

## Foreword

This book differs from existing political and sociological studies of Environmentalism in Germany in its focus on the culture of the environmental movement. Besides including up-to-date assessments of environmentalism as a social movement and a political force, it is also concerned with explaining its prominence in German political culture. On the one hand, it points to the collective memory and imaginary accumulated in layers of cultural tradition through words, images and events. The responses to modernisation of generations of cultural critics and their conceptions of nature are significant factors impinging on environmental concern. On the other, it asks how contemporaries' concerns have found expression in books and films, and what role these have played and might play in promoting awareness of the need for change.

The book begins with statements by two practitioners, a journalist and a writer. Jürgen Krönig is a London-based political correspondent for the German weekly *Die Zeit*. Environmental questions have featured prominently alongside British politics, globalisation and the media in his many contributions to the press, television and radio in Germany, Switzerland and Britain. His highly critical account of German environmental journalism, stressing its part in contributing through alarmism to Germany's international reputation as a nation of environmental hysterics in the 1970s and 1980s, and the subsequent abandonment of independent critical investigative journalism for lifestyle reports in keeping with the revival of hedonist consumerism in the 1990s, is informed by his own experiences, and draws comparisons between the situation in Germany and Britain.

The Bavarian novelist, essayist and cultural critic Carl Amery has been described as 'the Nestor of the German environmental movement'. He was a leading promoter of environmental awareness throughout the 1970s, and a co-founder of the Green Party. In the interview recorded for this volume, he speaks about the origins of his environmental concern, his politics, the role which the writer can play in raising consciousness and appropriate literary forms and techniques. These 'experiential' contributions raise issues concerning the rise and subsequent decline of the movement, assumptions, hopes

and disappointments, and the scope for change, which are developed and analysed in the following chapters.

Chapter 3 is an introduction to the political, social and cultural dimensions of German environmentalism, which sets out the rationale for the volume. This is followed by a section comprising four chapters examining the past, present and future of the environmental movement. Chapter 4 establishes the historical context of environmental concern in Germany, examining links with the internationally influential tradition of German cultural criticism. The next three chapters are devoted to political and sociological aspects. They survey the development of the environmental movement with particular emphasis on the shifting relationship between grass-roots activists and the Green Party, and investigate the present state of environmental concern in Germany, asking whether parties and interest groups have led the public with their agendas or merely followed existing trends, and examining discrepancies between environmental consciousness and eco-friendly behaviour. The concluding chapter in this section (Chapter 7) takes a critical look at the future prospects of the movement as a whole and the Green Party in particular.

The final section of the book is devoted to literary and filmic discourses. It opens with an extract from a recent publication of Carl Amery's, and an extended commentary reviewing the author's practical campaigning, prose fiction, essays and statements on the role of the writer in environmental debate (Chapter 9). Chapter 10 examines public debate on the environment in the GDR, its part in the struggle for political reform in the seventies and eighties, and its cultural transformation in narrative prose and poetry. Continuities and contradictions in the representation of nature and the environment are discussed in Chapter 11 with reference to German films ranging from the Mountain Films of the 1930s to Tom Tykwer's *Wintersleepers* (1997). Finally, Chapter 12 illustrates and reflects on the contribution of East and West German children's books to environmental education.

Three arguments unite these contributions from the disciplines of history, political science, sociology, literary and film studies. The first is that despite the seemingly ultimate achievement of the German Greens in becoming coalition partners with the Social Democrats in Federal Government in 1998, the environmental movement in Germany is in decline. The uniquely successful blend of anxiety about the environment and technological developments with self-realisation and self-expression which characterised the 1970s, a time of relative economic security and idealistic concern with the quality of life, has yielded to 'eco-optimism', youthful hedonism and the pursuit of affluence. As Blühdorn points out, the environment is no longer a rallying cry for social, cultural and political innovation. Though

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environmental concern remains at a relatively high level in Germany compared with other nations, the future of the Greens as a political force has come to look doubtful.

The second is that the specific characteristics of German environmentalism may be explained not only by economic, political and social circumstances, but also by cultural tradition and developments in contemporary German culture. Environmental debate appears at times to have been driven as much by human anxieties arising from the violation of cultural norms and expectations, as by physical conditions or objectively existing problems. This does not mean that environmental 'crisis' can be dismissed as the 'construction' of a specific society, at a specific juncture, or even of particular social interest groups. The gravity of the challenge in the coming decades is undeniable. However, it opens up a perspective for the understanding of the puzzling differences between national cultures in the importance they attach to individual issues and aspects of the environment.

The third, related argument is that culture not only reflects changes in social values and attitudes towards the environment, but also participates actively in the construction of perceptions of nature and our relationship with it. Through narratives and images, literature and film play a part in determining the way in which environmental problems are framed, publicised and remedied.

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