Andrew S. Tompkins, "An 'Ecological Internationale?' Nuclear Energy Opponents in Western Europe, 1975-1980," in Michele Di Donato and Mathieu Fulla, eds., *Leftist Internationalisms: A Transnational Political History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), pp. 219–232.

An 'Ecological Internationale'?

Nuclear Energy Opponents in Western Europe, 1975-1980

by Andrew S. TOMPKINS

In March 1980, the French Interior Ministry was convinced that a spectre was once again haunting Europe: an 'Ecological Internationale' (*l'Internationale écologiste*), particularly the movement's anti-nuclear energy wing, had drawn together 'more than a thousand associations and anti-nuclear committees from around the world' and was 'coordinating their actions' to slow or stop nuclear programmes across the industrialized West. According to the police-spies who sought to exorcise this latest spectre of protest, the anti-nuclear movement's 'unstable' coalition of supporters ranged from trade unionists, leftists and anarchists to 'the credulous', 'the backward-looking' and 'youth ever ready to reject the society of their elders'. However, it also reached deep into the intelligentsia, the upper middle class and centrist parties, even appealing to some conservatives with its critique of modernity. The nuclear issue, it seemed, had led to an 'amalgam of protests' encompassing everything from concern about overpopulation and consumerism to advocacy for worker's self-management and a 'return to the land'. Activism rooted in myriad issues now targeted energy policy because of its centrality to production, consumption and pollution. In short, demonstrators seemed to regard nuclear power as the 'source of the ills of industrial society'.[1]

French authorities and their counterparts in West Germany had particular reason to be concerned, having watched anti-nuclear demonstrations grow from 1,000 participants in 1971 to 100,000 in 1979, with major protests in both countries regularly attracting 20,000-50,000 participants in the

[1] Ministère de l'Intérieur (MdI), 'Le mouvement écologique: Internationalisation – Doctrine anti-énergétique – Amalgame des contestations', 1980, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, Archives Nationales (AN), 19850718, art. 25.

late 1970s.[2] Indeed, protest seemed to follow state and industry planners around, emerging nearly everywhere nuclear power facilities were proposed: from Fessenheim and Wyhl along the French-German border (where construction began, respectively, in 1971 on the French side and in 1975 on the German side) to Southern France (Creys-Malville, 1976) and Northern Germany (Brokdorf, 1976 and Gorleben, 1980), nuclear energy opponents at different sites established translocal and transnational networks of protest. But if environmentalism seemed like a new *Internationale* in the (distorted) view of authorities, it was a curious one indeed, with a deeply ambivalent relationship to the traditions of the left and a variety of sometimes contradictory internationalist impulses.

For those directly concerned by the tangible impacts of environmental problems, protest was not a manifestation of coming world revolution so much as 'front porch politics'—or, in the view of their detractors, 'not in my backyard' attitudes.[3] Local activists who worried about safety risks and the rapid industrialization of their communities worked within 'citizens' initiatives' (*Bürgerinitiativen*) or 'local committees' (*comités locaux*) and framed their activism as 'apolitical' in nature. Many were reluctant to embrace extra-parliamentary activism, which they associated with students and the left. Their own internationalism was primarily provincial, linking disparate grassroots nodes via occasional contacts.

However, local activists alone could never have mobilized the hundreds of thousands who joined mass demonstrations throughout the 1970s. The bulk of anti-nuclear protesters consisted of supporters from outside the affected communities who opposed nuclear energy not out of their own 'direct concern' but based on broader principles. They brought with them different networks and ideals associated with pacifist, countercultural and radical left forms of internationalism. These

---

[2] Andrew S. Tompkins, *Better Active than Radioactive! Anti-Nuclear Protest in 1970s France and West Germany*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 15-16.

[3] Michael Stewart Foley, 'No Nukes and Front Porch Politics: Environmental Protest Culture and Practice on the Second Cold War Home Front', in Klimke, et al. (ed.), *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear and the Cold War of the 1980s*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 186-205. See also Stephen Milder, *Greening Democracy: The Anti-Nuclear Movement and Political Environmentalism in West Germany and beyond, 1968-1983*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

overlapped to different degrees with local protest and could complement or compete with one another in ways that enhanced the reach of protest while also sometimes turning international solidarity itself into a balancing act. Anti-nuclear activists in the 1970s consistently exploited the possibilities that translocal and transnational connections created, even though most connections between protest sites remained loose and coordination at the national and especially international levels generally weak.[4] The anti-nuclear movement was thus a far cry from the Internationale of communist yore, or even from the NGOs that became so closely associated with environmentalism in the 1980s.[5]

This chapter will explore varieties of internationalism associated with anti-nuclear energy protests during the late 1970s, focusing on France and West Germany. The 1970s were in many respects a post-1968 decade, when impulses attributed to the 'student movement' of that prior moment grew into something much broader.[6] In this period of accelerating globalization, perceived by many as one of 'crisis' and impending change, contemporary social scientists used the term 'New Social Movements' (NSMs) to describe protest related to feminism, queer liberation, human rights, peace and environmentalism, all of which coexisted—and competed—with the organized left, including the hierarchical cadre groups of Maoist or Trotskyist inspiration that had (also) succeeded the student left and taken up its internationalist mantle.[7] These different groups interacted within the

---

[4] Andrew S. Tompkins, 'Grassroots Transnationalism(s): Franco-German Opposition to Nuclear Energy in the 1970s', *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 1 (2016), 117-142. National organizations such as Les Amis de la Terre in France or the Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz did exist, but they served primarily as networks of communication rather than command centres of protest. Dorothy Nelkin and Michael Pollak, *The Atom Besieged. Extraparliamentary Dissent in France and Germany*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1981, p. 126-129.

[5] Frank Zelko, 'The Umweltmulti Arrives: Greenpeace and Grass Roots Environmentalism in West Germany', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 61 (2015), 397-413.

[6] Martin Conway, 'The Rise and Fall of Western Europes Democratic Age, 1945-1973', *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 1 (2004), 67-88 (p. 70). On 1968 as a moment and as a longer period, see Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *Le moment 68 : Une histoire contestée*, Paris, Seuil, 2008; Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, et al., *Les années 68 : Le temps de la contestation*, Bruxelles, Éditions Complexe, 2000. On the breadth of contestation beyond the student milieu, see additionally Ludivine Bantigny, *1968 : De grands soirs en petits matins*, Paris, Seuil, 2018.

[7] Hartmut Rosa, 'Social Acceleration: Ethical and Political Consequences of a Desynchronized High-Speed Society', *Constellations* 10, no. 1 (2004), 3–33; Niall Ferguson, *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, Cambridge, Belknap, 2010; Claus Offe, 'New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics', *Social Research* 52 (1985), 817-868. On perceptions of change and acceleration associated with nuclear energy, see Andrew S. Tompkins, 'Generating Post-Modernity: Nuclear Energy Opponents and the Future in the 1970s', *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 28, no. 4 (2021).

anti-nuclear movement, which proved particularly strong and peculiarly interconnected in France and West Germany during the period in question. The close linkage between protest in these two countries had little to do with the institutions of the European Communities (which then included Euratom[8]) and far more to do with the timing and locations of nuclear power plant construction, especially along the two countries' shared border on the Rhine. However, French-German protest ties were not self-evident in light of both the living memory of war and critical contextual differences, including those related to left-wing traditions. Post-1945 France not only looked back on a distant Revolutionary past but had an active Communist Party that was integrated into the political establishment. In West Germany by contrast, National Socialism had disrupted many left-wing traditions and anti-communism was deeply ingrained in state and society. Activists in these two countries had ample opportunities to interact within post-war Western Europe, but exchange between them mostly took place outside the usual circuits linking francophone or germanophone countries and generally did not rely on English as a *lingua franca*. Ties between French and West German activists illustrated the complexity of internationalism in the 1970s because they were at once easily possible and relatively uncommon.[9]

This chapter examines the different forms of internationalism that manifested themselves in three cases of cross-border solidarity: the convergence of local and pacifist internationalisms in protests along the French-German border around 1975; the clash between left-wing and countercultural internationalisms at protests in Brokdorf and Malville in 1976-77; and parallel efforts by the radical left and non-violent activists around 1978-1980 to link anti-nuclear protest in Gorleben with the struggle of farmers on the Larzac plateau in southern France against a military base. The text draws on police reports, activist media and protest ephemera from state and activist archives as well as

[8] On anti-nuclear activists' attitudes towards Europe, see Andrew S. Tompkins, 'Towards a 'Europe of Struggles'?: Three Visions of Europe in the Early Anti-Nuclear Energy Movement, 1975–79', in Wenkel, et al. (ed.), *The Environment and the European Public Sphere*, Cambridge, White Horse Press, 2020, p. 124–146.
[9] They thus constitute an example of the 'improbable encounters' that Michelle Zancarini-Fournel and Xavier Vigna have described for the French domestic context in relation to May 1968 itself: 'Les rencontres improbables dans « les années 68 »', *Vingtième Siècle* 101, no. 1 (2009), 1-16.

oral history interviews conducted with former activists some 30-35 years after the period of activism in question.[10]

At the French-German Border: Local and Pacifist Internationalisms

The first major anti-nuclear protests in France or West Germany took place along their shared border in the early 1970s. France began building the Fessenheim nuclear power station in 1971, the first of a new wave of power plants across the country (but ultimately the last built in Alsace). Early demonstrations there attracted hundreds of protesters from throughout the region, but only limited support from within the affected community and the nearby area itself. For subsequent protests, Alsatian environmentalists therefore worked to build sufficient local backing. On the German side of the border, nuclear energy opponents in Breisach registered a partial success in 1972 with a petition signed by almost 60,000 people, which led to a proposed site being moved further south. By 1974, plans were underway for a nuclear power station in Wyhl (West Germany) and a chemical factory in Marckolsheim (France)—the two only 10 km apart but separated by a national border. Environmentalists from throughout the region directed their energy toward opposing both projects, promising to jointly occupy each whenever construction began. They thus enacted a form of highly local internationalism that was compatible with existing regional identities in Alsace and South Baden.

In September 1974, activists made good on their promise to occupy the site in Marckolsheim, initiating an illegal occupation that would last until the French government cancelled the chemical company's building permit in late February 1975. In the meantime, nearby villages rotated responsibility for maintaining a presence on the site, and protesters built a wooden roundhouse to draw further supporters to it with concerts and events.[11] When construction crews rolled onto the planned nuclear site in Wyhl in mid-February 1975 (less than a week before the successful end of

[10] The author conducted approximately 60 life history interviews (usually lasting 90-120 minutes) with former activists, seeking a balance of male and female participants as well as members of different regions and movement factions.
[11] Solange Fernex, 'Non-violence Triumphant', *The Ecologist*, vol. 5, no. 10 (December 1975), p. 372–385.

the protests in Marckolsheim), local activists thus had plenty of practice setting up and maintaining a site occupation. In Wyhl too, they camped in rotating village-based groups and built a wooden *Frendschafts Hüs* ('Friendship house' in the local dialect common on both sides of the border).[12] Anti-nuclear activists, including many from Freiburg and Strasbourg rather than the directly affected communities themselves, consciously contrasted this cooperation with the recent wartime past. In this manner, they linked the specific concerns of the affected communities with a larger story of French-German reconciliation 'from below' after the Second World War.[13] As similar protests took place in nearby Northern Switzerland, anti-nuclear activists christened the entire region *Dreyeckland* (the 'land of three corners') and claimed the pre-national sixteenth-century Peasant's War as a precedent for regional revolt. Though it would be years before the Wyhl project would finally be abandoned, the narrative of shared cross-border resistance fed a compelling 'legend' of internationalist protest that attracted attention throughout France, West Germany and in activist circles further afield.[14]

This borderland transnationalism was overlaid with other forms of internationalism, notably including peace activism, which naturally had particular resonance in the region after two World Wars. In 1971, the first anti-nuclear protest in Fessenheim was led by Esther Peter-Davis, a long-time pacifist who, together with two other Alsatian women, had authored a brochure about the dangers of nuclear energy based on French, West German, Swiss, American and British sources.[15] Esther was also the wife of Garry Davis, an American veteran of the Second World War who famously renounced his citizenship, declared himself to be the first 'Citizen of the World', and later issued official-looking 'world passports'. Esther worked closely with Jean-Jacques Rettig, a

---

[12] Bernd Nössler and Margret de Witt, eds., *Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl und auch sonst nirgends: Betroffene Bürger berichten*, Freiburg, Inform-Verlag, 1976, p. 148-149.
[13] Walter Moßmann, Interview with the author, Freiburg (1 April 2010).
[14] Padraic Kenney, 'Opposition Networks and Transnational Diffusion in the Revolutions of 1989', in Horn and Kenney (ed.), *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2004, p. 207-223 (p. 210-211).
[15] Esther Peter-Davis, et al., *Fessenheim: Vie ou mort de l'Alsace*, Saales, CSFR, 1971; Alsace Panorama, 'Les femmes de Fessenheim', 1971, [https://www.ina.fr/video/R18081202/les-femmes-de-fessenheim-video.html (accessed 1 June 2021)].

longstanding opponent of French nuclear tests and an advocate of non-violent protest.[16] As the Marckolsheim occupation began, they were joined by young non-violent activists involved in campaigns for conscientious objection from military service, which French as well as West German authorities often refused to recognize. Through the two site occupations, Alsatian anti-militarists established close ties with German non-violent action groups such as Gewaltfreie Aktion Freiburg (GAF). International and ecumenical religious groups and international pacifist such as the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and War Resisters' International provided additional foreign contacts.

Marie-Reine Haug was an anti-militarist activist from a town near Marckolsheim who participated in the environmental protests there and in Wyhl. Well before the mobilization in Marckolsheim began, she had already met Jean-Jacques Rettig and several opponents of the Fessenheim nuclear power station at IFOR-sponsored non-violent training seminars in Strasbourg. On the occupied site in Marckolsheim, Marie-Reine met her future partner, Raymond Schirmer, a conscientious objector and environmentalist, and both subsequently helped occupy the site in Wyhl. Despite plans by the local organizers to occupy each site jointly, Marie-Reine and Raymond noted that not all the protesters from Marckolsheim made the short journey across the Rhine to join the occupation in Wyhl. The much-celebrated use of local dialect could be a hindrance as well as a help, since not even all residents of Alsace spoke it, and information had to be translated for French or German speakers from further afield.[17] Borderland internationalism made a compelling narrative, but it was insufficient by itself. Anti-nuclear protest within the region therefore derived much of its force from wider networks. Marie-Reine and Raymond helped bring anti-militarists to the region through events like the 1976 'International non-violent march for demilitarization' along the French-German border, which commemorated the bombing of Hiroshima with discussions of

[16] Jean-Jacques Rettig, 'Eine persönliche Umweltgeschichte, Familiengeschichte und Regionalgeschichte im Elsass', 2013, [http://www.bund-rvso.de/rettig-umweltgeschichte.html (accessed 1 June 2021)].
[17] Marie-Reine Haug and Raymond Schirmer, Joint interview with the author, Rammersmatt (17 April 2010).

anti-nuclear energy protests in Alsace, Baden and elsewhere.[18] The next year, the countercultural environmentalist newspaper *La Gueule Ouverte* (*GO*) promoted the follow-up march along the French-German border as part of a series of environmentalist and anti-militarist protests taking place that summer in Malville, Naussac and on the Larzac plateau. In this manner, the highly local form of borderland transnationalism in and around Alsace linked up with peace-related internationalist networks.

In the directly affected rural areas where anti-nuclear protest took root, other forms of internationalism were not necessarily always equally welcome, especially within anti-communist West Germany. Marie-Reine was accustomed to communist groups in France, but she recalls that people in the affected mountain villages near Wyhl acted like 'they saw the devil when they saw the *Rote Fahne*', the party organ of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/Aufbauorganisation (KPD/AO).[19] Cadre groups on the organized left based in Freiburg and other university towns supported anti-nuclear protests, but in Wyhl they were overwhelmingly treated as unwanted intruders. The Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland (KBW), the largest Maoist group in Freiburg, did itself no favours by insisting on internationalist references that did not resonate with the local community: the residents of small towns that saw nuclear energy as a harbinger of accelerated industrialization were uninterested in learning of how events in the Chinese village of Dadschai demonstrated that 'under socialism, it is possible to carry out a systematic and sensible industrialization' better than under capitalism.[20] And while pacifists made inroads with 'concerned citizens' by speaking a Christian-inflected language of non-violence, some radical left groups such as the pro-Albanian KPD/Marxisten-Leninisten found themselves excluded precisely for

[18] 'Internationaler gewaltloser Marsch für Entmilitarisierung. Teilnehmer-Information' (brochure, 8 pp.), 4–10 August 1976, Hamburg, Archiv Aktiv, Internationaler Gewaltloser Marsch 1976–1980.
[19] Marie-Reine Haug and Raymond Schirmer, Interview.
[20] KBW, 'Kein Kernkraftwerk in Wyhl', 1975, Amsterdam, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG), Bro 4216-21.

advocating—on principle rather than out of 'direct, existential necessity'—potentially violent protest strategy.[21]

Northern Germany and Southern France: Left-wing and Countercultural Internationalisms

If the organized left was marginal in Wyhl, this was not necessarily the case everywhere, particularly when it came to more dynamic groups like the Hamburg-based Kommunistischer Bund (KB) or its French sister organization, the Organisation Communiste des Travailleurs (OCT). Unlike some other Maoist groups, KB and OCT framed anti-nuclear protest not only as a mass movement with political potential but as a cause specifically for the internationalist left. Challenging the received wisdom of West Germany's largest trade union, KB argued that nuclear power destroyed more jobs than it created, allowing employers to replace human labour with capital- and energy-intensive machinery.[22] At the same time, nuclear energy was an anti-imperialist issue because of the competition among wealthy countries for both raw materials (uranium from Niger and Togo) and export markets (in Brazil and Iran) in the so-called 'Third World'.[23] KB and OCT also translated concern about nuclear risks into left-wing terms, emphasizing capitalist-imperialists' willingness to ride roughshod over safety considerations and to harm 'the life itself of workers and the masses [*masses populaires*]'.[24] Elements of the radical left felt drawn to environmental and anti-nuclear protest for reasons of principle, even though this placed them at odds with both the apoliticism of many local activists and the differently politicized visions of competing left-wing groups.

Solidarity with victims of police repression also drew the organized left into anti-nuclear protest. After the occupations in Marckolsheim and Wyhl, police did everything in their power to prevent activists from getting onto planned sites. When construction equipment was brought to the future

[21] '„Mer setze uns durch, weil mer recht hen"', *Spiegel*, no. 14 (31 March 1975), p. 36–41; '„... mehr Demokratie überhaupt": ein Bericht von den Bürgerinitiativen um Wyhl' (brochure, 68 pp.), January 1977, Amsterdam, IISG, Bro 2188/16.
[22] KB, 'Atomenergie und Arbeitsplätze' (brochure, 2nd edition, 64 pp.), 1977, Hamburg, ak-Archiv.
[23] KB, 'Warum kämpfen wir gegen Atomkraftwerke?' (brochure, 2nd ed., 48 pp.), 1977, Hamburg, ak-Archiv, p. 19-30.
[24] Ibid., p. 19; 'la lutte sur la « question du nucléaire »', *l'étincelle*, no. 27 (23 June 1976), p. 10-11.

site of Brokdorf nuclear power station (in northern Germany, about an hour's drive from Hamburg) on 26 October 1976, it arrived in the middle of the night under police escort, and private security companies quickly erected fencing to keep protesters out. At a first demonstration four days later, 825 police repelled the 5,000 or so (mostly local) demonstrators using not only water cannon and tear gas, but also horse-mounted officers, dogs and Chemical Mace.[25] The dramatic scenes repeated themselves at a second protest two weeks later, when nearly 2,000 officers used water cannon 'almost without interruption' against an estimated 25,000 demonstrators (from throughout the region), which the KB described in its journal *Arbeiterkampf* under the headline 'Brokdorf: The police state in action'.[26] KB mobilized its networks to support further Brokdorf protests in 1977 and it shared information with comrades abroad. OCT published news about West German demonstrations in its own journal, *l'étincelle*, alongside material about anti-nuclear protests in France, notably including an international demonstration planned for 31 July 1977 against the Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR) being built in Creys-Malville (a small town in southern France, between Lyon and Geneva).[27]

The FBR in Malville was considered a central element of France's nuclear programme because the technology generated (as a by-product) plutonium that could be used to power other, 'ordinary' nuclear reactors. Countercultural environmentalists from the surrounding region had organized a short-term site occupation in the summer of 1976 and held information sessions for the local population, who they felt should lead the struggle.[28] For hippies, neo-ruralists, and others who subscribed to the idea that 'small is beautiful', decentralization was both a means and an end in itself.[29] Their ambitions for the 1977 protest were to replicate the good-natured, non-violent site

[25] Landespolizei Schleswig-Holstein, 'Dokumentation über die Polizeieinsätze in Brokdorf (Band 1)', 1977, Schleswig, Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Abt. 621, Nr. 534, p. 37.
[26] Ibid., p. 132; KB, 'Brokdorf: Der Polizeistaat in Aktion', *Arbeiterkampf*, no. 93 (15 November 1976), p. 1.
[27] See, for example, the jointly published OCT/KB, 'nucléaire : une possible prise de conscience ?', *l'étincelle/Arbeiterkampf* (1 May 1976).
[28] See *Aujourd'hui Malville, demain la France*, Claix, La Pensée Sauvage, 1978, p. 7-15.
[29] Several such interviewees mentioned having read E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, London, Blond and Briggs, 1973.

occupation of the previous year, but this time on a larger scale, with greater resolve and within decentralized, participatory structures. According to Odile Wieder, a member of the coordinating committee in 1976 and 1977, 'Our goal was not to take power, it was—we were still a bit naive—we're going to organize a big demonstration in 1977, [...] and we're going to give power to people.' Part of this strategy involved placing local activists at the centre of a system that 'twinned' villages in the affected region with 'Comités Malville' elsewhere across France and abroad.[30]

The 1977 Malville demonstration was also promoted by other groups, with *l'étincelle* linking it to the Larzac (where OCT had long been involved) and *GO* building its itinerary for a 'summer of struggles' around Malville. *GO* even announced to its countercultural readership the goal of attracting 100,000 participants to Malville.[31] Like prior anti-nuclear protests, the Malville demonstration was thus not coordinated by a national organization, but by local and regional activists tapping into wider networks, which connected with like-minded factions abroad. Indeed, the irrelevance of national organizations like Les Amis de la Terre was illustrated by the reactions to comments by that organization's Paris-based leader, Brice Lalonde, that he would not attend the protest: local branches in Grenoble and Marseille insisted that Lalonde did not speak for them, and a satirical cartoon in *GO* downgraded plans for Malville to a new 'Objective: 99,999 (Brice Lalonde won't come)'.[32]

The decentralized and democratic coordination process was, however, quickly overwhelmed by a deluge of new participants. Instead of organizing accommodations and radio communications, 'working meetings turned into debates over violent versus non-violent strategy', inspired in no small part by developments in neighbouring West Germany.[33] Indeed, countercultural environmentalists, radical leftists and concerned citizens in both France and West Germany all mobilized for the Malville demonstration, billing it as the next step after Wyhl and Brokdorf.

---

[30] Odile Wieder, Interview with the author, Annecy (29 April 2010).
[31] 'Malville: Objectif 100.000', *GO*, no. 159 (26 May 1977), p. 1.
[32] *Aujourd'hui Malville*, p. 43-45; *GO*, no. 167 (21 July 1977), p. 7.
[33] Odile Wieder, Interview.

Organized groups like KB arranged buses to bring demonstrators from Hamburg and Frankfurt, and OCT members volunteered as stewards at the demonstration itself. However, most participants were 'non-organized' protesters, including countercultural environmentalists as well as autonomous protesters (the latter close to the radical left but disdainful of its hierarchical organizations). In the absence of a unified strategy and under intense pressure created by heavily armed police, this led to a clash of cultures in multiple dimensions: hippies and radicals had different visions for the protest, West German and French protesters responded differently to police, and autonomous protesters refused to submit to the authority of anyone (including local activists).[34] French riot police blocked the demonstration march several kilometres from the construction site, firing dangerous stun grenades into the crowd that killed one protester and maimed three other people (including one police officer). Transnational cooperation among authorities had also outpaced the internationalism of nuclear energy opponents: French authorities developed their policing strategy on the basis of information from West German colleagues about prior protests in Brokdorf.[35]

The demonstration in Malville also had an impact on West Germany, where a follow-up protest against a German FBR in Kalkar (near the Dutch border) was planned for two months later, on 24 September 1977. Local protesters from Malville, autonomous groups from Grenoble, Swiss non-violent activists, KB and OCT, and nuclear energy opponents in the Netherlands all mobilized for the demonstration, which police all but prevented from taking place: following unrelated violence by the Red Army Faction in early September, West German police conducted a nationwide dragnet on the day of the Kalkar protest, erecting roadblocks all across the country that prevented thousands of protesters from ever reaching the site—and hundreds of foreigners from even

[34] Bernard Dréano and Suzanne d'Hernies, Joint interview with the author, Paris (20 January 2010).
[35] MdI, 'Cas conret – Malville', 1977, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, AN, 19850718, art. 25.

entering West Germany.[36] Of the 42 buses that had reportedly left from Hamburg alone, only 11 reached the site (after journeys of up to 19 hours and as many as 10 police checks).[37]

For Günter Hopfenmüller, one of the KB's leading anti-nuclear organizers, the Kalkar protest illustrated how the West German state felt empowered 'to suspend a basic right [...] without pronouncing a ban on the demonstration [and] without changing the constitution'. When the KB printed glossy brochures with photos of the heavy-handed police action, they sold especially well in the neighbouring Netherlands, where Dutch activists opposed to a uranium enrichment facility in Almelo drew their own conclusions from Kalkar. Hopfenmüller described Almelo as 'a typical, well-to-do Dutch town where people have good jobs, earn well, and live in well-kept houses with manicured gardens', and thus a far cry from the Hamburg left-wing scene. It was therefore all the more surprising that local activists from the town approached the KB with a straightforward proposal: "'If one can't demonstrate in Germany, then one should at least demonstrate in the Netherlands.'" On 4 March 1978, after the disastrous international demonstrations in Malville and Kalkar, tens of thousands of anti-nuclear activists converged on Almelo. According to estimates by West German police, some 30,000 people took part, nearly half of whom (14,000) travelled from West Germany.[38] After the demonstration, Almelo residents invited KB members to stay overnight in their bourgeois homes before returning to Hamburg. Hopfenmüller thus remembers this as a particularly vivid instance of internationalist solidarity reaching across boundaries of class as well as nation.[39]

---

[36] Ermittlungsausschuss der Bürgerinitiativen gegen Kernenergie, *'Wir, das Volk...' Eine Dokumentation*, Köln, Graphischer Betrieb Henke, 1977.
[37] KB, 'Kalkar am 24.9.' (brochure, 64 pp.), 1977, Amsterdam, IISG, Bro 537/10 fol, p. 6.
[38] Bundesministerium des Innern (BMI), 'einsatz anlaeszlich der demonstration in almelo (nl) am 4.3.78' (telex), 4 March 1978, Koblenz, Bundesarchiv, B106/107375.
[39] Günter Hopfenmüller, Interview with the author, Hamburg (23 August 2010).

Larzac-Gorleben: Complementary or Competing Internationalisms?

The anti-nuclear movement also benefited from cross-issue solidarities that brought other transnational ties with them, including with one of best-known causes in 1970s Western Europe: the struggle of local farmers on the Larzac plateau in southern France to prevent the expansion of a military base onto their farmlands. Their long and ultimately successful campaign (1971-1981) profited from the same sort of dynamic that animated the anti-nuclear movement, namely the interaction between local farmers on the one hand and the radical left, pacifists and environmentalists on the other. The Larzac struggle became famous throughout France for, among other things, long, drawn-out tractor demonstrations that travelled from the affected region all the way to Paris in 1973 and again in 1978. The 103 directly affected farmers also hosted two enormous rallies on their own land in 1973 and 1974: the organizers' claim that 103,000 people came to the remote plateau in 1974 symbolically expressed the solidarity between local activists and outside supporters. Within France, the farmers demonstrated in solidarity with striking workers at the Lip watch factory in Besançon and opponents of a nuclear power station in Plogoff.

Internationalism and transnational networks were part of the Larzac struggle from the start. Religious pacifists associated with Lanza del Vasto, a European disciple of Gandhi, came to the plateau and encouraged the farmers to exploit the possibilities of non-violent action. Anti-imperialist groups on the radical left such as Gauche Ouvrière et Paysanne (a forerunner of OCT) helped set up Comités Larzac throughout France. Representatives from national liberation movements from Northern Ireland to Palestine were welcomed at the 1973 rally, and the 1974 event included a harvest in which food and funds were donated to the 'Third World'. The farmers later cultivated ties with Japanese peasants opposed to the expansion of Narita Airport near Tokyo as well as national liberation groups in the French colony of New Caledonia.[40]

[40] See Robert Gildea and Andrew S Tompkins, 'The Transnational in the Local: The Larzac Plateau as a Site of Transnational Activism since 1970', *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (Jul 14 2015), 581-605.

The Larzac thus incarnated a form of local internationalism that was compatible with different social movements of the 1970s, and it became a site for experimentation with protest forms that environmental and anti-nuclear activists emulated. The rallies held on the plateau were in some ways a model for the site occupation in Marckolsheim, where Marie-Reine and others invited Lanza del Vasto to speak to the local community about the Larzac.[41] On the German side of the border, Freiburg-based journalists Freia Hoffmann and Walter Moßmann reported on both the Larzac and Wyhl struggles as part of a radio feature before subsequently becoming involved in Wyhl themselves.[42] Pacifists from GAF produced a special issue about the Larzac for the Wyhl squatters' newspaper, and KB regularly published articles in *Arbeiterkampf* based in part on information from OCT.[43] By the late 1970s, West German anti-nuclear activists had several channels through which to follow developments on the Larzac. When the Larzac farmers issued a call for volunteers to help with renovation and construction work in 1979, West German anti-nuclear activists jumped at the opportunity to act in solidarity. In August 1979, the farmers were 'drowned' in volunteers; so many were from West Germany that organizers asked for a German speaker to serve on the committee coordinating volunteer activities for the following year. When the exercise was repeated in 1980, it was estimated that fully half of the 700 volunteers came from West Germany, 'where publicity was incontestably better done than in France.'[44] While on the plateau, the Germans held events to publicize what was rapidly becoming the most important anti-nuclear protest in their home country: opposition to the nuclear waste treatment centre planned for Gorleben.

In February 1977, the state of Lower Saxony announced plans to build a nuclear reprocessing facility with an integrated waste disposal site in Gorleben, a remote location in the Wendland region along West Germany's border with East Germany. Designed from the start to be a world-leading

---

[41] 'Le Larzac rencontre l'Alsace à Marckolsheim' (flyer), 1974, Freiburg, Archiv der Sozialen Bewegungen in Baden, 24416.
[42] Freia Hoffmann and Walter Moßmann, 'Bürger werden Initiativ' (Südwestfunk broadcast script), 30 September and 7 October 1973, Amsterdam, IISG, Bro 1132-19.
[43] 'Bauern kämpfen gewaltfrei', *Was Wir Wollen* (September 1975); '50 000 im Larzac', *Arbeiterkampf*, no. 111 (22 August 1977), p. 36.
[44] Comités Larzac, 'Bulletin de Liaison' (n° 75 and 80), 17 March and 8 September 1980, Millau, AM, IZ64, 1980-1.

facility, the Gorleben project was also a domestic necessity following a 1976 legal change that made the licensing of future nuclear power stations contingent on waste management plans.[45] By 1979, the government of Lower Saxony sought to quell the growing protests against Gorleben by holding a week of hearings in March at which pro- and anti-nuclear experts were invited to speak. In order to pile pressure on the government, Gorleben activists organized a tractor-led march to the state capital in Hanover, modelling their protest on the prior Larzac marches. The carefully paced procession allowed activists to build momentum over a period of weeks and establish contact with people all along the route. When the Harrisburg nuclear accident occurred on 28 March 1979 shortly before the march's arrival in Hanover, the demonstration presented a ready opportunity for as many as 100,000 people to express their concerns about nuclear power.[46]

Given the centrality of Gorleben to anti-nuclear struggle in West Germany and the inspiration many activists drew from the Larzac farmers, different groups sought to link the two struggles based on their own particular understandings of internationalist solidarity. By 1979, two distinct networks had forged ties between the Larzac plateau on the one hand and Gorleben supporters (in the Wendland region as well as in Hamburg) on the other. One was associated with Wolfgang Hertle, editor of the anarcho-pacifist monthly newspaper *Graswurzelrevolution*, and his friend Hervé Ott, a French conscientious objector who squatted a farm on the Larzac. Hertle wrote frequently about the Larzac in *Graswurzelrevolution*, presenting it as an example of creative, non-violent protest that might also be deployed in places like Gorleben. After Ott set up a non-violent training centre on the Larzac, Hertle proposed a similar centre in Gorleben and the two organized joint training programmes. In parallel, Volker Tonnätt and Heidi Burmeister, former leaders of a KB-friendly youth group, launched a separate Larzac support group in Hamburg that they described as 'non-non-violent', emphasizing anti-imperialist and anti-authoritarian dimensions of the Larzac struggle.

---

[45] Astrid M. Eckert, *West Germany and the Iron Curtain: Environment, Economy, and Culture in the Borderlands*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 202.
[46] KB, '100.000 in Hannover' (brochure, 48 pp.), 1979, Hamburg, ak-Archiv.

Tonnätt and Burmeister maintained close contact with the coordinator of the Comités Larzac and publicized the struggle within left-wing publications such as *die tageszeitung* and *links*. They also organized events about Gorleben on the plateau and about the Larzac in Hamburg to foster solidarity between the two struggles.

The actions of these two distinct groups were in many ways complementary, helping to popularize the Larzac struggle among slightly different, partly overlapping milieus within the anti-nuclear movement in West Germany. They undertook similar activities, publishing full-length books as well as extensive articles and repeatedly inviting delegations from the Larzac to visit various sites in West Germany.[47] However, they also vied for authority within that movement. In late 1979 each group publicly criticized the other for selectively presenting the Larzac story to West German audiences and omitting information about non-violence or the left, respectively.[48] In effect, the non-violent and radical varieties of internationalism that might have mutually reinforced one another were instead placed in competition, as each group presented the Larzac as a model for its own preferred form of protest in Gorleben.

In spite of these tensions among outside supporters, local activists on the Larzac and in Gorleben visited one another several times. Pierre-Yves de Boissieu, a farmer from the Larzac who visited Gorleben, remembers that the purpose of such visits was to share experiences and not to present a model to follow: 'It's difficult to make suggestions. We explain how we work. You can't say "you must work like this" because the context elsewhere is different and because such-and-such a formula might not apply.'[49] During the first week of May 1980, farmers from the Larzac and Plogoff jointly toured environmental protest sites in West Germany, arriving in Gorleben only days before one of the most spectacular anti-nuclear protests there began: the occupation of 'Drilling Site 1004',

---

[47] See Heidi Burmeister and Volker Tonnätt, *Larzac: Zu kämpfen allein schon ist richtig*, Frankfurt, Jugend & Politik, 1981; Wolfgang Hertle, *Larzac, 1971–1981. Der gewaltfreie Widerstand gegen die Erweiterung eines Truppenübungsplatzes in Süd-Frankreich*, Kassel, Weber Zucht & Co., 1982.
[48] See *id*, no. 303 and 305 (1979).
[49] Pierre-Yves de Boissieu, Interview with the author, Nant (15 September 2010).

where geological tests were to be conducted for the future nuclear facility. Though plans for the occupation began well before the Larzac farmers' arrival, the visit represented not only an opportunity for exchange but, perhaps more importantly, a show of solidarity at a critical moment.

When anti-nuclear demonstrators occupied the site on 3 May 1980, they quickly set about transforming the terrain in this remote corner of West Germany into the 'Free Republic of Wendland' (RFW), building on a decade of protest experience in France, West Germany and beyond. Activists not only built a 'friendship house' (as in Marckolsheim and Wyhl) but also an entire 'anti-nuclear village', and they played up RFW's imitation statehood at every opportunity. Like Garry Davis in Alsace, RFW issued its own 'passports', which included a declaration that the bearer 'does not recognize as her/his own' any state which 'holds that internal and external security can only be achieved with weapons and uniforms'.[50] In cities like West Berlin, supporters set up 'embassies' and 'consulates' for RFW.[51] When squatters were evicted from the site by 8,000 West German police officers on 4 June 1980, RFW used its state broadcaster (i.e. pirate radio transmitter) to provide demonstrators with advice on passive resistance and to keep supporters elsewhere informed.[52] RFW represented a largely rhetorical form of internationalism that undermined the power of the nation-state by ridiculing it. At the same time, it gave the Gorleben struggle enduring importance for anti-nuclear protest in Germany and Western Europe by drawing on the impulses of ideologically diverse translocal and transnational protest networks.

Conclusion

The 'Ecological Internationale' referred to at the beginning of this chapter was never as united as French authorities or their West German counterparts imagined it to be. Indeed, it might well be argued that the opposition to nuclear energy owed its rapid expansion to the presence of multiple internationalisms within its orbit, each espousing solidarities with different scopes. The horizons

[50] Dieter Halbach and Dieter Schaarschmidt, 'Widerstand wirkt!', *Oya* (September/October 2010), p. 19-23.
[51] BMI, 'Aktionen von Gegnern der Kernenergie' (report), 3 June 1980, Koblenz, Bundesarchiv, B106/107375.
[52] Günter Zint, ed. *Republik Freies Wendland. Eine Dokumentation*, Frankfurt am Main, Zweitausendeins, 1980.

of many local activists were primarily regional, though they also extended to other affected communities and opened up to a range of outside supporters. Countercultural environmentalists encouraged precisely the kind of decentralized, local action that prevailed within the anti-nuclear movement, and their presence changed the makeup of protest in rural communities especially. Pacifist networks and radical left organizations were more intrinsically focused on international developments and internationalist solidarities, helping to bring the wider world to places and protests that might otherwise have remained consciously provincial. However, despite overlapping and frequently complementary interests, non-violent and left-wing activists often competed with one another for hegemony among anti-nuclear protesters. With its emphasis on the personal concern of directly affected individuals, the anti-nuclear movement effectively fused the place-based nature of environmental protest with the 'politics in the first person' espoused by many so-called New Social Movements. It also foreshadowed the ways in which protest movements in the 1980s (from the revitalized peace movement to the decentralized, autonomous left) developed internationalist orientations and transnational networks on the basis of concern that was overwhelmingly understood as embodied, personal and local.