

West Germany's Greens want higher profile in government

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The West German Greens now seek an end to their second-class status.

The environmental, countercultural party considers itself the real victor in last month's election, in which it shot up from its maiden 5.6 percent of the vote in 1983 to its present 8.3 percent. And it wants the fruits of victory in Bundestag posts commensurate with the party's electoral strength.

This poses problems for all three established parties, which managed to treat the Greens as an anomaly during their first four years in Parliament and shut them out of sensitive positions. What posts they will hold will have to be thrashed out in the next two weeks before the new Bundestag holds its constituent meeting Feb. 18 - but this has been complicated by last week's one-vote win by "Fundis" (fundamentalist) Thomas Ebermann over "Realos" (realist) Otto Schily in the parliamentary caucus election of the Greens' spokesman.

The Green Fundis favor pure resistance to the political system, while the Realos favor impure influence within it. Ebermann, a former member of one of the tiny militant communist splinter parties, further approves use of violence in this resistance and asserts that the state should not have a "monopoly" on the use of force. Politically Ebermann rejects West German membership not only in NATO but also in the European Community, which he characterizes as an evil instrument of the ruling classes.

What the Greens are demanding is a Bundestag vice-presidency and membership in the Intelligence Oversight Committee, both of which they were denied in the last legislature. Social Democratic parliamentary leader Hans-Jochen Vogel is all for "full equal treatment" of the Greens and supports their desire to name a vice-president - but not at the cost of surrendering one of the two Social Democratic vice-presidents. The conservatives, who provide the president and one vice-president (the conservatives' junior coalition partner, the Liberal Party, provides the fourth vice-president) reject the Greens' bid outright.

The Greens argue that depriving them of a vice-president would be rank discrimination, since they have more seats in the incoming Bundestag than the Liberals had in the outgoing one.

Certainly they have earned their spurs in the parliamentary process over the past four years. They have made highly effective use of the Bundestag podium and of their right to interrogate the government on policy

issues. In their zeal for challenging old-boy networks and habits, they have often done their detailed homework far more assiduously than colleagues. Mr. Schily in particular, a crack lawyer who was in the last Bundestag for a bit over half a term and has now been reelected, is a master at committee cross-examination.

Clearly, however, they have not been able to get their own legislation passed by the Bundestag. But by scaring the established parties with the Green voter appeal and utilizing the parliamentary pulpit, they have put the environment firmly on the agenda of every party and prodded the center-right government (after the Chernobyl nuclear accident in the Soviet Union last year) to establish an environment ministry.

The Greens have also aired any number of awkward issues, such as clandestine arms exports, careless disposal of toxic wastes, plainclothes policemen's surveillance practices, intelligence-agency compilation of dossiers on Green MPs, and the government's failure to extend the state's voluntary reparation payments given to Jewish survivors of Adolf Hitler's holocaust to pay Hitler's other victims among Gypsies, homosexuals, forced laborers, and those who were subjected to compulsory sterilization.

This record may suggest to the Social Democrats that the Greens deserve to name one of the vice-presidents in the Bundestag. But membership on the intelligence oversight committee is much more problematic.

When cases of East German spies have surfaced in recent years, Green spokesmen have ridiculed the need for classified information. The Fundis in the party are refusing to sign any secrecy pledge, claiming that such a pledge would be the first step to an acceptable "ideology test" for MPs. Individual "freedom of conscience" should prevail, they contend, in deciding whether to reveal any information that committee members become privy to. Indeed, some Greens want to do away with the intelligence services altogether.

If the Greens are not allowed representation on the intelligence oversight committee - and on the postal surveillance and wiretap, intelligence agency budget, judges selection, and elections committees, and on the media supervisory board - Schily intends to appeal this exclusion to the Constitutional (supreme) Court. the military and government bureaucracies have no intention of letting secrets get into Green hands and thus, they fear, the press. Privately, officials say that if any Green gets onto the intelligence committee, they will simply staunch the flow of information to the committee. In this, they would probably be successful, since Bundestag committees do not have the same powers to subpoena testimony that United States congressional committees do.