THE GREEN MENACE

By Stephen Brockman

Fifty years ago, on January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of the German Reich. The free and sovereign people of a civilized European democracy had voiced their opinion, and their opinion was that democracy wasn’t for them.

Thus Hitler came to power in a spotlessly legal, democratic way. A little more than a month after he was appointed Chancellor, Hitler tried to consolidate his position by holding another election. He was confident that the astute voters of Germany would see the light and give him an even more convincing mandate; and he was right.

On March 5, 1933, Germany held its last free elections until after World War II. The Nazis received 44% of the vote. Though this wasn’t a majority, it was enough: the clever man acted quickly, and each day democracy was further corroded. Soon the world was treated to the most frightening example of dictatorship it has ever seen.

The fiftieth anniversary of a series of events that changed world history has caused much comment; the situation is not without its historic ironies, for on March 6 of this year, precisely fifty years and one day after the election in which German voters gave Hitler his mandate, West Germany will hold another national election. This election is also likely to change the course of history, but in a different way; and the strangest of this year’s political ironies is that, while in 1933 the Western World remained silent about the advent of Hitler, thus ushering in an era of blindness and appeasement, this year the Western leaders and the Western media, from The New Republic to The Nation Review, are loudly proclaiming a dangerous new Green Menace for Germany and for the world, thus making a proverbial mountain out of a mole hill and belittling one of the greatest evils of all time.

The comparisons are being made between the Nazis and a group of anti-establishment pacifist-types known as the Greens. Though the comparisons clearly bear no relationship to reality, they show how deeply the Greens have frightened American and German leaders, and how fundamentally we have forgotten the lessons of Germany’s Nazi past.

The attacks against the German peace movement and the Greens in the American press have grown fiercer as their influence in Germany has spread. One cannot help wondering how fierce the reaction would have been if in 1933 the Germans had voted in a pacifist instead of Hitler. Would that have been a terrible calamity for us?

Fortunately, the media in this country control merely American, not German opinion, and in no matter how the American establishment rages, Germany is a democracy (we made it one), and the German people will elect whom they please. It is thus quite likely that when the votes have been counted on March 6, 1983, the Green Party will come into the German parliament; there is even a possibility that they will be asked to help form a government. Whatever happens, one can be sure that the Greens will cause trouble for the powers that be. Germany’s next revolution will thus be neither red nor brown; it will be green.

Columbia’s provost, Fritz Stern, who is a distinguished historian of Germany, wrote in the pages of The New York Times last fall that the Greens rep-
resent a return of German politics to a certain characteristic romanticism and idealism. This is true, but it is not all the Greens represent, or say they repres-
ent. The Greens also offer to German voters the hope of a second choice, something which has been distinctly lacking in a country where, as in the United States, both the party that is labeled conservative and the party that is labeled liberal, though disagreeing on certain technical matters, are in basic agreement on foreign affairs, and where up till now there has seemed to be no alternative to continued unquestioning obedience to United States foreign pol-
icy, no matter how outrageous that policy was perceived to be.

More than anything else, the Green Party bills itself as the party of the peace movement, and to an overwhelm-
ing extent, it actually fulfills this role. It is the only major party that clearly and unequivocally opposes both the place-
ment of more nuclear weapons on Ger-
man soil and plans by both superpowers to build more nuclear weapons. It thus represents an electoral response to politi-
cicians of all creeds and colors who, ac-
cording to many voices in the peace movements here and in Germany, have known nothing better to do in response to current problems than to give us more of them; and who have driven the total number of nuclear weapons in the world up from 0 in 1945 to more than 50,000 in 1983, all in the name of preservation of the status quo.

Because it represents such a powerful electoral response to politics as usual, the Green Party is feared not only in Germany but also in the United States. Demonstrations may be impres-
sive, but votes are what counts for politi-
cicians, and the Greens promise to hit them where it hurts. Since the United States has yet to produce such a power-
ful electoral reaction to conventional politicians, liberal and conservative, the Green Party is seen as a dangerous ex-
ample for American voters. While the peace movement in this country is pow-
erful, it still operates predominantly within the established framework of American electoral politics and has left the supremacy of the two parties that label themselves every four years as choices basically unchallenged. Third parties like Barry Commoner’s Citizens’ Party that have attempted to present viable alternatives have as yet mostly with bureaucratic intransigence and extreme reluctance on the part of an electorate educated by the official press to believe that only the Democratic and Republican Parties have a chance.

The Greens are for the most part children of the Hitlerjugend—children of the children who grew up during the Third Reich; their world has been one of “economic miracle” and dead silence about the past. For West Germans during the 50s, 60s and 70s hard work has meant being able to forget what people would rather not remember. Parents and politicians don’t like to talk to their children and constituents about what they were doing during the Hitler years, and for good reason, because what they were doing wasn’t pretty.

Now, on the golden anniversary of Hitler’s rise to power, people in their teens and twenties are beginning to ask questions about exactly what it was that led to the Third Reich, and the answers are more often than not uncomfortable. It is thus natural that the Greens have stirred up resentment. A party that goes around shouting “Niemals Rüge!” (“Never again war!”) is bound to upset those who would prefer to for-
ter that a war ever took place. But it was precisely because people were unwilling to ask hard questions, face up to genuine change and learn the lessons of the past that German democracy com-
mitted suicide in 1933.

Now that Germans have the auda-
city to question American foreign pol-
icy, it is clear that, as far as the Ameri-
can government is concerned, they have learned their democratic lesson too well.

The Greens are essentially a de-
layed reaction to Nazism and all that led to it: they are anti-war, anti-authority, anti-centralization and anti-establish-
ment. In fact, they are against practi-
cally everything the Nazis were for and for practically everything the Nazis were against. Perhaps they have gone too far in their reaction to the unques-
tioning obedience to authority that led to the atrocities of the Third Reich; but it can only be a sign of health that even at this late date Germany is beginning to learn its lesson.

The anti-Americanism of the Greens has been overstressed by the American press. In fact the Greens are not anti-American but anti-U.S. Gov-
ernment, which is an entirely different thing.

When and if the Greens enter the parliament (current surveys show that they probably will), there will be an up-
roar here, because they will do their best to stop the stationing of American Pershing II medium-range missiles on German soil, and they will probably suc-
cceed, since Germany does not want to be the showplace for the next American crusade against Communism. The Ger-
mans are tired of waiting for the United States government to come up with pro-
sals for disarmament; and they are tired of Reagan’s tendency to refuse to even consider any Soviet proposals the moment they are made.

If we don’t do something ourselves,
efforts. An estimated half-million non-registrants can definitely be a powerful
signal.

Prodding students into participating beyond name signing and attending events is tricky, but SAM members seem undaunted. "A lot of the problem comes not from people's ignorance of the facts, but because the news and statistics are lifeless. That's why we search for campus issues like the Solomon bill that have direct impact on the student body, and effectively link the campus to broader issues." By organizing and educating the Columbia community, such activities lay the foundation for future mobilization against the relentless, often silent spread of militarism in the country. "The time is right to tie together social and military issues," Robert continues, "and the more strident the Administration becomes, the more aware people are of their real interests.

The belief that moribund institutions, rather than individuals are at the root of the problem, keep SAM's energies alive. "A prerequisite for members of an organization like ours is the faith that people are fundamentally good, but you need to show them. And when you look at the work people are doing across the country, it makes you optimistic."

Perhaps the essential goodness of humanity is an arguable proposition, but by observing the SAM meeting last Thursday night, with its solid turnout and enthusiasm, one might be persuaded that the manifestations of our better instincts can at least match the bad ones. Regarding Columbia's possible compliance, one comment in particular hit upon an important point with the Solomon bill, "The thing we need to do is expose how Columbia is talking out of two sides of its mouth."

Indeed, the most pervasive malady of the collegiate system specifically, and the American experience generally, is that elaborate patterns of knowledge and theory have been disembodied from individual choices and government policy. What the members of ARA and SAM try to do is infuse what they have learned about the current situation, bring the words of that formidable roster on the face of Butler Library, names like Thoreau, Jefferson, and Whitman, to bear on the twisted logic of which we are today a part. By adding their energy and effort in order to enhance the possibility of a decent world, they may help

and soon, it is quite probable that the Germans will do something on their own. The Reagan administration's stalling at the Geneva talks on nuclear weapons has thus already caused severe tension and could ultimately bring about a dangerous rift between the United States and Western Europe. By being intransigent, Reagan is playing directly into the Russians' hands.

In 1983 the German establishment thought it could use Hitler to restore a modicum of order to the confused and confusing Weimar Republic. In fact, Hitler did strengthen the German establishment, but not exactly in the way the bankers and businessmen had wanted; and now, fifty years later, it is clear who was being used.

Nevertheless, the Western World did not complain in 1983 because Hitler, though a fascist and a totalitarian, was seen, like countless American puppet dictators today, as someone who leaves the established order in place.

Not so the Greens. If a group of young, anti-establishment pacifists with unusual ideas and uncomfortable answers to hard questions terrifies us more today than Hitler, Himmler, Goering and Goebbels did back in 1933, our terror says more about us than it does about the Greens or the Germans. It indicates that we have failed to comprehend the meaning of Nazism and blind obedience to authority in their full horror, and that we, unlike the Greens, have yet ourselves to learn the democratic lesson that we have taught the Germans so well.

Since the European peace movement has long since become the American peace movement, and since America now has its own Green Party, the rise of the Greens in Germany has profound significance here. It is at once a warning to us that the old solutions of more weapons and again more weapons will no longer be accepted in a Europe that is already a powderkeg waiting to go off, and it is an invitation to work towards a peace that is genuine, lasting and non-nuclear.