

Thinking Globally, Acting (Trans-)Locally:  
Petra Kelly and the transnational roots of West German Green politics

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## ABSTRACT

STEPHEN MILDER: Thinking Globally, Acting (Trans-)Locally: Petra Kelly and the transnational roots of West German Green politics  
(Under the direction of Konrad Jarausch)

The first years of the 1970s have been seen by scholars of the German Left as a period of dissolution, highlighted by the factionalization of the 1968er movement. Yet, as an avowed ‘European Integrationist,’ Petra Kelly found many opportunities for the integration and growth necessary for a developing social movement in the early 1970s. Kelly soon combined her internationalist impulses with grassroots anti-nuclear activism, developing a new “trans-local” politics. She became a human link between grassroots movements, traveling frequently between them and ferrying new ideas across Europe and all over the world. Re-tracing Kelly’s journeys of the 1970s clarifies the essential role played by anti-nuclear activists at the grassroots level, many of whom were anything but 68ers, and internationalist ideas in the crystallization of a nationally organized Green Party in West Germany.

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## **Introduction**

Thousands of demonstrators crowded Trafalgar Square on a chilly April afternoon in 1978 to protest the planned expansion of nuclear fuel reprocessing operations at the Windscale Reactor in rural Cumbria. They had listened raptly as speaker after speaker voiced opposition to the project. Now, a young woman faced the mass of protestors from behind the podium. “I am here to bring you greetings of solidarity from the various European, Australian and Japanese anti-nuclear movements,” she announced. The self-described “German feminist/pacifist” continued her message to the British activists in fluent English. Despite her American accent, the tremendous speed at which she spoke assured her British audience that she was expounding on a familiar topic in a familiar language. She explained that the other anti-nuclear movements whose greetings she brought to London represented “a great wave of transnational determination to put a stop to Windscale, to put a stop to a nuclearized, militarized Europe.” Within the next few moments, she described the contours of this transnational wave. In rapid succession, she took her audience from Aboriginal territory in Australia, where Green Ban strikes interfered with uranium mining, to the nonviolent demonstrations against reactor construction in German villages, and back to Windscale, where protesters demanded a stop to nuclear fuel reprocessing. In the few minutes she stood at the podium, Petra Kelly

had taken her listeners on a journey around the world which had taken her most of the past decade to complete.<sup>1</sup>

Kelly's around-the-world journey, including her 1978 visit to London, could perhaps be viewed as little more than the personal journey of a single dedicated activist. But her travels between local sites of resistance, which took her from remote German villages to the Australian Outback to far-off Japan, also made her "an important part of the international networking of the anti-uranium, anti-atom, and anti-atomic-power initiatives."<sup>2</sup> Networking transformed grassroots anti-nuclear initiatives, which had originally been devoted to "point-based programs" intended to solve local problems outside the context of national politics, into a consolidated "movement." In transcending the local context, networking "expanded the horizon of problems" relevant to grassroots anti-nuclear activists and caused them to begin developing "constructive alternatives alongside their preventative actions."<sup>3</sup> Despite grassroots activists' growing awareness of the trans-local links between protests taking place all over the globe, however, opposition to nuclear power during the first half of the 1970s remained relegated to peripheral places, far removed from the ostensible centers of government decision-making and political activism in major world capitals and metropolitan cities. It was not until late in the decade that protests against rural nuclear plants, like the Windscale reprocessing

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<sup>1</sup> Petra Kelly, "Anti-Windscale Demonstration" (speech, Trafalgar Square, London, April 29, 1978), 1-2. PKA Akte 538,5.

<sup>2</sup> Lukas Beckmann, "'Beginne dort, Wo Du bist.' Das Leben der Petra K. Kelly," in *Petra Kelly: Eine Erinnerung* (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2007), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Dieter Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1980), 195-6.

facility, took place in centers of political power, like London.<sup>4</sup> As she traveled the globe networking grassroots activists and publicizing their “constructive alternatives” to a society powered by nuclear energy, Kelly played a key role in this migration of anti-nuclear activism from rural villages to capital cities.

As both adventurous world traveler and Brussels civil servant, Petra Kelly gravitated towards the peripheral places where grassroots anti-nuclear activism occurred at the same time as she gained access to the governmental and political centers where policy decisions were made. Despite the multiple access points to the global debate on nuclear power granted to Kelly by her dual-identity, the political establishment as well as the established activist traditions of her native West Germany remained foreign to her. Kelly’s position in Brussels rather than Bonn, her secondary education at High School rather than Gymnasium, her academic training in Washington, DC and Amsterdam rather than West Berlin or Frankfurt, and her use of “United Europe” rather than divided Germany as the framework for her activism conspired to keep Kelly outside the mainstream of West German politics. As the struggle against nuclear power in the Federal Republic moved from reactor construction sites outside remote villages to the center of West German government in Bonn, however, Kelly moved with it. Remarkably, the very traits which had kept her outside of West German politics up to this point now enabled her rise to prominence within the increasingly consolidated and nationally-coordinated anti-nuclear movement. *SPV Die Grünen*’s selection of Kelly as its top candidate in the 1979 European Parliament elections confirmed her growing prominence within West Germany at the same time as it reinforced the transnational

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<sup>4</sup> The first mass protest against nuclear energy in Bonn did not take place until October 1979. Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben*, 94.

framework in which Green politics had been imagined over the past decade. Re-tracing Kelly's steps through the 1970s, then, should provide insight into the development of international anti-nuclear networks, the consolidation of anti-nuclear protest at the federal level in West Germany, and the role these interconnected processes played in the rise of *Die Grünen* at the decade's end.

Like the new political ideas she worked so hard to propagate, it was with the first Green electoral campaigns that Petra Kelly was grudgingly acknowledged by mainstream West German politics. Despite the prominence she enjoyed throughout the Federal Republic as the country's best known Green politician in the early 1980s, however, scholars have discounted Kelly's significance to the development of *Die Grünen*. As political scientist Ruth Bevan has recently noted, to the extent that Kelly's name even "finds mention in current academic literature on the Greens, it is usually only in passing."<sup>5</sup> One reason for this neglect of Kelly and her legacy is evident even in Bevan's article, "Petra Kelly: The *Other* Green," one of only a handful of scholarly works that take seriously Kelly's contributions to Green politics. Bevan asserts that Kelly "enjoyed a relatively brief but spectacular political career," a career which "began in 1979 when she helped found the German Greens 'anti-party party' and soared after she...won election to the *Bundestag* in 1983."<sup>6</sup> This description of Kelly's career fits the commonly accepted chronology of German Green politics, a chronology which overlooks the movement-building of the 1970s and treats the few electoral campaigns that preceded the

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<sup>5</sup> Ruth Bevan, "Petra Kelly: The *Other* Green," *New Political Science* 23 (2001): 182.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

party's triumphant entrance into the Bundestag in 1983 as the extent of the West German Greens' pre-history.<sup>7</sup>

Within this truncated timeline, Kelly's falling out with *Die Grünen*, which began almost as soon as the party entered the Bundestag, is the primary evidence of her limited relevance to the longer trajectory of Green politics. Sociologists Dieter Rucht and Jochen Roose, for example, condescendingly describe Kelly as a "sort of ecological Joan of Arc" who played "no strategically important function" within *Die Grünen*.<sup>8</sup> In focusing on Kelly's difficulty in cooperating with her Green colleagues during the 1980s, however, scholars have failed to explain how an outsider like Kelly became the public face of the first new political party to enter the Bundestag since the early days of the Federal Republic. Answering this question requires a longer view of Green politics in Germany, one which goes back beyond the initial Green electoral campaigns.

Scholars interested in this longer view have typically framed the emergence of *Die Grünen* within the history of the West German Left. Andrei Markovits and Philip Gorski, for example, "believe that one can identify clear predecessors of the Green Party within the context of the West German Left." The Greens' predecessors, Markovits and Gorski argue, emerged from the SPD during the 1950s, diverged from one another during the 1960s and 1970s, and then reconverged "into the Greens" in the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Using the

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example Brian Tokar, *The Green Alternative* (San Pedro, CA: R. and E. Miles, 1987), Margit Mayer and John Ely, eds. *The German Greens: Paradox between Movement and Party* (Philadelphia: Temple, 1998), and Joachim Raschke, *Die Grünen: Wie sie wurden, was sie sind* (Cologne: Bund, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Dieter Rucht and Jochen Roose, "Von der Platzbesetzung zum Verhandlungstisch? Zum Wandel von Aktionen und Struktur der Ökologiebewegung," in Dieter Rucht, ed. *Protest in der Bundesrepublik: Strukturen und Entwicklungen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2001), 201.

<sup>9</sup> Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski, *The German Left: Red, Green, and Beyond* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993), 30.

biography of Joschka Fischer as an example, Paul Hockenos affirms this narrative of Green pre-history. Fischer was radicalized through the student movement in the late 1960s, and became a well known Sponti during the 1970s before coming to the Greens in the early 1980s. As late as November 1980, however, the dedicated Leftist Fischer still felt that joining the Greens would be like jumping “a train in the opposite direction just because it has more steam.” Because he believed that the Greens’ did not share the Spontis’ roots in the “socialist tradition,” Fischer argued that believing that the steaming Green train would “arrive at the same goal” as the slowing Sponti train “exceeds dreaming in the direction of stupidity.”<sup>10</sup> Despite his initial misgivings about Green politics, Fischer’s eventual departure from the Frankfurt Sponti scene and his adoption of *Die Grünen* as a new political home support the argument that the Greens became a point of reconvergence for the German Left’s many factions during the 1980s. As Fischer’s initial reluctance to join *Die Grünen* attests, however, the ideals which motivated the formation of this new party appeared to him, at least, to come from outside the Left.

Petra Kelly, on the other hand, saw Green politics as a continuation of the political activism she had practiced during the 1970s. Unlike Fischer, Kelly made a point of rejecting both the 68er movement and the factionalized remnants that succeeded it. Instead, she became involved in the movement towards European integration, finding a place for herself in Brussels and organizing transnational networks of grassroots activists. It was in the spirit of these activists’ alternative social vision, demonstrated when they came together to protest, that she led *SPV Die Grünen* into the 1979 European Parliament elections. Thus, reflecting on the 1970s from her perspective offers a rich account of the

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<sup>10</sup> Joschka Fischer, “Die widerspenstige Zähmung” *Pflasterstrand* (Nov 18, 1980): 8-10. Cited in Paul Hockenos, *Fischer and the Making of the Berlin Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 153.

unique convergence of grassroots activism and transnational thinking that sparked the emergence of *Die Grünen*. As Kelly's story reveals, both of these elements originated far from the established centers of West German politics and resistance; by the time Joschka Fischer was thinking seriously about the steaming Green train's imminent arrival in Frankfurt, it had already traveled quite a distance from Germany's rural margins. Yet, it was precisely this long journey across the anti-nuclear landscape of the 1970s that connected disparate sites of resistance and fused together transnational thinking and grassroots activism.

## **Straddling the Atlantic: Growing up German in the American South**

The origins of Petra Kelly's outside perspective on German politics as well as the outset of her around-the-world journey can be found in her childhood.<sup>11</sup> Kelly was born Petra Karin Lehmann to Marianne Birle Lehmann and Richard Siegfried Lehmann in Günzburg, Bavaria on November 29, 1947. Her father had come to Günzburg directly from an American POW camp, which he had only been allowed to leave after Marianne Birle, a pen-pal with whom he had exchanged letters during his internment, agreed to sponsor him.<sup>12</sup> Within a year of Lehmann's arrival in Günzburg, the former pen-pals married, but when Kelly was six, Lehmann walked out on his wife and daughter. Thus, Kelly was raised primarily by her grandmother while her mother worked at the US Army Post Exchange in nearby Laupheim. Kelly's all too typical post-war childhood<sup>13</sup> was interrupted in 1958 when her mother married John Edward Kelly, a US Army Corps of Engineers Officer. By the end of the following year, the family moved to Fort Benning, Georgia, where Kelly's new step-father had been stationed following his stint in

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<sup>11</sup> Two published biographies describe Kelly's early life in detail. Monika Sperr's *Petra Kelly: Politikerin aus Betroffenheit* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1983) and Sara Parkin's *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly* (London: Pandora, 1994). Though I have used some information from these biographies here (particularly where basic biographical data is concerned), several important aspects of the biographies appear to be contradicted by primary source material available at the Petra-Kelly-Archiv in Berlin. Thus, I have tried to use other sources wherever possible.

<sup>12</sup> Sperr, *Petra Karin Kelly*, 41.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Angela Vogel, "Familie" in Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Geschichte in drei Bänden* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1983), vol II, 99.

Bavaria.<sup>14</sup> Despite her continued devotion to Germany, Kelly would not again reside in her native country until 1983, when she was elected to the German Bundestag at the top of the Green party's ticket. Thus, it was from outside of the Federal Republic that Kelly developed her unique perspective of West German politics.

The difficult contradictions of Kelly's new international existence, shaped by her continued devotion to Germany on the one hand and her desire to prove herself in the United States on the other, were revealed almost as soon as the Kelly family arrived in Georgia. Twelve-year-old Petra showed her unwillingness either to shed her German identity or to become fully American when she chose to adopt her new step-father's last name but refused to allow him formally to adopt her. This paradoxical decision, which Kelly stuck to throughout her life, meant that her classmates in the US saw her "as a German, but told her at the same time that she was as American as a cowboy, a hot dog, or the red, white, and blue flag."<sup>15</sup> In practical terms, the decision allowed Kelly to retain her German citizenship, but it also gave her an Anglophone surname, clearly alien to any German ear. More immediately, Kelly's refusal to be adopted by her step-father also stopped her short of becoming an American citizen, meaning that she would live in the US as the ultimate outsider, a resident alien, for the next eleven years. Kelly spent those years in the South, attending high school in Columbus, Georgia and then Hampton, Virginia before enrolling at American University's School of International Service in 1966.

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<sup>14</sup> Sperr and Parkin both refer to John Edward Kelly as "Lieutenant Colonel Kelly," but it seems far more likely that this was Kelly's rank upon his retirement from the Army Corps of Engineers in 1970, since the rank of Lieutenant Colonel is usually attained after 17 – 22 years of service as an officer.

<sup>15</sup> Beckmann, "Beginne dort, wo du bist: Das Leben der Petra K. Kelly," 3.

It was at AU that Kelly experienced the tumultuous years of the student movement's climax in the late 1960s. Living 1968 as an ex-patriot at AU in Washington rather than at home amongst the students in West Berlin or on the Frankfurt "scene" was essential to Kelly's understanding and evaluation of the student movement and the developing New Left in both the US and Germany. Not only did her unique perspective make Kelly an outsider in both the American and German contexts, it also gave her free hand to compare and critique these two student movements, whose important differences she quickly identified. In Kelly's analysis and eventual rejection of both these movements, can be seen the foundations of her position outside established traditions of political resistance and her desire to integrate new people into activism, the keystones of her politics during the 1970s.

Kelly couched her alienation from other student activists of her generation in her personal experiences during the 1960s. She remembered the night of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in April 1968 as her first personal interaction with the string of tumultuous events that shook the world that year. When riots broke out in Washington, Kelly sought refuge at the home of AU professor Elspeth Rostow. As the rioting continued outside, Kelly recalled waking to the calm voice of Walt Rostow, the husband of her hostess and security advisor to President Lyndon Johnson. Seated across the room from her, Rostow was discussing Vietnam War bombing targets in a midnight telephone conversation with the President.<sup>16</sup> Though Elspeth Rostow has disputed the accuracy of this memory, Kelly continued to cite her experience at the Rostows' as a key moment in

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<sup>16</sup> Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, 48.

her personal and political development.<sup>17</sup> Kelly's reverence for King was unquestionable and unwavering; she referred to him frequently in speeches and the door to her Bundestag office was adorned with his image decades after his death.<sup>18</sup> Yet Kelly's desire to seek safety in response to King's assassination and her association of the cold-blooded selection of Vietnam bombing targets with the night of April 4, 1968 was very different from the outward and emotionally charged responses of German students to the political violence of the late 1960s.

The death of Benno Ohnesorg at the hands of a West Berlin police officer during an anti-Shah demonstration in June 1967 caused student activists to pour onto the streets and radicalized many of them in the process. Nineteen year-old Joschka Fischer, for example, claimed that Ohnesorg's murder made him a "professional revolutionary."<sup>19</sup> When SDS leader Rudi Dutschke was shot in the head by a would-be assassin less than a year later, German students again responded with spontaneous action, barricading the offices of the Springer publishing company in cities all over the country.<sup>20</sup> As opposed to German students' willingness to take their outrage to the streets after the Ohnesorg and Dutschke shootings, Kelly's response to the politically more significant assassination of King was far more introspective.

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<sup>17</sup> Elspeth Rostow has stated that there was no telephone connection with the white house in the room Kelly slept in. Furthermore, Walt Rostow and President Johnson never discussed Vietnam bombing targets by phone. Melvin Lasky, "The Pacifist and the General," *The National Interest* 34 (Winter 1993): 69.

<sup>18</sup> Kelly had posters of King and Rosa Luxemburg on the door to her Bundestag office. See picture in Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, following page 102. Kelly's posters are now held at the Archiv-Grünes-Gedächtnis in Berlin.

<sup>19</sup> Hockenos, *Joschka Fischer*, 62.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-85.

Months after King's murder, Kelly's reaction to the assassination of Presidential candidate Robert Kennedy in June 1968 was even more revealing of her rejection of student radicalism. Although Kelly had supported Kennedy's bid for the Democratic Party's Presidential nomination, she was not moved to protest following his death. Rather than demonstrating outside the Democratic Party's nominating convention in Chicago, an action which American SDS leader Tom Hayden recalls being all the more motivated to undertake following Kennedy's murder,<sup>21</sup> Kelly wrote to Democratic Presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey seeking advice.<sup>22</sup> Unsurprisingly, Humphrey "told her Kennedy's death was not the end, and invited her to join his campaign."<sup>23</sup> Kelly followed up on Humphrey's suggestion with gusto, and began organizing his supporters at AU. As sitting Vice President, Humphrey stood for the continuation of the Johnson administration's policies in Vietnam, a position vehemently opposed by German activists at the International Vietnam Congress in West Berlin as well as the American students demonstrating in Chicago. Kelly, too, proclaimed her personal opposition to the war, yet she became so deeply involved in the Humphrey campaign that she was flown from Washington to Minnesota in order to attend an election night rally in Minneapolis as the candidate's personal guest.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 294.

<sup>22</sup> Kelly had been corresponding with Humphrey since she invited him to attend AU's "International Week" in June 1967. Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, 40.

<sup>23</sup> Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Kelly was so deeply in favor of Humphrey that she pledged to become an American citizen should he win the 1968 Presidential Election. See "HHH Phones Girl in Dorm; Students Join VP on TV," *The Eagle*, October 22, 1968.

The differences between Kelly and her more radical American classmates were not limited to Kelly's acceptance of Humphrey despite his stance on the Vietnam War, however. Throughout her career as a student and activist at AU, Kelly attacked her fellow student "revolutionaries" for what she saw as a hypocritical refusal to engage seriously with important issues. AU students certainly talked about revolution, but they rarely acted on their ideas. Even after her return to Europe in 1970, Kelly's disdain for her AU colleagues' lack of seriousness continued to affect her political mindset. In a poem entitled "To A.U.'s Revolutionaries..." she linked her fellow AU students' lack of meaningful political engagement with their failure to take seriously their studies. Kelly duly noted students' support for unfairly paid cafeteria workers and acknowledged the emergency rooms they set up in the student union. "But," she asked:

...I wonder where your books are. . .  
in pockets as a status symbol. . .  
only worn out from frisby [sic] playing  
and practicing the theories of Timothy Leary?  
or have  
you gotten red eyes from reading Mandel, Trotsky, and Engels and Jesus and the  
Upanishads and Hesse?

Kelly contrasted herself sharply with this image of the Frisbee-playing, acid-tripping AU student "revolutionaries." Now "away from you [AU revolutionaries], your platforms, and your playgrounds," Kelly continued the poem, she had returned to Europe, where she planned to stay and "seek roots." Back in the "Old World," Kelly had learned that:

red eyes from Marx and Bloch and Orwell and Lenin and Hinduism and Albert  
Schweitzer  
can change more in this world we want to change (at least we scream so every  
day)  
than 'coppingout' on the system and calling pigs 'Pigs' and skipping pages in *Das  
Kapital*.

For Petra Kelly then, the contrast between herself and her lackadaisical American colleagues was a distinction between serious, focused work towards realistic political solutions and a fleeting engagement with social issues overshadowed by a lack of dedication to actually working seriously in order to change the world.<sup>25</sup>

Typical of her difficult relationship with both her adopted home in the United States and her native West Germany, Kelly did not spare German student radicals from her criticism. In an analysis of the German Left written in the spring of 1970 for an AU seminar course on modern Europe, Kelly remarked that “The German revolt is almost intent on calling itself ‘scientific’ or using words [such] as ‘dialectical’ or ‘rational,’ whereas in American SDS chapters there is little talk of theory.” The German students’ ‘scientific’ approach may seem in-line with Kelly’s own emphasis on the careful study of important texts as a step towards changing the system. Yet, Kelly still faulted German students for their complete lack of “love, community, or human warmth,” traits she readily associated with the “US rebel.” Thus, Kelly continued, German students are “almost totally oblivious to the fact that they are no more tolerant than their elders when they demonstrate with provocative counter-violence...that others are so much more intolerant.” Kelly believed that this “provocation strategy,” used by the students participating in mass demonstrations after the Ohnesorg and Dutschke shootings, for example, was responsible for the biggest failing of the German students: their inability to carry the movement “further to other segments of society.” Kelly thought it self-evident that “the [German] SDS is fully aware that the working man shows no inclination to mount the barricades for the goals of the intellectual left.” Unlike their unserious and

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<sup>25</sup> Petra Kelly, “To A.U.’s Revolutionaries...” (Brussels, n.d. [May 1972?]). PKA 530,23.

idealistic American counterparts, German students were far too intellectually driven and isolated from the rest of society for their own good.<sup>26</sup>

As Kelly's detailed analysis of these two distinct student movements shows, her difficult position between the United States and Germany provided her with a unique point of reference from which to investigate, critique and compare the two groups. Despite her identification with American student activists' "screams" to "change the world" and her respect for German students' critical engagement with theoretical texts, she simply could not bring herself to accept either group's methods. Kelly's rejection of both student movements and her desire to integrate "other segments of society" into activism pushed her in new political directions when she returned to Europe in 1970. Throughout her career as an activist, this willingness to separate herself from the mainstream and develop her own approach to problems would shape Kelly's politics. Thus, although the remnants of the recently dissolved German student movement were hardening into distinct factions at the time of her return to Europe, Kelly's prior rejection of the student movement as a whole placed her above the fray. Instead, Kelly remained aloof from the German Left during the 1970s, choosing an approach to politics that she considered more attractive to "other segments of society." Thus, Kelly began to approach issues normally consigned to domestic politics from a transnational, European perspective.

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<sup>26</sup> Petra Kelly, *Untitled* (Seminar Paper, American University, Spring Semester 1970), 10 – 12. PKA 530,1.

## **Searching for Citizens in a Lonely Capital**

Upon her return to Europe in the fall of 1970, Petra Kelly remained very much interested in changing the world through political activism and in reaching out to involve new “segments of society” in this process. Rather than rushing to join one of the remnant factions of the now defunct West German student movement, however, Kelly turned towards the European Economic Commission (EEC) in Brussels; an unusual choice for a motivated young activist in 1970. In Kelly’s eyes, however, integration in Western Europe was needed “precisely because we want to create a large, socially progressive zone in the world, so that this ‘United Europe’ has meaning for the NON-managers and NON-bankers, as well.” For Kelly, in other words, European integration offered a new chance to reach out to other segments of society and “rearrange the social order for the benefit of the underprivileged.”<sup>27</sup> Becoming involved in Brussels and working towards the creation of a “large, socially progressive zone in the world” offered Kelly the opportunity to work seriously towards real change and motivated her to reach out to “underprivileged” segments of the population in new ways. In short, Kelly’s decision to think about social problems within the framework of Europe rather than that of West Germany and to work through the EEC rather than a Leftist group gave her an approach to changing the world which was distinct from the lackadaisical idealism of the American student rebel and the self-absorbed intellectualism of the German 68er.

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<sup>27</sup> Petra Kelly to Vorwärts, January 29, 1973. PKA Akte 531,3.

Kelly first approached European politics on academic terms. Even before she had physically returned to the European continent, Petra Kelly had directed her thoughts towards a transnationally integrated “United Europe.” As she neared the end of her undergraduate education at AU, Kelly applied to post-graduate programs in European Integration at several European universities. In the spring of 1970, she accepted a scholarship to a one-year master’s program in European Integration at the University of Amsterdam from amongst a handful of other offers.<sup>28</sup> According to her biographers, Kelly loved the “small friendly streets” and the “centuries of human history and culture” that surrounded her in Amsterdam, but as a graduate student she found precious little time to enjoy the city, focusing almost exclusively on her studies.<sup>29</sup> In any event, Amsterdam was little more than a stepping stone for the adventurous Kelly. As soon as she had completed her master’s degree, Kelly left for Brussels, the ostensible command center of European integration. Here she planned to augment her academic knowledge of European politics with practical experience by combining dissertation research on organizations working towards European unity with an internship at the EEC.<sup>30</sup>

When Kelly began her internship in late 1971, Brussels seemed full of opportunities. French President Charles de Gaulle’s recent resignation had removed one roadblock to EEC expansion and now Great Britain, Denmark, and Ireland were all on the verge of joining the original six EEC member states. Kelly quickly came to see that

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<sup>28</sup> Though Kelly was also accepted at the University of Bruges and offered a scholarship to participate in a program run through Johns Hopkins University in Bologna, she chose Amsterdam because it was the only option which offered a scholarship and which she considered to be reasonably close to her relatives in Franconia. Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, 59.

<sup>29</sup> Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, 62. See also Sperr, *Petra Karin Kelly*, 90.

<sup>30</sup> Kelly’s dissertation was supervised by Professor Carl J. Friedrich at the University of Heidelberg. She never completed the project. Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, 62, 68-9.

there were important differences between this formal process of European integration, which was clearly centered around the EEC offices in Brussels, and the sort of European integration aimed at incorporating underprivileged Europeans, which she favored. The awkward contrast between Brussels' purported role as capital of Europe, and the city's status as something of a backwater in terms of political activism and public consciousness, would become a central paradox of Kelly's career with the EEC. Despite this paradox, however, Kelly did not reject Brussels' role wholly. Instead, she argued that the underprivileged "NON-managers and NON-bankers" must be represented in Brussels, so that they too would have a stake in European integration. Thus, Kelly saw "the direct election" to the European Parliament as a necessity for a United Europe with "political democratic legitimacy."<sup>31</sup> In order to build Europe's legitimacy, Kelly dedicated herself to the fight for direct elections.

Kelly's repeated calls for direct elections to the European Parliament were echoed by the Young European Federalists (JEF), a Europe-wide activist group dedicated to the creation of a federal government structure for a United Europe. Kelly first came into contact with the JEF through the German chapter's magazine, *Forum E* (short for *Forum Europa*), to which she started submitting articles shortly after her arrival in Brussels. The relationship that began with this trickle of correspondence soon grew to the point that members of *Forum E*'s Bonn-based editorial staff stopped in to visit Kelly on their trips to Brussels.<sup>32</sup> For Kelly, collaboration with the *Forum E* team was a way into a community of West German activists who shared her desire for a socially progressive

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<sup>31</sup> Petra Kelly, "Demokratisierung der Institution der Europäischen Gemeinschaften," n.d. [1972?], 2. PKA Akte 530,35.

<sup>32</sup> Petra Kelly to Jo Leinen and Gisela [?], September 25, 1974. PKA Akte 2249

Europe. For the staff of *Forum E*, on the other hand, working with Kelly offered access to the inside of the EEC's Brussels' headquarters, particularly to the office of Dutch EEC Commissioner Sicco Mansholt, the Commission's President from March 1972 until January 1973, and Kelly's lover from the summer of 1973 until early 1975. As both youthful activist and well-connected Eurocrat, Petra Kelly was optimally positioned to serve as a human link between the *Forum E* editorial staff and President Mansholt.

Kelly first met Mansholt in the summer of 1972 after her dissertation research stipend was revoked by the Christian Democrat Press and Information Office. Kelly's attempts to publicize her findings that European integration under the EEC's leadership was benefiting bankers and managers, not the underprivileged, outraged the Christian Democrats as well as her supervisors at the EEC.<sup>33</sup> Unsure where to turn, the twenty-four year old intern took matters into her own hands. "Spontaneously, without making an appointment she rode up to the thirteenth floor and marched determinedly into the [EEC] President's office." The man she found there was Sicco Mansholt. Kelly greeted President Mansholt by launching into an outraged diatribe about the state of the EEC. Far from being bowled over by Kelly's verbal onslaught, however, the sixty-three year old Dutchman "made many seriously-minded compliments and even arranged for [Kelly] to continue her study."<sup>34</sup> By the fall of 1972, Mansholt had remedied Kelly's problematic financial situation by guiding her to an opening in the EEC's Economic and Social Committee (despite a Commission-wide freeze on new hirings while the accession of the

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<sup>33</sup> Sara Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, 72.

<sup>34</sup> Monika Sperr, *Petra Karin Kelly*, 94.

three new member states was finalized). The couple's love affair began with a romantic rendezvous in New York City the following summer.<sup>35</sup>

Kelly and Mansholt's thirty-eight year gap in age made them appear something of an odd couple romantically. Their drastically different political backgrounds also seemed to set them apart. Yet during the early 1970s, Petra Kelly and Sicco Mansholt became devoted lovers and close political collaborators. Mansholt was a career politician, described by his biographer as a "founding father of the European Union,"<sup>36</sup> and best known for his important work as lead author of the EEC's archly-bureaucratic and economically-driven Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). By the time he met Kelly in 1972, however, Mansholt was yearning for a more inclusive and more accessible version of Europe. In fact, Mansholt's vision for Europe had changed to such an extent by the 1970s that Kelly nicknamed him "Mr. New Europe." In an article she wrote about him published in the United Nations' *Vista* magazine in 1973, Kelly described Mansholt's plan to strengthen and re-organize the EEC as no less than an attempt at "forging new political foundations for Europe." Kelly explained that "Mr. New Europe" was approaching this project by "turning his massive energies" towards the struggle "to get the people involved at every local level."<sup>37</sup>

Despite, or perhaps precisely because of their long-time focus on Brussels, the involvement of the people "at every local level" seemed necessary for the future of the European project to Kelly, the JEF activists, and even "Mr. New Europe" himself.

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<sup>35</sup> Sara Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, 77.

<sup>36</sup> Johan von Merriënboer, *Mansholt: Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2006), 9.

<sup>37</sup> Petra Kelly, "Mister New Europe," *Vista*, April 1973, p. 19. PKA Akte 531,14.

Without widespread public involvement, these integrationists reasoned, Europe did not really offer an alternative way of doing politics. Without dedicated citizens, the “large, socially progressive zone” that Kelly hoped to create on the continent would have little value. Yet the political tactics used by these elite integrationists seemed disconnected from their goals of widespread involvement. Moving in privileged circles and orbiting Brussels, the distant Belgian city that doubled as capital of Europe, neither Kelly nor her allies were in close contact with the people at the grassroots they all hoped to win over to the European cause. Even if Kelly was successful in dusting off the “direct election proposals” which she claimed had been “yellowing in the desk drawers” of “politicians of the old-rank-and-file” since 1958, there was little reason to believe that local people across the continent would jump to become involved in the Europe of Kelly, the JEF, and Mansholt.<sup>38</sup> Despite their good intentions, Kelly and her colleagues were committing the same mistake for which she had so harshly criticized the German student movement. The significant discrepancy between their inclusive statements and the exclusive nature of their political activism remained as these Brussels-based integrationists turned their attention to the European ramifications of the imminent energy crisis.

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<sup>38</sup> Petra Kelly. “Europe...it is a little mainland off the south-east coast of Northern Ireland,” (Speech at the University of Coleraine, Northern Ireland, May 7, 1975), 7. PKA Akte 533,4.

## **Nuclear Power Politics in Brussels and Bonn**

In the early 1970s, energy policy became a hot topic in political centers like Brussels and Bonn. Even before the 1973 oil shock foreshadowed a future without cheap energy, the Club of Rome had forecast a global energy crisis in its landmark study *The Limits to Growth*. In the eyes of long-time EEC Commissioner Sicco Mansholt, who was well aware of the part played by the ECSC and Euratom in the movement towards an integrated Europe, energy debates had pride of place in Brussels. EEC member states' lax adherence to the policies promulgated by the Commission, on the other hand, meant that Brussels energy debates were not necessarily a matter of much importance to Europe's citizens. Thus, although the plans for a "New Europe" outlined by Mansholt in Kelly's *Vista* article focused on the need to include Europe's citizens in re-forging the EEC, Mansholt's emphasis on energy and macroeconomic policy made his plan less of a radical break from the EEC's past than he may have hoped. As Mansholt, Kelly, and the JEF struggled to articulate an alternative vision for Europe that would involve local people, however, the growing significance of energy in policy debates across the continent led them to believe that this issue would engage people "at every local level" and become a decisive one in Europe's future.

Mere months after the publication of Kelly's *Vista* article, the 1973 oil shock triggered a fiery debate about the economization of energy and gave the concept of "energy independence" a new significance. "Only nuclear energy," one scholar has argued, "presented itself as a solution to these dilemmas." In the mid-1970s, nuclear

power was considered “the only technologically realistic, economically competitive, and long-term alternative to oil.”<sup>39</sup> West Germany’s eager acceptance of the nuclear solution was evident in the country’s 1973 Energy Program, which called for an increase of nuclear energy consumption from one percent of the nation’s total in 1973 to fifteen percent by 1985, a goal which would require the construction of forty new nuclear plants over the next decade.<sup>40</sup> Beyond serving as a solution to the twin dilemmas of global oil shortages and international energy dependence, nuclear power was becoming a crucial West German industry in its own right; by the early 1970s, the Federal Republic had become the world’s second largest exporter of nuclear energy technology.<sup>41</sup> For German economic policy-makers, in other words, expanding the country’s nuclear program seemed an ideal path back to the economic heights of the post-war *Wirtschaftswunder*.

Despite all this excitement, Petra Kelly and Sicco Mansholt remained skeptical of nuclear energy’s potential. In her article for *Vista*, Kelly had traced the origins of Mansholt’s plan for a “New Europe,” to the Club of Rome’s 1972 publication *The Limits to Growth*, a slim volume billed by its authors as a study of the “central, long-term problems of modern man.” Citing a speech given by UN Secretary General U Thant, the Club defined these “central, long-term problems” as “the arms race, environmental degradation, the population explosion, and economic stagnation.”<sup>42</sup> According to the

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<sup>39</sup> Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Christian Joppke, *Mobilizing Against Nuclear Energy: A Comparison of Germany and the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 93.

<sup>41</sup> Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben*, 27.

<sup>42</sup> Donella H. Meadows, et al, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972), 17.

study's authors, a continuation of the current trends in "world population, industrialization, food production and resource depletion," would lead to a "rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity" sometime "within the next one hundred years."<sup>43</sup> This bleak forecast for the future of humanity brought Mansholt to "the conclusion that new economic priorities not based solely on material growth are called for." The new economic priorities Mansholt laid out shortly after becoming President of the EEC responded directly to the long-term problems described in *The Limits to Growth*. Chief among them were reform of food production, economization of energy and raw materials, re-urbanization, and encouragement of the use of recycled materials. Though these new economic priorities did not indict nuclear power in and of themselves, they did call into question the wisdom of a headlong rush towards an unproven technology aimed only at continuing the unstoppable economic growth which had defined the post-war boom. For Mansholt, the decision to adopt nuclear power was first and foremost a decision about economic priorities, and thus the shape of future society in Europe.

Mansholt and Kelly's critical stance towards nuclear power was also tempered by Petra Kelly's exploration of the debate about nuclear power in the United States, where effective anti-nuclear protests were mounted years before the issue was publicly contested in Europe.<sup>44</sup> Kelly herself had been aware of the American anti-nuclear movement since she attended a meeting about the hazardous effects of nuclear radiation

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>44</sup> Rucht, *Von Wyhl nach Gorleben*, 79.

hosted by consumer advocate Ralph Nader in 1970.<sup>45</sup> At that time, the issue had been a personal one for Kelly, whose younger sister Grace had died of a cancer that Kelly came to link with exposure to nuclear radiation. Following *The Limits to Growth* and the oil shock, however, Kelly's personal concerns about nuclear power took on new dimensions. Now Grace's death became a motivation for Kelly to "inform people about the military and civilian uses of nuclear technology."<sup>46</sup> In 1974, several trips to her parents' home in Virginia for kidney treatment offered Kelly the opportunity to gather materials from the highly politicized nuclear debate in the US. Early in the year, Kelly wrote to Mansholt from Washington, describing the copious quantity of reports, pamphlets, and articles on nuclear power she had ordered "for you (and myself—in order to learn from them)."<sup>47</sup> Kelly's personal engagement with these materials was intensive. She explained that she was staying up until 3 or 4 a.m. each night in order to study "the tremendous piles of materials [on nuclear power] that one must work through in order to really understand the topic and also to have all the necessary arguments ready."<sup>48</sup> The countless early morning hours that Kelly devoted to her piles of materials were reflected in her remarkable command of the facts in the nuclear energy debate.

Though Kelly's initial reservations about nuclear power stemmed from her growing conviction that nuclear radiation was responsible for her sister's death, the "necessary arguments" that she endeavored to master expanded on the physical dangers

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<sup>45</sup> Kelly attended the meeting shortly after her sister Grace died of cancer at the age of ten. Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, 79

<sup>46</sup> Petra Kelly, *Thinking Green* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Petra Kelly to Sicco Mansholt, n.d. [April 1974?], PKA Akte 3199.

<sup>48</sup> Petra Kelly to Hans-Helmut Wüstenhagen, February 2, 1975, PKA Akte 2262.

of radiation by taking the social consequences of nuclear technology into account. The extremely high levels of radiation measured by atomic physicists near fast-breeder reactors, for example, were cause enough for Kelly to denounce the construction of fast-breeders as a “Faustian pact.”<sup>49</sup> Yet the prospect of widespread reliance on these plutonium producing reactors led Kelly to see the adoption of fast-breeders as a threat to European democracy, as well as public health. Plans to develop fast-breeder technology, she claimed, would lead to the creation of “large stockpiles [of nuclear fuel] and spent nuclear fuel elements...from which crude homemade bombs could be made.” Given the “recent plague” of terrorism in Europe, Kelly wondered how “satisfactory protection and control” of dangerous nuclear materials would be feasible “within a pluralistic democratic Europe in the future.”<sup>50</sup> In effect, Kelly argued, plans for the widespread construction of fast-breeder reactors would necessitate a corps of “trained guerilla troops to protect the many reactors we will soon have.”<sup>51</sup> The incompatibility of real democracy with the type of security required to safeguard dangerous stockpiles of nuclear fuel led Kelly to ask one “insurmountable question.” How, she wanted to know, could one “make people SAFE for a [sic] nuclear power generation short of total robotization?”<sup>52</sup> This extreme vision of the extent to which nuclear power would force changes on European

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<sup>49</sup> Kelly borrowed this description of fast-breeder reactors from Dr. Alvin Weinberg of the US Federal Energy Office. Petra Kelly, “The Faustian Pact with Breeder Reactors!” (Brussels, November 22, 1974), 1. PKA Akte 532,16.

<sup>50</sup> Petra Kelly, “An Open Letter to All within the European Communities,” (Brussels, March 23, 1975), 5. PKA Akte 531, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 3.

democracy and affect Europeans' personal freedoms equated decisions about nuclear technology with central choices about the future form of European society.

The introduction to a 1978 guide for potential anti-nuclear activists echoed Kelly's absolutist assessment of the deep social consequences of increased reliance on nuclear technology:

We begin from the assertions that different visions of society are behind the debate about atomic power, and that the outcome of this conflict is, in the end, a question of economic and political power, and not only scientific arguments.<sup>53</sup>

Kelly's fear of the broad changes that nuclear power would effect on European society, and Mansholt's understanding of nuclear power as a means to prevent the implementation of new economic priorities go to the heart of the assertion that "different visions of society are behind the debate about nuclear power." For Kelly, nuclear power would increasingly become symbolic of the two possibilities for Europe's future. Acceptance of nuclear technology indicated an implicit adherence to "old economic priorities," despite their potential costs for European democracy and their effect on the freedoms of Europe's people. Rejection of nuclear technology, on the other hand, was a move towards Mansholt's "new economic priorities," and a new "fission-free economy built on sound and sustainable alternative power sources."<sup>54</sup> If frantically constructing the forty nuclear power plants called for by the West German Energy Program regardless of the risks involved was representative of one vision of society, replete with boundless economic growth and the eventual "robotization" of humanity, accepting the consequences of not building the plants implied a drastically different vision. Despite the deep social

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<sup>53</sup> Hanz-Christian Buchholtz et al, *Widerstand gegen Atomkraftwerke: Informationen für Atomkraftwerkgegner und solche, die es werden wollen* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1978), 8.

<sup>54</sup> Petra Kelly, "The Faustian Pact with the Breeder Reactors!," 4. PKA Akte 532,16.

ramifications that Kelly linked to the adoption of nuclear energy, and the continued intensity of the energy debates in Brussels and Bonn, she remained hard pressed to articulate this alternative vision for Europe's future in a way that resonated with the continent's citizens. It was not until Kelly and *Forum E* editor Jo Leinen visited a grassroots anti-nuclear demonstration in March 1975 that they found a functioning model of the "fission-free economy" they considered so necessary for Europe's future; a model designed by the very people they had so long hoped to integrate into the European project.

## **“Aha-effect:” The Convergence of Grassroots Activism and European Integrationism**

Far removed from the geo-political debates in Brussels and Bonn, local people responded to the construction of nuclear plants near their homes in terms of specific locally-defined interests and concerns. While some were pleased with the economic opportunities offered by a new power station in the neighborhood, others were worried about the effects a nearby nuclear plant would have on their livelihoods and ways of life.<sup>55</sup> Much like the energy policy debates in Brussels and Bonn, then, local dialogues about nuclear power stations turned on economic concerns and divergent ideas about the shape of society. Yet, these local dialogues remained distant from the policy debates taking place in Europe’s capital cities. It was not until word of a grassroots struggle against the nuclear plant planned for the village of Wyhl in southwestern Germany became widespread that Kelly, Mansholt, and the JEF realized how closely their concerns about nuclear power were aligned with those of the “people at every local level.”

In the fall of 1974, *Forum E* editor Jo Leinen learned from friends that “in Baden and the Alsace a protest movement against atomic power plants was growing, with links across the Rhine.”<sup>56</sup> The transnational circumstances of this grassroots protest movement

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<sup>55</sup> The important role played by economic issues in motivating grassroots anti-nuclear protest has been discussed extensively in recent analyses of the West German anti-nuclear movement. See, for example Jens Ivo Engels, *Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 348.

<sup>56</sup> Jo Leinen, “Von der Apfelsinenkiste auf den Ministersessel,” in Karl-Otto Sattler, ed., *Im Streit für die Umwelt: Jo Leinen, Basis-Aktivist und Minister: Bilanz und Ausblick*, (Kirkel: Edition Apoll, 1995), 47.

made it perfect material for the JEF magazine; Leinen quickly canvassed *Forum E* contributors for article ideas. When Petra Kelly got word of Leinen's proposal, she was about to leave Brussels for a short trip to Washington, DC. Hurriedly, Kelly typed out an excited reply to Leinen's query. Kelly's letter supplied *Forum E* with a long list of potential sources for interviews and materials on both sides of the Atlantic, ranging from a trade union leader opposed to the introduction of nuclear power in Ireland, to Dutch opponents of the planned Kalkar reactor, to the German "pro-industry" Atomforum organization, to Ralph Nader and the American "Nuclear Moratorium" movement.<sup>57</sup> All of these contacts were culled from Kelly's personal rolodex; even before nuclear energy was a hot topic in Europe, Kelly stood at the center of an expanding, international web of "anti-uranium, anti-atom, and anti-atomic-power initiatives." Yet Kelly's contacts did not include grassroots activists. In the context of nuclear power, just like the wider European project, Kelly lacked access to the people at every local level whose participation she had long ago deemed essential to meaningful politics. The locally organized protest movement in Baden and the Alsace proved to be an entry point into grassroots anti-nuclear activism. It was by coming into contact with local activists at Wyhl that Kelly and Leinen would finally connect their ideas about United Europe and the need for "new economic priorities" with the people "at every local level."

By the time the staff of *Forum E* had finally assembled the magazine's "Nuclear Issue," the protest movement on the French-German border had made international headlines. On February 23, 1975, the reactor construction site at Wyhl was occupied by 28,000 demonstrators. For those who were unfamiliar with the years of struggle and

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<sup>57</sup> Petra Kelly to Jo Leinen, November 7, 1974. PKA Akte 2249.

organizing that had preceded this massive site occupation, the sheer number of protesters present at this remote village was unimaginable.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the anti-nuclear movement seemed to explode onto the stage with the Wyhl site occupation. Kelly's press clippings file soon swelled with articles detailing the occupation of the construction site and its consequences. In one article, Kelly underlined a comment made by the mayor of Strasbourg. "If the nuclear plant at Wyhl is stopped," the mayor quipped, "it would be extremely difficult to put one into the Alsace. If you can't do it here, where can you do it in France? I believe the entire French nuclear program rides with Wyhl."<sup>59</sup> For Kelly, the significance of the mayor's comment was clear: the movement at Wyhl was about more than one reactor. It was about more than the reactors in one country. In fact, if the mayor of Strasbourg's comments were to be taken seriously, then the citizens of a tiny village nestled in the hills of southwestern Germany held the fate of European nuclear power in their hands. Not only were local people at Wyhl actively engaged in anti-nuclear politics, they were also beginning to broadcast an alternative vision for Europe.

It was for good reason that the mayor of Strasbourg was not alone in attributing international significance to the events at Wyhl. Despite the protest's local focus, the international nature of everything that happened at Wyhl was apparent to many of the local people occupying the reactor construction site. In 1970 and 1971, locations on both

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<sup>58</sup> Though accounts which describe this veritable horde of protesters as coming from France and Switzerland as well as the Federal Republic seem to suggest that the protesters at Wyhl came from all across the European continent, Wyhl's location in Germany's southwestern corner meant that the French and Swiss activists actually came from villages within several kilometers of Wyhl. Though the demonstration included activists from somewhat further away, particularly from the city of Freiburg, this was by and large a protest of people from the immediate region. See Wolfgang Sternstein, *Überall is Wyhl: Aus der Arbeit eines Aktionsforschers* (Frankfurt: Haag + Herchen, 1978).

<sup>59</sup> The comment was made by Mayor Pierre Pflimlin, who had also served briefly as Prime Minister of France (May 13 – June 1, 1958). John Vincourt, "Two Rhine Villages Succeed in Halting Industrial Invasion." *International Herald-Tribune*, March 5, 1975. PKA Akte 3167.

banks of the Rhine had been chosen by far-off regional and national governments as sites for new nuclear power plants.<sup>60</sup> Opposition to these projects had quickly transcended national borders, as villagers from both sides of the river had come together first in Marckolsheim, France and later in Wyhl, Germany in order to stand up against industrial construction projects.<sup>61</sup> The participation of Swiss activists, too, in these struggles caused people all along the upper Rhine to dub their region “Dreyeckland” (“Three corner land”).<sup>62</sup> Despite their seemingly local focus, then, the activists of Dreyeckland physically embodied the transnationalist ideas that Kelly and her colleagues in Brussels could only write about in the abstract.

It was in light of the growing consciousness of Wyhl as a European issue that Petra Kelly and Jo Leinen made their first visit to the disputed construction site on March 31, 1975. Attending an Easter Monday rally along with more than 10,000 demonstrators, Kelly, an unknown bureaucrat from Brussels, managed to get her name on the speakers’ list.<sup>63</sup> Shortly after a speaker from nearby Kaiseraugst, Switzerland invoked the spirit of Dreyeckland with an announcement that a reactor construction site just across the Swiss-German border had been occupied earlier that same day, Kelly addressed the mass of

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<sup>60</sup> Jens Ivo Engels, *Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik*, 351-352.

<sup>61</sup> The occupation of a lead factory construction site in Marckolsheim, France from August 1974 until February 1975, was seen by at least one Alsatian as a rehearsal for everything that took place at Wyhl. Frederic Mayer, “Ein Elsässer fühlt sich wie im Dritten Reich,” in Nössler and de Witt, eds., *Wyhl: Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends* (Freiburg: inform-Verlag, 1976), 91.

<sup>62</sup> Activists described the name “Dreyeckland” as a play on the German term “Dreiländereck” used to denote a point where the borders of three countries met. See “Umweltbegung in Dreyeckland” (n.d [1977?]). PKA Akte 3166.

<sup>63</sup> Kelly’s copy of the Speakers’ List for the Easter Monday Rally includes her name, written in by hand, as the penultimate speaker of the afternoon. “Rednerliste” (Wyhl, March 31, 1975). PKA Akte 3166. Biographer Sara Parkin claims that Kelly attended the rally as a substitute for Sicco Mansholt, though his name does not appear on the speakers’ list in Kelly’s files. Parkin, *The Life and Death of Petra Kelly*, 80.

demonstrators.<sup>64</sup> She opened her speech ironically, describing herself as a representative of “the profit-addicted EEC.” There in Brussels, she declared, “we are waiting for Wyhl.” Offering greetings from Sicco Mansholt, Kelly noted that the former EEC president had sent telegrams to numerous German government officials in support of the Wyhlers’ actions.<sup>65</sup> Kelly’s short speech revealed her distance from the campaign at Wyhl even as it established her support for the Wyhlers and her high-level connections in Brussels. This was an important step in Kelly’s journey into the mainstream of West German politics; for once, Kelly, the outsider from Brussels, seemed able to connect with people at the grassroots.

Immediately after Kelly spoke, many of the demonstrators she had addressed rushed off to join the growing occupation at Kaiseraugst.<sup>66</sup> As Kelly and Leinen left Dreyeckland for the first time, they were in awe of the transnational movement against nuclear power they had encountered in this rural region. For Leinen, the visit had an “aha-effect.” It was on the way home from this rally, he recalls, that he and Kelly realized that “atomic energy would divide society.”<sup>67</sup> The activism of local people in Dreyeckland, in other words, led Kelly and Leinen to the same conclusions as did Mansholt’s reading of *The Limits to Growth*.

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<sup>64</sup> Lutz Anders from the group Gewaltfreie Aktion Kaiseraugst/Schweiz told the crowd about the occupation in Swiss Kaiseraugst. See Nössler and de Witt, eds., *Wyhl*, 123. See also “Rednerliste,” PKA Akte 3166.

<sup>65</sup> Petra Kelly, Untitled (speech, Wyhl, March 31, 1975). PKA Akte 3166.

<sup>66</sup> Nössler and de Witt, eds., *Wyhl*, 123.

<sup>67</sup> Leinen, “Von der Apfelsinenkiste auf den Ministersessel,” 48.

Yet the activism of the local people of Dreyeckland was even more striking than the deep thoughts of 'Mr. New Europe.' Kelly revealed the extent to which she had been personally affected by her visit to Wyhl in a letter to the West European Socialists, a transnational pro-European organization with which she was associated. Kelly suggested three new "possibilities for action" to the group. The first possibility, which Kelly placed under the heading "Europe and Nuclear fission centers: GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE!!!!" was obviously linked to her recent experience in Dreyeckland. Kelly described the "resistance in the Wyhl region" as a sign of a "transnational consciousness" and argued that the West European Socialists should get into dialogue with groups like the activists of Dreyeckland in order to "put to use collected experiences in joint transnational actions."<sup>68</sup> In Kelly's eyes at least, the highly effective transnational protests in Dreyeckland had much to teach even the cosmopolitan West European Socialists. Instead of continuing to develop ideas intended to pull people from "every local level" into the orbit of Brussels, Kelly shifted her tactics. Now she was asking the cosmopolitan Brussels-based Euro-elite to follow the lead of the locally-focused farmers of Wyhl. As she had exclaimed in her speech at the Easter Monday rally, Brussels had indeed been "waiting for Wyhl."

Kelly's call for the West European Socialists to learn from the farmers at Wyhl evokes the irony of the relationship between Dreyeckland and Europe. Kelly described this relationship in an open letter addressed to "All within the European Communities" in late March 1975. "While in Wyhl, Germany thousands of Germans, French and Swiss citizens have demonstrated peacefully on the site of a future nuclear reactor," Kelly

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<sup>68</sup> Petra Kelly, "WAS TUN ??? Einige Aktionsmöglichkeiten für die Westeuropäischen Sozialisten !" (November 1975), 1. PKA Akte 534,2

reminded the readers of her open letter, “there has not yet taken place the political discussion with all its implications at the European level!”<sup>69</sup> The idea that ‘backwards’ Dreyeckland, a rural region comprised mainly of farms and vineyards, had taken the lead on determining the future of nuclear power in Europe may have seemed preposterous to politically-savvy West European Socialists and the energy-obsessed EEC leadership in Brussels. Yet for Kelly, who had shared in Jo Leinen’s Wyhl revelation, and who considered herself exiled among the Brussels “Eurocrats,” the leadership of the Wyhl demonstrators in articulating an alternative vision for Europe was much easier to accept. She explained this acceptance using the words of Albert Einstein:

In 1946, Albert Einstein stated “Our representatives depend ultimately on decisions made in the village square...to the village square we must carry the facts of atomic energy.” From there Europe’s voice must come! This is the responsiveness we should seek.<sup>70</sup>

Following her visit to Wyhl, Kelly began to “carry the facts about nuclear energy” to village squares across Germany, throughout Europe, and eventually all around the world. As at Wyhl, she used her position in Brussels as a way onto the agenda. But rather than peddling the viewpoint of the “profit-addicted EEC” or even that of her “New European” colleagues to those she addressed, Kelly sought the “responsiveness” of local people. Thus, in spreading the facts about nuclear power to village squares across the continent, Kelly saw herself laying the groundwork for “Europe’s voice” to come roaring back to Brussels.

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<sup>69</sup> Kelly, “An Open letter to All Within the European Communities,” 1. PKA Akte 531,10. Emphasis from original.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 2.

### **From the Occupied Site to Parliament: Building Europe from the Grassroots Up**

In the fall of 1975, Kelly spoke at a rally against the fast-breeder reactor under construction at Kalkar in Northern Germany. Standing in this small town's idyllic market place, she was indeed carrying her version of the "facts of atomic energy" to the village square, just as Einstein had proposed. At Kalkar, Kelly described her many concerns about Europe's planned nuclear future. She worried about the "European federal guerilla troops" that she feared would be needed to defend functioning reactors from terrorist threats and the decreasing importance of human beings in an increasingly technological society. Yet she concluded her speech by describing the actions of local anti-nuclear activists as representative of a sorely needed alternative vision for Europe. "Whether in Wyhl or Kaiseraugst or Kalkar," Kelly exclaimed, "there is an ever-growing solidarity, an ecological self-consciousness in border regions." Anti-nuclear activism in each of these local, yet transnational settings, Kelly continued, marked "a way towards peace and nonviolence," and proved the need "to build a transnational, nonviolent, simple, humane Europe."<sup>71</sup> In responding to nuclear power, Kelly thought, anti-nuclear activists were effectively putting forth a new vision for Europe from the grassroots up.

Kelly explained the significance of grassroots transnationalism in a letter criticizing the "absence of an international or transnational element" at a February 1977

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<sup>71</sup> Petra Kelly, "Kalkar-Ansprache der Frau Petra Kelly," *Die Unabhängigen*, October 4, 1975. PKA Akte 533,7.

anti-nuclear rally held in the town of Itzehoe, Germany.<sup>72</sup> She lambasted the leadership of the national organization which had sponsored the Itzehoe rally for failing to include reports about the “Wyhl court proceedings, Danish [anti-nuclear] activities, or about the seminar in Malville, or about the EEC proceedings regarding the issue of site selection.” It was precisely at such a demonstration, with its 40,000 participants, Kelly went on to argue, that “transnational communication” could be “activated and pushed forward.” If this chance was wasted, she concluded her letter, then she got the feeling that “40,000 prepared anti-nuclear activists had come for nothing.” Kelly’s tough criticisms of the Itzehoe demonstration were directed against top-down control of grassroots activism. For her, communication and coordination between activists at the local level were the obvious means of ensuring meaningful transnational activism. One of the many Danes she noticed in attendance at the rally, Kelly suggested, could have been asked to report on the movement in Denmark. A bicyclist could have been sent to the nearby reactor construction site in Brokdorf in order to gain information about the parallel rally taking place there. Although none of these potential connections were realized at Itzehoe, Kelly continued to believe that the dynamics of grassroots anti-nuclear demonstrations offered the basis for transnational networking.<sup>73</sup>

In fact, Kelly saw successfully organized anti-nuclear demonstrations themselves as the potential birthplaces of a diverse transnational political coalition. “On the

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<sup>72</sup> Though the rally was in opposition to the reactor under construction at Brokdorf, rural activists met at Itzehoe (20 kilometers from the site) because the government had asked them not to protest in Brokdorf after a court order had temporarily halted construction there. Urban activists staged a parallel protest in Brokdorf despite the government’s request. Joppke, *Mobilizing Against Nuclear Power*, 104-5.

<sup>73</sup> Petra Kelly and John Lambert to Hans-Helmuth Wüstenhagen and Freimut Duve, 23 February, 1977. PKA Akte 2879.

occupied site,” Kelly claimed, “rocket technicians, uranium miners, secretaries in atomic power centers, housewives, scientists” all could learn to speak with one another and agree to “nonviolent resistance against the overstepping of the bounds of humanity.” Creating this new coalition, she continued, was the key to unleashing “political and social chain reactions like Lip, Larzac, Marckolsheim, Wyhl, Brokdorf, and Kaiseraugst.”<sup>74</sup> In locating the source of political and social power in the grassroots, Petra Kelly demonstrated just how great a role she believed that local protest could play in the re-forging of European society. For Kelly, the obvious target of the “political and social chain reaction” unleashed across national borders by a heterogeneous coalition of activists was Strasbourg, home of the European Parliament. She saw the upcoming “Direct elections to the European Parliament,” as an electoral contest which local activists should “make into a decisive battle against atomic power plants.”<sup>75</sup> Kelly herself hoped to play a prominent role in this battle, and she intended to do so as a representative of the alternative vision for Europe developed by anti-nuclear activists on the occupied site.

Kelly was, in fact, interested in leading the charge in this decisive battle against atomic energy. As the 1979 European elections approached, a group of electorally-inclined anti-nuclear and ecological activists with experience in several state-level electoral campaigns formed *Sonstige Politische Vereinigung Die Grünen* (Miscellaneous Political Association The Greens – *SPV Die Grünen*), a political coalition legally eligible to take part in the direct elections to the European Parliament, though formally not a

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<sup>74</sup> Petra Kelly and Roland Vogt, “Ökologie und Frieden: Der Kampf gegen Atomkraftwerke aus der Sicht von Hiroshima” *Forum Europa* (January/February 1977): 18. PKA Akte 534,4.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

political party. Kelly did not hide her excitement about this new coalition. “Should the first place on the list [of candidates] be offered to me,” she wrote, “I would be inclined to accept it and to commit myself fully to it in the coming months.” Kelly couched her own readiness to lead an alternative, ecological slate into the West German elections for the European Parliament in terms of her movement experience. She was an optimal candidate, she argued, “particularly in view of my long and intensive involvement within the anti-atomic, peace- and women’s-movement in West Europe since 1970.”<sup>76</sup>

*SPV Die Grünen* was formally established at a March 1979 meeting in Frankfurt. Immediately, the coalition chose its candidates for the European elections. Kelly successfully convinced the assembled delegates that she ought to head up the slate, beating out even “the most prominent of the green [sic], Mr. Herbert Gruhl who had left the establishment in order to join the ecological movement.”<sup>77</sup> Kelly’s triumph over Gruhl, whom one scholar has argued “did more than any other individual to lay the foundations for the Green party,” and who was well known throughout West Germany after his highly visible resignation from the CDU and departure from the Bundestag in 1977, is a clear sign of her support within this new party.<sup>78</sup> That Kelly’s European integrationist colleague Roland Vogt, whom she had touted as a candidate for parliament because “he also worked through ideas about the ecology movement’s role in the European direct elections and the future Europe (alternative Europe) very early,” won the

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<sup>76</sup> Petra Kelly to August and Renate Haußleiter, March 3, 1979. PKA Akte 2301. Emphasis from original.

<sup>77</sup> Petra Kelly to Mary [?], March 25, 1979. PKA Akte 2301.

<sup>78</sup> Christoph Becker-Schaum, “The Origins of the German Greens,” in *Green Parties: Reflections on the first three Decades*, ed. Frank Zelko and Carolin Brinkmann (Washington, DC: Heinrich Böll Foundation North America, 2006), 30.

second position on the Green slate is further evidence of the support for both Kelly and her ideas at Frankfurt.<sup>79</sup>

Kelly's experience in Brussels, and her long commitment to the idea of direct elections to the European Parliament made her an obvious choice for a top position on *SPV Die Grünen's* ticket in the upcoming elections. In her own explanation of the role she hoped to play as "number one candidate on the Ecological Ticket," however, Kelly saw her tenure in Brussels as little more than a basic qualification; her focus was elsewhere. She was stepping forward, she announced, in order to represent an alternative vision for European society, to "build Europe from BELOW and not from ABOVE." In fact, Kelly viewed her experience in Brussels chiefly as an in-depth look at all that was wrong with Europe. In Brussels, Kelly wrote, she had "known all too long the Europe of the soulless technocrats and the Europe of traditional power-and-hierarchy thinking." She now intended to "speak up for a decentralized, non/nuclear, non/military [sic] and gentle Europe – a Europe of the Regions and of the People." For Kelly, in other words, "these direct elections to the European Parliament" would be a chance to demonstrate, "that we desire soft and reliable and renewable energies, that we desire social and not military defense, and that we want a Europe that is modest and gentle and not power and ego-mad."<sup>80</sup> In short, the elections to the European Parliament offered a chance to re-articulate grassroots' activists' alternative vision for Europe and make Strasbourg into the next stage of the Lip, Larzac, Marckolsheim, Wyhl, Brokdorf, Kaiseraugst chain reaction.

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<sup>79</sup> Petra Kelly to August and Renate Haußleiter, March 3, 1979. PKA Akte 2301. Emphasis from original.

<sup>80</sup> Petra Kelly, "My dear Friends and Comrades" (Brussels, March 24, 1979). PKA Akte 540,6. Emphasis from original.

Though *SPV Die Grünen* did not receive enough votes to overcome German election law's "five percent hurdle" and win representation in Strasbourg, Kelly and Vogt attempted to bring the chain reaction to parliament on their own. Shortly after the election, the two activists unfurled a banner in the gallery of the European Parliament's plenary hall, protesting the fact that they had not been seated in parliament despite the 3.2% of the German vote earned by *SPV Die Grünen*.<sup>81</sup> By attempting to re-create the dynamics of "the occupied site" within the halls of parliament, Kelly and Vogt were knocking on the doors of the European establishment as representatives of an alternative Europe envisioned by grassroots anti-nuclear activists. Kelly's politics had come full circle.

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<sup>81</sup> Simone Veil to Petra Kelly and Roland Vogt, January 18, 1980. PKA Akte 2301.

## **Conclusion**

During the 1970s, the trajectory of Petra Kelly's career and the content of her activism were shaped by a host of transnational connections and inter-continental flows of ideas. Kelly herself often linked various locally- and nationally-defined activist projects, ferrying ideas across the Atlantic, spreading news of protest strategies and tactics, and attempting to enliven the soulless, technocratic EEC bureaucracy through an infusion of grassroots activism. The role she played as a carrier of ideas between these many contexts was certainly one important aspect of her nearly constant travels. More importantly, however, Kelly's transnational existence exemplified the alternative political vision to which all of her activism was dedicated. In transcending the national context, Kelly kept her distance from the established traditions of resistance that she had so strongly rejected in 1968, and found a space to re-define political participation separate from the over-determined and strictly policed terrain of national politics.

Kelly found a new model for political participation in the actions of grassroots opponents of nuclear power. Within her transnational political framework, the convergence of a heterogeneous mass of protesters and their individual concerns on the common ground of the occupied site represented nothing less than an alternative vision for Europe. Kelly placed the Wyhl occupation at the heart of a "chain reaction" of protest that crisscrossed France and Germany, and reverberated far beyond Europe. To her, the European Parliament was an obvious target for this impressive outpouring of grassroots energy. Kelly saw the involvement of grassroots anti-nuclear activists in the

direct elections to this as yet vaguely defined and largely powerless institution as an opportunity to remake European democracy in the image of the occupied site. Unlike traditional politicians, who viewed the European Parliamentary elections, when they finally came, as one more electoral contest, Kelly had been working towards these elections since her return to Europe in 1970. Her strong desire to take part in the battle of ideas that she believed direct elections to the European Parliament represented was matched only by the support for her candidacy among the members of the newly created *SPV Die Grünen*. Thus the 1979 elections to the European Parliament, seen through the lens of Petra Kelly's career during the 1970s, were the capstone of a decade of political activism.

Yet the enduring image of the 1979 elections among scholars of *Die Grünen* is as a dress rehearsal for the 1983 *Bundestag* elections. In this interpretation, the importance of the 1979 European elections for Kelly and her party can be seen in the 4.9 million DM campaign expense reimbursement earned by *SPV Die Grünen*, because these funds bankrolled *Die Grünen*'s numerous electoral campaigns of the early 1980s.<sup>82</sup> This interpretation does little to explain the Greens' surprising showing in 1979, however. For a party which had not yet contested even a single election in most West German states, and which still was not represented in any state's parliament, 3.2% of the vote in a national election was impressive, indeed.

Viewing the 1970s, including the 1979 elections, through the lens of Petra Kelly's career ascribes new significance to this campaign at the same time as it helps to explain the election's results. For Kelly and her European integrationist colleagues, the meaning

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<sup>82</sup> Joachim Raschke, *Die Grünen: Wie sie wurden, was sie sind* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1993), 895.

of political activism during the 1970s had grown out of what could be considered an impending choice between two distinct visions of society. The distinction between these visions was first expressed in Sicco Mansholt's differentiation between old and new economic priorities and then much more successfully demonstrated by the actions of grassroots anti-nuclear activists. It was in terms of these new possibilities that Kelly understood the 1979 campaign. In essence it was through the newly accessible political framework of Europe that Kelly hoped to make possible the building of new political coalitions outside of the national traditions of Leftist resistance in West Germany. And it was towards this goal that she had been working throughout the decade.

For both Petra Kelly and *Die Grünen*, then, Europe became an entry point into West German politics. It was within this outside political context that a new social vision could be developed. In this sense, Petra Kelly's contention that, "The need to act transnationally, European, and also internationally as a Green must never be forgotten," is more than mere rhetoric.<sup>83</sup> Instead, this call to transnational action is a reminder of the transnational roots of *Die Grünen* and the significance of ideas that transcend the traditions of national politics for Green social vision. Seen through the lens of Kelly's vision for Europe and her activist career, *Die Grünen's* 1983 entrance into the Bundestag was not a sudden shock to the West German political establishment, but instead the first fruit of a long-developing alternative politics shaped outside the established traditions of politics and resistance by advocates of grassroots transnational activism. Looking back over the 1970s with Kelly, it becomes possible to see the alternative grassroots activism that fostered the growth of a new politics in the mid-1970s and also to see how this new

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<sup>83</sup> Beckmann, "Beginne dort, wo Du bist," 8.

politics developed as it was filtered through the framework of Europe. From this vantage point, it becomes clear that Petra Kelly and her European project were of definite significance to the development of Green politics in West Germany and to the prospect of an alternative future for Europe.

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