuals in a campaign that foreshadowed future environmental preservation efforts.

Keith Alexander's contribution, "Green-Alternative Politics in West Berlin, 1978–1990," addressed the role of environmental issues for the *Alternative Liste für Demokratie und Umweltschutz* (AL), the West Berlin affiliate of the West German Green Party. Initially, the AL's radical left-wing founders seized upon environmental issues as a "green train" that they felt they could ride to power. Later, green issues provided the common ground for a diverse gathering of groups. Green ideas helped hold these groups together and avoid the fragmentation that plagued the Left in the 1970s. In the last phase of the AL's development, the AL sincerely

embraced environmental ideas. The AL viewed environmentalism as a unifying concept for its political program that informed its other policy initiatives. For the individuals involved in the AL during the 1980s, environmental issues proved profoundly integrative rather than radicalizing.

Carol Hager's presentation, "Citizen Participation, Land-Use Planning, and Community: Berlin and Beyond," examined the responses of local planning authorities to demands from citizens for a voice in planning decisions in Berlin from the 1970s to the present. In particular, her paper focused on the battle over the siting of the Reuter West power plant, as well as city planning in post-Wall Berlin. She showed that citizens' groups have given grassroots participation in land-use planning new legitimacy and have breathed new life into the parliaments as the forum for discussing policy making. Hager also pointed to indications that the emphasis on citizen participation with roots in the 1970s continues to play an important role in the west and appears to be spreading to the east as well. Finally, Hager noted a correlation between implementing planning that is sensitive to local conditions and the ability of communities to maintain their identities.

In his comments, Thomas Lekan examined the question of how the papers challenged conventional ideas regarding the development of environmentalism in Germany. He noted that urbanites were just as willing to fight environmental destruction as members of the *Heimat-* or *Naturschutz* movements typically associated with more rural surroundings. Also, urban environmental concerns appeared to attract support from a broader social spectrum than rural preservationism. During the discussion, presenters noted the common importance of ideas of *Heimat* to their respective research subjects.

Overall, the panel yielded important insights regarding attempts to create livable, sustainable cities in modern Germany. At the same time, it linked environmental protest to larger issues in modern German history, including processes of democratization and the shaping of political participation.

Keith Alexander