ENVIRONMENTAL PROTEST IN WILHELMINE BERLIN: THE CAMPAIGN TO SAVE THE GRUNEWALD

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In the early part of the twentieth century, Berlin witnessed an ongoing struggle between the state and the metropolis over the future of the region’s forests, especially the Grunewald. Between 1902 and 1914, as the city and its environs grew from roughly 2.7 to 3.7 million inhabitants, the state sought to capitalize on the climbing value of its properties near the capital. A broad range of Berliners responded to this threat with a campaign to save the surrounding forests. This battle to preserve the woods demonstrated the depth and strength of environmental action in this period. One collaborative study of German environmental politics bemoans the failures of early twentieth-century activists, complaining of their antimodernism, conservativism, timidity, lack of vision and inability to form broad coalitions. While Berliners fighting for the preservation of the Grunewald may not have utilized the confrontational techniques of today’s environmental activists, their efforts were far from romantic, diffident or fragmented. Along with Berlin’s political leaders, the city’s press and associational life rallied to save the woods, pressuring the government not to sell state forests for real estate development. This broad and sustained mobilization of public opinion, from about 1904 to 1914, put great pressure on the Prussian state to accede to their demands. By the First World War, the state had abandoned its plan to profit marvelously from its extensive wooded properties around Berlin, and instead transferred the forests to the capital at a small fraction of their real estate value. Although significant institutional barriers, primarily the Prussian three-class voting system, impeded the progress of Berliners’ demands, they were not impervious. The liberal urban establishment’s efforts to preserve the Grunewald and other woodlands extended beyond the anemic efforts described by some historians; rather, the campaign to save the Grunewald presaged contemporary environmental endeavors.

The Grunewald, a largely coniferous forest, stood on roughly four thousand hectares of sandy soil between Berlin’s western suburbs and the broad stretch of the River Havel. Local princes had hunted there since at least 1543, and it remained a royal hunting ground until 1904, when Kaiser Wilhelm II withdrew his sport from the vicinity of Berlin. Hunting served as an important ritual of the court, and the imperial entourage marked Saint Hubertus Day (November 3, honoring the patron saint of the chase) with a colorful hunt in the Grunewald. The party, dressed in
the English style, would eat breakfast outdoors at the royal hunting lodge and then proceed on horseback in pursuit of forty wild boar released into the woods. Kaiser Wilhelm I continued to participate in the *Hubertusjagd* into the 1870s, despite his advanced age, along with about two hundred members of German high society. The whole affair captured the elegance and taste of the imperial court.

Starting in the 1870s, however, curious city-dwellers marred this noble sport. One local author disdainfully referred to the “dense hordes [of] uninvited old Berliners” that followed the hunting party, complaining that the “rabble of the capital” (*Pöbel der Hauptstadt*) had transformed the *Hubertusjagd* into a rowdy “Volksfest.” Prince Heinrich von Schönburg-Waldenburg described the tumult surrounding the *Hubertusjagd* in the 1880s, relating how “ten thousand Berliners of all calibers” gathered outside the hunting lodge to abuse the participants. While “especially well-known and popular riders were greeted with cheers,” those not so fortunate “were met with bad jokes” (*mit faulen Witzen bedacht wurden*). Indeed, almost every rider had some taunt shouted at him by the crowd; Schönburg-Waldenburg recalled that one could choose to either respond with a clever retort or, if things got rude, pretend not to have heard. Any rider showing signs of anger “made himself totally ridiculous” (*hätte sich unsterblich lächerlich gemacht*) in the eyes of the crowd. Schönburg-Waldenburg concluded that: “A kind of Narrenfreiheit was proclaimed for the Berliners.” By 1894, it took forty gendarmes and an army contingent to hold back the throng. A hiking-guide to the Grunewald complained that the authorities frequently had to close the Grunewald to the public due to “ever greater ill-mannered disturbances” on the part of Berliners. By 1900, the disruptive gatherings had begun to drive the Kaiser and his entourage from the forest altogether. As another guide to the Grunewald explained:

Unfortunately, a certain part of the public has earnestly tried to spoil the visits of the Kaiser and his guests in the Grunewald. These noble souls, who lack the organ to distinguish between a good time and blatant roughness, have finally brought it to a point where the Kaiser—who surely would have liked to have maintained the Volksfest—gave an order to remove the *Hubertusjagd* to a more distant reserve not easily reached by troublemakers.

In the end, an expanding urban public managed to seize—at least during the *Hubertusfest*—the forest for itself. The celebration had also given many Berliners their first taste of the Grunewald, as one local journal reminisced. The forest thus was clearly becoming an important locus of popular recreation, and Berliners began to appropriate it for themselves. But as Berlin expanded during the speculative boom of the early 1870s—the *Gründerjahre*—real estate developers also cast an expert eye
westwards to the wooded hills and chains of lakes that comprised the Grunewald. There, tycoons like Hamburg’s J. A. W. von Carstenn envisioned profitable villa suburbs on the English model. Carstenn, among others, lobbied the state to sell him the land and to reinvest the proceeds in extending the city’s infrastructure to the new suburbs. The state resisted these requests, citing two issues. The first was legal: all state forests were held as collateral for state debt, and the proceeds from their sale could only be applied to the debt, not public works. Second, cabinet ministers insisted on the importance of the Grunewald to the health of Berlin, citing its salubrious influence on the air and the opportunities it provided for recreation. Prussian officials thus blocked private development and acknowledged the public’s claim to the royal hunting ground in the early 1870s.

The state did not maintain this clear vision of the public good, however. As the largest single landholder in Berlin’s environs, the Prussian Ministry of Agriculture—administrator of the state forests—demonstrated a keen desire to develop Berlin’s suburbs. Furthermore, it displayed great acumen in handling its landholdings. Rather than unloading all its property in the Gründerjahre, the state slowly offered its property for sale, keeping prices high. Moreover, it held on to its land during recessions, seeking the most favorable conditions for sale. But perhaps the most significant obstacle to the development of the Grunewald, as the ministers noted, was the fact that proceeds from such a sale would not flow into ministerial budgets, but would be applied to state debt. This, however, would change by the turn of the century.

Real estate developers were not the only Berliners to imagine the transformation of the Grunewald in the 1870s. The Countess Adelheid von Dohna-Poninski, concerned with the overcrowding of Berlin’s workers in the city’s notorious tenement houses (Mietskasernen), called for greater public access to the forests around the city. In 1874, Dohna-Poninski issued a pamphlet proposing to limit the expansion of the city and to preserve green spaces for public use. Fearing Bismarck’s political repression of working-class dissent would provoke revolution, she insisted “that the right of every inhabitant to reach open space within a half hour from home not be injured.” This required parks within two kilometers of any point in the city, including a great “green ring of the metropolis,” where “the entire population, with all of its classes,” could come together to enjoy all manner of “recreational sites in the outdoors, including kitchen gardens, suited to their various natural needs.” For her, the forest would serve as a means to improve the quality of workers’ lives during the tortuous processes of industrialization and urbanization.

Despite the fact that Berlin’s overcrowding became increasingly serious over the course of the 1880s and 1890s, neither the state nor the city
did much to guide Berlin’s expansion. In the 1860s, James Hobrecht, Berlin’s chief urban planner, laid out large city blocks where he anticipated low-density housing surrounded by private gardens. By the end of the century, these lots had been developed to the fullest extent, with apartment blocks rising five stories high and preserving no green space around them. Some buildings attained enormous sizes, extending back from the street around a series of small courtyards. Such patterns of construction made Berlin one of the most densely populated cities in Europe, suffering from all the attendant public-health consequences.\(^{14}\) By the 1890s, municipal authorities began to propose regulations on metropolitan growth and to plan major new parks. Among those proposals was the purchase of the Grunewald. In 1892 and 1893, the city fathers approached the Prussian government with offers to buy the forest, but to no avail. The authorities had no interest in selling to the municipality what was becoming a prime piece of urban real estate.\(^{15}\)

The Grunewald’s rising significance as a site of public recreation, coupled with the state’s refusal to sell it to the city, raised some doubts about the future of the forest, moving others to intervene. In 1897, the Silesian Free Conservative, Count Mortimer von Tschirschky-Renard, a member of the Prussian Herrenhaus, proposed legislation to turn the Grunewald into a “state park” with the support of 58 colleagues. Drawing on romantic notions, Tschirschky-Renard called on the state to preserve the Grunewald as an “Urwald” to be managed according to aesthetic, not fiscal, principles.\(^{16}\) Berlin’s Free Conservative paper, Die Post, echoed Tschirschky-Renard’s call to preserve the Grunewald from future destruction.\(^{17}\) With rising concerns over the problems of Berlin’s rapid urban growth, conservative nature enthusiasts sought to enlist the state to save the Grunewald from the encroaching city. Prussian authorities responded by reassuring the legislature that the state was actively concerned with cultivating the aesthetics of the Grunewald.\(^{18}\) Privately, however, the Prussian cabinet regarded the Tschirschky-Renard bill as a threat to the state’s property rights.\(^{19}\) The Minister of Agriculture therefore promoted and passed a weaker version of Tschirschky-Renard’s bill, which simply called on the government to consider the public interest in its management of the forest.\(^{20}\)

With the explosive growth of Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century, the Grunewald’s significance as a site for recreation only expanded. It became a favored spot for picnics, hiking excursions and beer gardens.\(^{21}\) Public pressure to preserve the Grunewald, whether emanating from the Prussian Landtag, the City of Berlin or the unruly crowds attending the Hubertusjagd, finally prompted Kaiser Wilhelm II to play the role of Berlin’s benefactor. Indeed, he liked to style himself as the people’s emperor, and in January 1902 Wilhelm announced that he would
convert the royal hunting preserve of the Grunewald into a “Volkspark.” Several Berlin papers greeted the Kaiser’s decision with enthusiasm, noting greater public access to the forest would enhance the health and beauty of the capital.\textsuperscript{22} The left liberal \textit{Volks-Zeitung}, however, suspected the \textit{Volkspark} plan might have been conceived as a means to sell parts of the Grunewald to real estate speculators.\textsuperscript{23}

The \textit{Volks-Zeitung}’s misgivings were justified. Until 1901, forestry authorities (the Forstfiskus) had been required by law (since 1820) to use all income from the sale of woodlands to repay state debts.\textsuperscript{24} With that restriction now out of the way, the Ministry of Agriculture secretly hoped to generate enormous funds not subject to the oversight of the Landtag for land acquisitions in the Prussian east, as the \textit{Volks-Zeitung} speculated.\textsuperscript{25} In conjunction with the \textit{Volkspark} project, the ministry planned to sell a significant portion of the Grunewald for the development of a fifty-meter wide \textit{Prachtstrasse} and a luxury residential district.\textsuperscript{26} Within two months of the Kaiser’s announcement of the \textit{Volkspark} plan, Department of Forestry Chief Wesener informed provincial authorities in Potsdam that the ministry intended to sell over 500 hectares of the Grunewald along the proposed road to developers.\textsuperscript{27} It appeared that Carstenn’s vision of the Grunewald might, at least in part, become reality after all.

Planning for the \textit{Prachtstrasse} took some time, and only at the end of 1904 did the Ministries of Finance and Agriculture request permission from the Kaiser to sell the northern portion of the Grunewald.\textsuperscript{28} Berlin’s progressive newspapers caught wind of these plans and launched a campaign against them in the fall of 1904. With the \textit{Berliner Volks-Zeitung} and the \textit{Berliner Tageblatt} in the forefront, many articles began to appear detailing rumors of sinister designs on the Grunewald and denouncing the anticipated butchery of the forests (\textit{Waldschlächterei}) as inimical to the health of the city. The editors of these papers also circulated a petition protesting the sale of any part of the forest—gathering an impressive 30,000 signatures—which they submitted to Minister of Agriculture Victor von Podbielski in November.\textsuperscript{29} At the same time, the illustrated \textit{Kladderadatsch} ridiculed Podbielski in caricature as the hero of land speculators, and the Deutscher Bund der Vereine für naturgemäße Lebens- und Heilweise held a rally of concerned citizens, insisting that the communal authorities and the Landtag intercede to protect the public’s access to the Grunewald.\textsuperscript{30} The authorities stood their ground, however, refusing to concede to public demand, so the press campaign continued.

In this clash with the state, the left liberal press styled itself as the champion not just of Berliners in general, but also specifically of Berlin’s working class. As the autumn press campaign against government land deals began, the \textit{Berliner Volks-Zeitung} complained that development plans would hurt Charlottenburg’s working-class neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{31}
the wake of the November petition, the Berliner Tageblatt proudly published a grateful letter from “a number of unionized Berlin workers” thanking the paper for its “manly and energetic intervention for the preservation of the Grunewald.” The letter testified: “You spoke to us Berlin workers from the heart, because in the end we alone are the victims, as the propertied classes can substitute summer holidays and longer excursions.” These workers echoed the recurrent discourse on the importance of the Grunewald for the health of Berlin, but more intriguing was their animus against the Social Democrats. They complained bitterly in their letter that neither the Social Democratic paper, Vorwärts, nor the party leadership had expressed any opinion on the Grunewald matter. These frustrated workers therefore declared: “We’ve finally had enough of letting ourselves be fed with these high-sounding, hackneyed expressions . . . We want to rub the cries from the ‘isolated reactionary mass’ outside of Social Democracy in the faces of our ‘leaders.’” The preservation of the Grunewald, a liberal reader of the Berliner Tageblatt might surmise, functioned therefore not only as a public health measure, but also as a means to reach out to the workers.

Appeals to the working class held great importance for Berlin’s left liberals at the turn of the century, whose monopoly on political power in municipal politics and the city’s delegations to the Landtag and the Reichstag was being seriously eroded by socialist candidates. Already in 1883—despite the official ban on campaigning by the party and the income-based, three-class voting system—Social Democrats entered Berlin’s Stadtverordnete Versammlung, and by 1914, they held 44 of the 142 seats in that body. In 1893, the party controlled five of Berlin’s six seats in the democratically elected Reichstag, and when the Social Democrats finally entered the Landtag’s Abgeordnetenhaus in 1908—again in spite of the discriminatory three-class voting system—they captured 6 of Berlin’s 21 seats. Thus, in making their case to the government and the public, left liberal newspapers and politicians must have had the socialist threat in mind. It seems likely, therefore, that they predicated their repeated emphasis on the importance of forests for the working classes on political considerations, and not simply on goodwill. As time progressed, and the strength of Berlin’s Social Democratic Party increased, the working-class motif of the debates only grew.

As the level of tension rose between Berliners and the Prussian state, and as left liberals attempted to appropriate the issue for themselves, rightward leaning newspapers that had criticized official pronouncements in the past now downplayed the confrontation. In the wake of the November petition, the nationalist Tägliche Rundschau—which had articulated largely the same critical stance as the Volks-Zeitung—now concluded rather anemically that the only question remaining was how
much Berlin would have to pay to secure the Grunewald for itself. The Free Conservative Berliner Neueste Nachrichten, another early critic of the state’s Grunewald policy, similarly demurred, providing only a simple account of the petition. With the progressive newspapers aggressively taking control of the story by actively participating in it, protecting the Grunewald became a largely left-liberal issue.

While the progressive newspapers’ indignation over the proposed sales caused reformers on the right to drop the issue, it called forth invective from more traditional conservatives. The reactionary Kreuzzeitung stepped forward to defend Podbielski from attacks in the liberal press. In an exasperated tone, it complained that the Berliner Tageblatt believed that Berlin’s size and wealth entitled it to privileged treatment by the state. While the public might have demonstrated its attachment to the Grunewald, the Kreuzzeitung noted this was no reason for the authorities simply to give it away as a gift. Instead, the paper recommended a parental approach: the officials should treat the capital as a child that needs to learn responsibility, and should demand a price for the forest. Thus the struggle for the Grunewald pitted Berlin’s left-liberal champions against the Prussian administration and its archconservative allies. As the press campaign yielded few concessions, the debate leapt from the headlines into the Prussian parliament.

As a result of the government’s hostile stance towards Berlin and its efforts to save the Grunewald from development, political forces at the state level organized to block the Ministry of Agriculture’s agenda. Between 1905 and 1910, the conflict played out on the floors of both houses of the Prussian Landtag. Left liberals rallied to the cause of forest protection, denouncing state policy as selfish and shortsighted, as it ignored public health to the detriment of Berliners and Germany as a whole. They accused the Ministry of Agriculture of attempting to turn a profit on the backs of Berlins’ workers. National Liberals eventually joined in the debate, echoing the demand for public access to and preservation of the Grunewald. The state continued to insist on its right to dispose of its property as it pleased, but quickly found itself under pressure from Conservatives to concede. Berlin Conservatives raised concerns over the degeneration of urban youth lacking opportunities for healthy recreation. At the same time, Conservatives from other parts of the country began to express some discomfort with the government’s hard line, suggesting that the Grunewald was more than just another piece of urban real estate. Indeed, just about the only voice supporting the government was the agrarian Deutsche Tageszeitung. This widespread resistance placed the Minister of Agriculture in a difficult position, requiring him to navigate a course between acknowledging the state’s responsibility to the public (and in particular the Kaiser’s promise of a Volkspark) on the one
hand and the administration’s desire to realize significant profits from its land around Berlin on the other. Largely silent support for the government came from agrarians and the Center Party in the legislature, both of which blocked bills directing the state either to preserve the Grunewald or sell it at reduced rates to Berlin. By 1910, although opponents of state policy had managed to protect only the Grunewald’s Havel shoreline from being sold, they nonetheless succeed in shaping the debate, putting the government on the defensive. This laid the groundwork for the later negotiated settlement. However, it would take pressure not only from the press and the Landtag, but also from the broader public, to push the government to compromise.

While the Landtag became increasingly critical of government policy, Berliners mobilized to protect the Grunewald. As far back as the autumn of 1904, tens of thousands had petitioned the government to save the woods. But with media and legislative efforts to rein in the regime stalling, a wide range of Berliners turned to more vocal forms of protest. Berlin’s lively network of public associations, encompassing everything from landowners’ societies to hiking clubs, rallied together to stymie government plans. They argued that greater access to the forest would help address the problems of unregulated urban expansion, declining public health, rising social unrest and deteriorating national sentiment.

Through 1907 and 1908, Berlin’s myriad public associations—the fabric of German civil society—began to use their influence to lobby the government. Perhaps with the memory of Tschirschky-Renard’s efforts in mind, several civic organizations petitioned the Herrenhaus to preserve the Grunewald in 1907. A second set of petitions originated in January 1908, at an auspicious gathering dubbed the Waldschutztag. This meeting was convened by the Berliner Waldschutzverein to bring together individuals and groups to strategize the defense of the Grunewald. High-profile dignitaries studded the attendance list, including Walter Leistikow, the celebrated secessionist painter, Arthur von Gwinner, the director of the Deutsche Bank, Baron Octavio von Zedlitz und Neukirch, the leader of the Free Conservative Party with close ties to industrial interests, and Prince Heinrich zu Schönaich-Carolath, a wealthy reformist aristocrat with industrial interests who had left the Free Conservatives to join the National Liberals. Rather than agrarians waxing romantic over the beauties of the Grunewald, these prominent personages championing Berliners’ right to the woods reflected the modernizing wing of Imperial Germany’s elites. Moreover, this assemblage illustrated the broad alliance of political interests mobilizing to defend the woods; Pan German League activist Admiral Eduard von Knorr sat in the meeting alongside left liberal Bernhard Schnackenburg, soon to be appointed Lord Mayor of Altona.
Joining these distinguished social and political figures was a number of scientists and academics, three of whom addressed the assembly on key topics. The Director of the University of Berlin’s Hygiene Institute, Professor Rubner, spoke on the climatic and hygienic importance of the Grunewald; State Geologist Dr. Hans Potonié focused on its botanical and zoological importance; and the teacher Dr. Henting reported on recent tree felling and real estate development in the woods. Following the speeches, this dignified assembly drafted a petition calling on the state to limit its sale of forests near cities and asked that any such sales be brought to the attention of the Landtag. Twenty-six groups, ranging from the Deutsche Entomologische Gesellschaft and the Botanischer Verein der Provinz Brandenburg to Berlin’s elite Heimat group, Brandenburgia, submitted the petition separately to the Herrenhaus.

This elite protest stirred sympathy in the Herrenhaus. Despite government opposition, the chamber agreed with the petition and resolved that the government should limit its sales of the Grunewald and inform the Landtag of them. Although the bill had no teeth, it indicated the seriousness with which the unelected Herrenhaus regarded the growing discontent. After all, the assembly could have simply ignored the petitions with impunity. Now, however, this overwhelmingly Conservative body began to impinge on state plans. In an official statement to the Herrenhaus, the government agreed to avoid the sale or exchange of land in the Grunewald “in so far as this can be reconciled with the purposes of the state.” Again, officials responded to legislative pressure with vague guarantees, which only served to further mobilize the public.

While the first Waldschutztag might appear to have achieved little, it in fact paved the way for the far more popular second Waldschutztag the following year. There, Berliners of many different stripes and from far more modest social backgrounds called for the preservation of the woods. Thirty groups representing teachers, housing reform advocates, public health officials and Heimat enthusiasts, among others, expressed their dismay at the continual loss of woodlands in the region and advocated their purchase by the municipalities. In contrast to the first conference—dominated by prestigious personalities—the second conference was driven by a broad array of interest groups.

On January 16, 1909, medical professor Dr. Karl Anton Ewald, the Chairman of the Berliner Waldschutzverein, opened the second Waldschutztag in the Architektenhaus on the Wilhelmstrasse, in the heart of Berlin’s government district. In attendance was not only a panoply of Berlin associations, but also government and municipal officials. Ewald opened the meeting by describing the changing role of his Waldschutzverein. While it had been founded to prevent littering in the Grunewald, the political situation had impelled the members to campaign to save the
forests around Berlin. This move from attempting to discipline the public (preventing “Schmutz”) to advocating for them (promoting “Schutz”) suggests the responsiveness of Berlin’s civic leaders to public desires. Ultimately, Ewald argued, the preservation of these woods would further the social, cultural, aesthetic and public health agendas of all the groups participating in the Waldschutztag.51

Besides the Berlin Forest Protection Association, an additional five groups sponsored the meeting, each representing differing agendas in the conservation of the Grunewald: the Bund Deutscher Bodenreformer under the leadership of the property reform advocate Adolf Damaschke; the Büro für Sozialpolitik, a coalition of liberal social reformers, represented by one of its founders, Ernst Francke; the Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft, a group promoting more affordable suburban living to counterbalance the increasing density of cities and headed by the moderate socialist Bernhard Kampffmeyer; the Landesgruppe Brandenburg des Bundes Heimatschutz, led by the left-liberal Abgeordnetenhaus representative, nature enthusiast and school principal, Karl Wetekamp; and the Zentralkommission der Krankenkassen Berlins und der Vororte, represented by a Herr Simanowski.52 These groups set the program for the conference.

The diversity of organizations sponsoring the meeting illustrated the broad array of interests coalescing around the opposition to state policy. Property reform advocates, concerned with rising rents and poor housing conditions, sought to prevent the state from selling its land to real estate speculators in order to avert a further escalation of land prices throughout the region. Moreover, they sought to preserve the forest for the use of their impoverished constituency. Kampffmeyer’s vision of a garden city, with light and air for all, likewise sought to reform urban housing conditions and preserve parklands in and around the city. Naturally, insurance companies also had an interest in improving the living conditions of their clients and promoting better public health. A healthier population with better access to recreation would also contribute to the goals of social reform, ameliorating the growing misery of Berlin’s working class and thus alleviating the social tensions liberal reformers felt fueled political radicalism. In a similar vein, Heimat protection interests believed the preservation of the Grunewald would serve not only to address the problems of cramped urban housing, deteriorating public health and the social crises arising from them, but also felt the forest would contribute to a growing feeling of local and national patriotism that would inoculate the poor against the appeals of revolutionary socialism.

These motives found their echo and some elaboration in the further thirty groups participating in the meeting. Twelve groups focused on social concerns: five stressed urban issues, four were liberal labor unions, two social reform associations and the last a league of women’s groups.53
Another ten of them addressed public health issues: four associations were dedicated to public health generally, three to combating alcoholism, two with athletics and one with holistic medicine. These two clusters of associations comprised the majority of the interest groups at the conference, reflecting the dominance of social and public health concerns at the organizers’ level. In addition, a further five groups represented youth and educational interests: three were teachers’ associations, one promoted science education and the last was a youth welfare organization. A final three represented academic interests: the Verein für Geschichte Berlins, the Deutsche botanische Gesellschaft and a scientific society promoting the preservation of the Grunewald’s moors. While these diverse groups all approached the Grunewald problem from a different angle, the need to maintain workers’ access to nature held the conference together. As the representative of the liberal Verband Deutscher Gewerkvereine, Goldschmidt, argued, “The interest of the workers is closely connected with the preservation of woodlands around Berlin,” stressing this issue would determine the “national future.” The speakers all identified workers’ access to nature as an important means of overcoming the problems of urbanization that threatened their health, morality and patriotism. This broad coalition sought to act in the public interest.

The efforts of the Waldschutztag garnered national attention, and demonstrated to Prussian authorities public resolve in the matter. Increasing attention to the Grunewald issue prompted Berlin’s left liberal Mayor, Max Kirschner, to engage the government in negotiations; a few months after the second Waldschutztag, Kirschner joined with suburban mayors in an effort to buy the Grunewald and other forests surrounding the metropolis. Securing the woods was one element of a larger effort at regional cooperation to manage urban growth; the other two issues were public transportation and city planning. Their first effort at negotiation—in April 1909—involved 10,000 hectares of woodland around the city. This effort failed, however, when the Ministry of Agriculture insisted on a price of two marks per square meter and the municipalities refused to pay more than one.

Over the course of the following two years, the municipalities formalized their association in the form of a Zweckverband, formally laying down the political and financial relationships between them. They resumed negotiations with the government in 1911, and by May 1912, the Ministry of Agriculture offered 11,200 hectares of forest for just under 1.79 million marks (or roughly 1.60 marks per square meter). The Forstfiskus also claimed the right to repurchase the land from the municipalities at the original price. The Zweckverband rejected this price and the left liberal press expressed outrage at the right of repurchase. The leader of the Zweckverband, Dr. Karl Steiniger, complained to the Kaiser person-
ally, and Wilhelm commanded his Minister of Agriculture to produce a more suitable offer.

Within the cabinet, anxiety over growing popular impatience with the series of drawn-out negotiations compelled some to seek compromise. Already in 1908, public anger over government intransigence prevented the cabinet from requesting funds for the Prachtstrasse project. At the height of the Daily Telegraph crisis, in which Wilhelm II’s rather too-candid comments about Germany’s relationship with several other nations were published in the aforementioned British daily, the Minister of Finance worried that criticism of the plans could “turn against His Majesty and therefore would be very unfortunate, especially now.”64 Similarly, fears of public distrust led to the polarization of the cabinet in the 1912 negotiations, with the Ministries of Finance and Agriculture taking a hard line, while the remaining ministries urged concessions. Although the Ministries of Finance and Agriculture, under pressure from the Kaiser, initially proposed lowering their initial 179 million mark offer to 113 million, a few months later they recommended raising the price, arguing that Berlin could afford market rates.65 The Ministries of Public Works and the Interior strongly objected to the inflated sum, citing public health concerns. Moreover, the Minister of Public Works stressed the sale was “politically absolutely necessary.” If the state now insisted on a higher price, “the good will of the government would be doubted,” and this would have serious consequences, “especially because the person of His Majesty the King has already been associated with the matter.”66 By January 1913, internal and external pressure had forced the Forstfiskus to reduce its offer to 70 million marks for 10,000 hectares, less than half the price (0.70 marks per square meter) of its 1909 demand. But even this dramatic reduction was considered insufficient by the Ministries of Culture and the Interior, who along with Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, felt the price should be set at 53 million marks out of concern for “general political considerations.” The Ministries of Trade, Justice and Public Works were willing to entertain even lower figures.67 Pressure from below had brought about serious compromises from the highest state officials.

After much negotiation, the Zweckverband finally agreed to an offer of 10,000 hectares for 50 million marks at no interest. With annual payments fixed at 3 million marks, this meant the cost of the woods worked out to be less than one mark per inhabitant per year. Moreover, as a result of the outbreak of war shortly after the deal was concluded, the cost to the city was reduced by half as a result of rising inflation.68

Berliners fought hard for their woods. They infiltrated the Grunewald, symbolically driving the Kaiser out by 1904. Over the course of the next twelve years, they transformed the Grunewald from a royal
hunting ground into a municipally owned public park. They protested the state’s plans to profit from the sale of public woodlands, insisting they be preserved for their health and enjoyment. In the press, in parliament and in their associations, citizens of the metropolis articulated their demands. They believed a belt of forests around their congested city could help solve the pressing urban, medical, social and political problems of the day. Left liberals championed the city’s cause, calling for the state to justify its policies to the public. Nature could help solve the enormous problems posed by industrialization and urbanization, left-liberal reformers insisted, and they demanded the state compromise on its goals. When Berlin’s leaders realized they could not trust the state to preserve the woods, they turned to buying them. Pressure from the public split conservatives and Prussian officials, forcing the state to relinquish the woods surrounding Berlin at a fraction of their real estate value and frustrating government plans to cash in on its property.

The struggle to protect the Grunewald demonstrated the rational and progressive agenda of the nature enthusiasts. Far from being a preserve of reactionaries and romantics, the campaign to protect the Grunewald represented a serious attempt to deal with the consequences of modernization, not to flee from them. This fight also demonstrates the power of Berlin’s liberal municipal administration, along with its allies in the press and the network of associational life, to overcome the self-interested motives of the Prussian state. An active city government assumed responsibility for social reform when reform at the state level stalled, hoping through its efforts to win the working classes over to liberalism. Finally, the Grunewald story documents the potential of the public, energized by this strong leadership, to confront the state over issues concerning social welfare, public health and environmental protection. By the First World War, Berliners had succeeded in wresting what they wanted from the state.

Notes

2 Dan Mattern argues with regard to the creation of Greater Berlin that “without reforming the Prussian three-class suffrage, movement on the provincial and state levels were [sic] foreclosed.” The example of the campaign to save the Grunewald, part of the struggle to create a Greater Berlin, reveals the power of public protest under municipal leadership. Mattern, “Creating the Modern Metropolis: The Debate over Greater Berlin, 1890–1920” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1991), 196.

3 Raymond Dominick very briefly discusses the Berliners’ campaign for the woods as a success in his book on the early German environmental movement. See his The Environmental Movement in Germany: Prophets and Pioneers, 1871–1971 (Bloomington, 1992), 43–45.


5 Trinius, Die Umgebung der Kaiserstadt Berlin, 209.


7 Schmedes, Grunewald, 28.

8 Hermann Berdow, Der Grunewald (Berlin, 1902), 94.


11 Letter from Ministers Itzenplitz (Trade) and Camphausen (Finance), Nov. 20, 1872. In Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz (hereafter GSTAPK), I HA Rep.89, Nr.31820, b.32–37.


13 For her concern for the working classes, Heinrich von Treitschke tarred Dohna-Poninski as a socialist in his Preussische Jahrbücher. Arminius [Countess Adelheid Dohna-Poninski], Die Grossstädte in ihrer Wohnungsnoth und die Grundlagen einer durchgreifenden Abhilfe (Leipzig, 1874), 149. See also Hegemann, Das steinerne Berlin, 369–372, 377; Werner Hegemann, “Stadt und Wald,” Die Woche 7 (1913): 256.


19 SM meeting, Jan. 6, 1898, in GStAPK, I HA Rep.90, Nr.1632, b.37.


26 On the state’s role in promoting and profiting from private real estate development, see Escher, *Berlin und sein Umland*, 293–295, 299–300.


32 Letter from Berlin workers to the *Berliner Tageblatt*, quoted in “Der Kampf um den Grunewald,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, Nov. 15, 1904, in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.30–31. The archival collections of newspaper articles I consulted contained no clippings from Vorwärts on the Grunewald until 1907. Whether this was for lack of interest in the issue on the part of the Social Democrats or archival caprice, I cannot say.


34 A similar dynamic unfolded in other German cities, where the socialists’ entry into municipal politics spurred left liberals to propose social reforms. See George Steinmetz, *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, 1993), 186; Ursula Bartelsheim, *Bürgersinn und Parteiinteresse: Kommunalpolitik in Frankfurt am Main 1848–1914* (Frankfurt/Main, 1997), 255–259.


38 In the AH, see speeches by Kreitling (Jan 28, 1905), Gerschel (Jan. 18, 1907) and Fischbeck and Müller (Feb. 13, 1907), in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.39–40. In the HH, see speech by Bender (Mar. 30, 1908), in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.79.

39 In the AH, see speeches by Böttinger and Friedberg (Feb. 13, 1907), in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.40.

40 Speaking for the government in the AH, see speeches by Podbielski (Jan. 28, 1905) and Wesener (Jan. 18, 1907, and Feb. 13, 1907), in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.39–40.

41 In the AH, see speech by Hammer (Feb. 1, 1906) and Felisch (Jan. 25, 1908), in GStAPK, I HA Rep.169, C 23, Nr.39. See also petitions from the Berliner deutschkonservative Wahlverein (A. B. Wagner) to the Ministry of Agriculture, Jun. 28, 1906, and Dec. 1906. In GStAPK, I HA Rep.90, Nr.1632, b.42 & 43.

42 In the AH, see speeches by Brandstein and Pappenheim (Feb. 13, 1907), in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.40.

43 “Grunewald und Fiskus,” Deutsche Tageszeitung, Aug. 13, 1908, in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.82.


46 Petition from the vereinigte kommunale Vereine von Zehlendorf to the HH, 1907, in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.77.

47 For a brief depiction, see Dominick, The Environmental Movement in Germany, 44; Escher, Berlin und sein Umland, 316.

48 Invitation to the first Waldschutztag from the Berliner Waldschutzverein to the MB, Dec. 1907, in LAB, STA Rep.12, Nr.485, b.13.

49 HH, 6 April 1908, in GStAPK, I HA Rep.169, C 23, Nr.39.


51 Berliner Zentralausschuss, ed., Der Kampf um unsere Wälder, 6.


53 Included here were: the Ansiedlungsverein Gross-Berlin, Berliner Zentralausschuss für die Wald- und Ansiedlungsfrage, Freie Vereinigung Grunewald, Mieterbund Gross-Berlin, Verein der Vororte Berlins zur Wahrung gemeinsamer Interessen; the Gewerkverband der Heimarbeiterinnen, Hirsch-Duncker Gewerbeverein, Verband der Deutschen Gewerkvereine, and the Kartell der Christlichen Gewerkschaften Berlins und Umgegend; the Berlin branch of the Gesellschaft für soziale Reform and the Jacob Plaut-Stiftung Berlin; and the Verbündete Frauenvereine Gross-Berlin.
54 Included here were: the Berliner medizinische Gesellschaft, the Berlin branch of the Deutsche Zentrale für Volkshygiene, the Verein für öffentliche Gesundheitspflege, and the Vereinigung der Walderholungssälichen vom Roten Kreuz; the Berliner Zentralverband zur Bekämpfung des Alkoholismus, Brandenburgischer Distrikt des Internationalen Guttelporder Enns, and Deutscher Verein gegen Missbrauch geistiger Getränke; the Ausschuss der Berliner Turngaue and Berliner Hochschulsportvereinigung; and the Bund der Vereine für naturgemässe Lebens- und Heilweise (Naturheilkunde).

55 Included here were: the Berliner Gymnasiallehrer-Verein, Berliner Gymnasiallehrer-Gesellschaft, Berliner Lehrerverein; the Berlin branch of the Verein zur Förderung des mathematischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Unterrichts; and the Deutscher Zentrale für Jugendfürsorge.

56 Included here were: the Verein für die Geschichte Berlins, Deutsche Botanische Gesellschaft, and the Ausschuss der wissenschaftlichen und gemeinnützigen Vereine zur Erhaltung der Grunewald-Moore.

57 Berliner Zentralausschuss, ed., Der Kampf um unsere Wälder, 32.


60 See Letter from MB to Minister of Agriculture von Arnim, Apr. 13, 1909, in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.117; letter from Minister of Agriculture of von Arnim to MB, May 5, 1909, in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.119; meeting with Wrobel referred to in a letter from the Oberstadtsekretär to Oberbürgermeister Berlin, September 2, 1909, in LAB, STA Rep.01–02, Nr.1814, b.113–114.


62 Letter from the Minister of Agriculture to the Ministry of Public Works, May 4, 1912, in GStAPK, I HA Rep.90, Nr.1632, b.189.


64 SM meeting, Nov. 30, 1908, in GStAPK, I HA Rep.90, Nr.1632, b.67–68.


68 See Kaufvertragsentwurf, as well as the transcripts of the meetings of May 26 and 29 and June 3, 1914, in LHAB, Pr. Br. Rep.2A, III F, Nr.3094. Copy of memorandum written by the former Verbandsdirektor Steiniger in 1938, reprinted in Rainer Stürmer, Freiflächenpolitik in Berlin in der Weimarer Republik (PhD Diss., Free University of Berlin, 1990), 348–349.