

# NAZI GREENS - An Inconvenient History

Martin Durkin

<http://www.martindurkin.com/blogs/nazi-greens-inconvenient-history>

Two disturbing stories recently on the greens. First *Spiegel* magazine runs an article on the rise of extremist right-wing environmentalism in Germany. Then *The Observer* newspaper reveals that, in the name of preventing 'climate change', British aid money to India is paying for the forced sterilisation of poor people. These are shocking stories. But not so shocking to those familiar with the story of Nazi environmentalism. Let's step back in time.

Picture the scene. At the edge of a forest, German soldiers point their guns at rows of naked people who follow the Jewish religion. Among them are young mothers clutching their babies. The shots echo through the woods and the dead bodies fall into the ground. Down the road, while this is happening, their German army comrades are busy establishing nature walks and bird sanctuaries and planting trees. The Nazis conducted horrific experiments on children (I have seen footage so upsetting it can't be shown on TV) but at the same time they banned medical experiments on animals. The same Nazi monsters who committed crimes of unimaginable barbarity also advocated vegetarianism, organic agriculture, forest preservation and homeopathic healthcare. *How can we possibly explain this?* What was the connection between the inhuman brutality of the Nazis and their gushing idealization of 'Nature'?

The purpose of exploring Nazi environmentalism is not just to upset the greens. If environmentalism were a curious but peripheral aspect of National Socialism, it would be of no real historical interest. Environmentalists could be forgiven for saying, *Ah well, it just goes to show, there's a little bit of good in the worst of us.* But environmentalist ideology was not an accidental, optional-extra to National Socialism. As we shall see, green ideas were *at the core* of Nazi thinking. The German Volk and Nazi movements marched beneath the banners of 'Nature' and the 'organic'. However, what follows here is not simply a potted history of *Nazi* environmentalism. It is, at the same time, a brief history of early environmentalism writ large. As will become clear, it is not so easy to draw a line between two types of green thinking.

To understand why green ideology emerged at all, and why it happened in Germany, we need to go back in time, a few centuries, to set the scene. We have described elsewhere on this blog (*The Greens: A Warning from History*), the transition from feudal society to capitalism. To the greens this great historical change is more or less the source of all evil. In Germany, it was a process which began, falteringly, in the 13th Century.

Historically, a rise in commercial activity is reflected in the growth of towns (towns are in essence markets). During this century the number of them in Germany increased by about ten-fold. But the towns in Germany were less of a liberating force than they had been in England. German feudal society was especially rigid. Professor of German history Mary Fulbrook describes how 'Germany had a much more immobile social hierarchy and was more 'caste-ridden' than either England or France.' The liberty of the towns was more bitterly opposed by the German nobles, the increasing wealth of the new commercial classes more

keenly resented and the desperate attempts by the serfs to obtain their freedom more fiercely resisted.

The German nobles despised the fledgling class of 'burghers' (or 'bourgeois') in the towns, and the burghers hated them right back. As Fulbrook says, 'German burghers tended to be anti-noble in outlook, and did not leave the towns to become country gentry as in England.' Nevertheless, the very existence of market towns in Germany - little bastions of liberty - was enough to instil in the serfs the hope of freedom.

In the 1520s the peasants rose up. The great serf revolt became known as 'The Peasants War' and the 'Revolution of the Common Man.' By 1525, 300,000 peasant serfs had armed themselves. Well organised peasant armies of between 2,000 and 15,000 went into the field, demanding the abolition of feudal dues and an end to the privileges of the nobles – in a word, freedom.

As with the famous Peasants Revolt in England, the serfs enjoyed support from the towns, and like the Peasants Revolt they met with stiff resistance from the feudal ruling class. But the suppression of the serf uprising by the German nobles was especially ferocious. Around 100,000 peasants were slaughtered and many more were blinded and maimed.

Larger economic forces also conspired against the serfs winning their freedom. The opening up of the Americas drew European trade towards the Atlantic seaboard. Overland trade routes across Germany became less important, markets shrank and many German towns fell into decline and even disappeared. As Professor Blanning says in his big history of early modern Europe, a pattern was emerging, 'It was in the urbanized west that serfdom disappeared earliest, and it was in the rural east, where one could travel for weeks without encountering anything resembling a town, that it not only survived, but periodically enjoyed new leases of life.'

In Germany, the power of the nobles (as against the towns and the serfs), was further enhanced by the devastating Thirty Years War, which proved to be a key event in German history. The war itself brought trade to a near stand-still, and to make matters worse, to pay for the war, ruinous taxes were imposed on commercial activity. As the historian Professor Gordon Craig describes, 'the war greatly strengthened the privileged position of the aristocracy at the expense of the educated and prosperous burgher class and the peasantry. The decline of towns and the consequent decrease in the demand for food caused so sharp a fall in grain prices that small landowners were often forced to sacrifice their independence in order to maintain themselves ... the local nobility was able to take advantage of this situation to impose new obligations in the form of rents and services and restrictions upon movement.'

But of most significance was the political settlement which followed the war. Professor Fulbrook points out, 'the settlement which finally emerged in 1648, set patterns with long-lasting consequences for German history.'

In this settlement, the German ruler, Friedrich Wilhelm (Elector of Brandenburg and Duke of Prussia) came to a deal with the nobles which amounted to the creation of the first modern State. Medieval warfare had involved great nobles – barons, earls and dukes - turning up on the battle-field with their own feudal retainers to support the king. War over, job done. There was no standing army. The 'State' amounted to a small royal court which followed the king

around. The nobles were powerful, the king was weak. But now, said Wilhelm, there would be a huge standing army and a greatly enhanced State. The nobles would lose their independence, but in return, their feudal privileges and an income would be guaranteed by the State. In fact they would be given enhanced feudal rights in their own localities and the servile status (*leibeigen*) of peasants would be reaffirmed.

The standing Prussian army would be huge (by the 1700s, it was 81,000 strong). The joke in England was that Prussia was not a country with an army, but an army with a country. The army, of course, was structured on feudal lines – the bluer the blood, the more senior the rank.

It was as if feudalism had been nationalised. The nobles rubbed their hands. Elsewhere in Europe, the aristocracy was in decline, their feudal privileges and economic status eaten away by the creeping success of capitalism. But in Germany, the State had come to the rescue. It would be the guarantor of inequality.

In England, the success of the commercial classes was leading to the first Parliamentary democracy. But in Germany, there was to be a suppression of freedom. In its place would stand the world's first modern, bureaucratic State. As Professor Fulbrook says, 'In the course of the 1670s, the self-government of the towns was destroyed and they were subordinated to a body of officials appointed by and responsible to, the Elector. At the same time, with the foundation of the Elite corps of the army, the elector created a prestigious status group which would attract a previously rather independent set of nobles into central state service.'

To get ahead in State-controlled Germany, now meant becoming a bureaucrat, as Professor Craig observes, 'in the upper reaches of the civil service, in the fiscal administration, for example, there were opportunities for educated members of the bourgeoisie, who now found such careers more attractive than the commercial life that they might have followed a century earlier ... This socio-political hierarchy was in turn served by a host of lesser officials – police, customs officials, tax collectors, teachers, even clergymen ... It is not too much to talk about the progressive bureaucratisation of Germany in the 17th and 18th Centuries.'

Declining commercial centres, like Nuremberg and Augsburg and Lübeck, were overtaken in size, importance and grandeur by administrative centres like Würzburg, Karlsruhe and Mannheim. A new class of high-status public sector officials had come into being. They were, in the words of Professor Fulbrook, the new 'state-dependent, state-sustaining, professional classes.' Professor Blanding says 'It was a process which reached its consummation with Hegel's designation of the bureaucracy as 'the universal class', freed from the pressures of the market and self-interest'. This was also the first modern publically-funded intelligentsia. As administrators they enjoyed authority over others. They were not elected and they did not have to submit themselves to the discipline of the market. They were paid to be in charge. As the Weimer German satirist Kurt Tucholsky put it, 'above, the bureaus; below, the subjects.' And, as the German sociologist Max Weber observed, like the scribes of ancient Egypt and the Mandarins of ancient China (and unlike the thrusting capitalists in England), these officials were not about to demand political freedom. Why *should* they oppose State control? They *were* the State!

Over in England, through the 18th and early 19th Centuries, capitalism was roaring ahead, liberating and transforming British society. But in Germany, development had been

arrested. As Professor Fulbrook says, ‘many German towns were no longer the flourishing, self-confident centres of trade and burgher life that they had been in the early sixteenth century ... towns were either transformed into, or newly founded as, princely residences, centres of government and administration rather than trade and industry ... self-confident burghers became dependent bureaucrats; habits of obedience and servility were stressed, for subjects rather than citizens. Many observers have seen these developments as having long-term political implications for German political culture.’

The creation of the Prussian State machine was key to what happened next in Germany (and indeed for what has happened subsequently in other countries too in the Western world). The creation of a vast State bureaucracy had created an influential class of people who were, in economic terms, parasitic on capitalism (they were paid for out of taxes), but in social terms antagonistic to it; a class which was jealous of its own power, disdainful of the activities of the commercial classes (and later envious of their growing prosperity); a class of administrators and planners whose entire reason for existence was predicated on limiting the freedom which capitalism tends to encourage, and needs in order to flourish.

It was a bureaucratic, administrative class which identified with its feudal masters and, as Weber describes brilliantly, embraced the notion of a society based on *status* rather than free market forces. A class, as we have seen from Hegel, which would try to portray itself as selfless, and stuffed with higher purpose, but which of course had (and has) a very clearly defined self-interest, and world-view to match. And here, in passing, let us underline a point which should be more than obvious. *The modern State did not arise in or order to ‘curb the cruelties’ of capitalism.* Far from it. It arose specifically to preserve the privileges of the existing ruling classes against the democratic, liberating, enriching and levelling forces of capitalism.

The creation of the German state, of course, could not isolate its feudal ruling classes completely from the historic changes happening beyond its borders. In England, serfdom had effectively been abolished in the 16th Century. At the end of the 18th Century, the French Revolution swept aside feudal servitude there, and, like a dam bursting, a wave of protest against feudalism swept across Europe. When the German army was defeated by the French in the battle of Jena in 1806, the German rulers feared that they would suffer the same grizzly fate as the French nobles, and so in 1807 serfdom in Germany was formally ended, though in effect, as Professor Fulbrook describes, the serfs would not be actually free till the middle of the century. Feudal restrictions on trade and the mobility of labour were lifted. Peasants and burghers could now, in theory buy noble lands. The nobles, for the first time, were asked to pay tax (though only temporarily, as their tax exemptions were reinstated in 1919).

It took a few years but, by the middle of the 19th Century the serfs in Germany were at last free to leave the land. The serfs who for centuries had been forced to work without wages, under legal compulsion, the serfs, whose lives had been, down to the smallest detail and as long as anyone could imagine, controlled by their feudal masters, the grovelling and obedient serfs ... had finally won their freedom. They now demanded wages, or else they would go elsewhere. They would go to the towns and cities – and did, in huge numbers – to find paid employment as free men, in any one of a thousand occupations. The transformation, not just for the serfs, but for Germany as a whole was spectacular. Within 20 years Germany industry more than doubled in size, shops sprang into life, the railway network trebled in size, the cities ballooned, new roads started criss-crossing the land, advertising hoardings went up.

The pace of change was electrifying. The former humble obedient serfs were quickly becoming assertive towns-folk with money in their pockets. They could move jobs to find higher wages, they could gain promotion, they were courted as consumers, they could save and they could borrow, they could start a business. Soon, like the French masses, they'd be demanding political equality!

For the existing ruling classes – the feudal elite and their legions of bureaucratic hangers-on – it was like the world had been turned upside down. They were horrified by the newly liberated capitalistic, commercial classes – proletarian and bourgeois alike.

This feudal anti-capitalist reaction, this *anti-capitalism of the upper classes*, this *anti-capitalism from above*, was not a phenomenon limited to Germany. It happened all over Europe and beyond. (We even see echoes of it in the American Civil War, in the politics of the reactionary South.) Even England, the pioneer of capitalism, produced reactionary anti-capitalists like Thomas More, Thomas Malthus and others. But in England, such men were outsiders. In thrusting capitalistic, liberal England, the embittered grumbling of men like Malthus could not compete with the enlightened, thrilling, progressive ideas of men like Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

In Germany, on the other hand, the anti-democratic, backward-looking feudal elite had the support of a large State bureaucracy, which shared its fears and prejudices, whose livelihood and status depended on patronage from above rather than custom from below. Germany's intelligentsia wrote books lamenting the death of age-old German values, looking back wistfully at the good old days, in the Middle Ages. Whole schools of thought were developed which reflected this. In economics, the democratic, freedom-loving English Classical Liberals were opposed by the Statist, elitist German Historical School. In art, while the English were enjoying the bright, funny, civilised novels of Jane Austen, the Germans were producing the absurd, leaden, melancholic, crumbling castles and gargoyles of *Sturm und Drang* and gothic Romanticism, and the ridiculous pagan fantasies of Richard Wagner. In philosophy the early enlightened rationalism of men like David Hume was later countered by the dark German irrationalism of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Nietzsche, the romantic anti-capitalist, was appalled by the notion that the 'common man' (bourgeois and proletarian alike) should enjoy democratic rights. He attacked the 'the raving stupidity and the noisy yapping of the democratic bourgeois.' 'Oh Voltaire! Oh humanity! Oh imbecility!' He spat at 'the French Revolution, that gruesome and, closely considered, superfluous farce.' He sneered at 'the levellers, these falsely named 'free spirits' – eloquent and tirelessly scribbling slaves of the democratic taste and its 'modern ideas'.' He poured scorn on the Enlightenment and humanism: 'Man', said Nietzsche, 'is something to be overcome.' He said 'The democratic movement is a form assumed by man in decay' ... 'that darkening and uglification of Europe which has now been going on for a hundred years.'

For German reactionaries like Nietzsche, the abolition of serfdom was a tragedy. He complained that 'everything base has become rebellious'. He was horrified by 'the great evil, protracted, slow rebellion of the mob and the slaves.' He said, 'Let us face facts: the people have triumphed – or the slaves, the mob, the herd or whatever you like to call them ... Masters have been abolished; the morals of the common man have triumphed ... Mankind's redemption (namely from its masters) is well under way; everything is becoming visibly

Judified or Christified or mobified (what do words matter!). To arrest this poison's progress throughout the body of mankind seems impossible.'

Nietzsche's whole work was defiant attack on democratic, levelling effects of capitalism. He insisted, 'there exists an order of rank between man and man.' He spoke of 'the incarnate differences of classes.' 'The noble caste', he said are 'the more complete human beings'. As for the newly liberated serfs, he called them, 'the grumbling, oppressed, rebellious slave classes who aspire after domination – they call it "freedom"'. They were, 'ponderous herd animals' and 'multifarious, garrulous, weak-willed and highly employable workers who need a master ... worthy clumsy mechanicals ... with their plebeian ambition.' He reviled the common masses: 'Life is a fountain of delight; but where the rabble also drinks, all wells are poisoned.'

Nietzsche belonged to a reactionary school of German thought which became known as the 'Volk' movement. The historian Professor George Mosse wrote a brilliant account of Volkish thought in 1964 (*The Crisis of German Ideology – Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*). The movement acquired its name because its adherents were constantly harking back to a more authentic golden age when the German people were not just people who happened to live in Germany and speak German, but were, in a deeper, mystical sense, a 'Volk' (or 'Folk').

A famous (and typical) Volkish work was *Land und Leute (Places and People)*, written in 1857 when the serfs had just won their freedom in Germany, and the feudal reactionaries were reeling from the great change. Its author, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (says Mosse), sought to turn back the clock and rebuild 'the web of ancient custom, which once had determined every man's place in society – and should do so again. The respective positions of lord and peasant had been fixed by time-honoured customs as clearly as nature had divided field from forest. Riehl viewed peasantry and nobility as the two estates which still lived according to the prescribed customs and which were furthermore, an integral part of the landscape out of whose soil they drew their living.'

From the start, Volkish ideology had what we would recognise today as a Green tinge. The Volkish writer Friedrich Ratzel, said, 'As different from each other as plants, animals and human beings may be, they all stand and move on the same soil. They came to life on the same soil ... Life is always bound to the earth ... and cannot, partially or as a whole, be separated from the earth and its soil.'

The 'Volk' (the people) had a deep, mystical, essential bond with each other and the earth. They said the true Volk society was connected with the soil (*volksboden*), it was organic and natural (*organisirtes naturproduct*), determined by nature (*naturbedingtheit*), shaped by earthly forces and conditions (*bodenständigkeit*), inseparable from the earth itself (*erdgebundenheit*). The landscape had formed the people, and their culture was part of the landscape (*kulturlandschaft*). The Volkists spoke of a healthy society's 'rootedness' (*verwurzelung*).

In Nietzsche we find the usual Volkish green simpering about Nature: 'Remain faithful to the earth' demands Zarathustra, we must 're-animalise man' and 'return to nature'. As Professor Mosse observes, 'The word "rootedness" occurs constantly in their vocabulary. They sought this in spiritual terms, through an inward correspondence between the individual, the native soil, the Volk and the universe ... Rural rootedness served as a

contrast to urban dislocation, or what was termed “uprootedness”.’ Volkish thinkers like Riehl, Paul de Lagarde, Heinrich von Treitschke and others, ‘looked back to the earlier Germans with nostalgia for their ordered social and economic life. These olden days had been times of rootedness, when the nation, composed of craftsmen and nobles, warriors and tillers of the soil, enjoyed its labors and prospered under the benefits of a settled hierarchy.’

Of course it is no accident that this sudden enthusiasm for social ‘rootedness’ appears immediately after serfdom is abolished. The yearning for ‘rootedness’ was nothing other than the desire to keep the peasants tied to the land. ‘Rootedness’ was a perfect description of feudal society. The nobles were rooted to the land ... they even derived their names from their feudal domains: *the Baron or Earl of this, and Duke or Count of that*. And of course their serfs were legally tied to them, and to the land. It was forbidden for serfs or their children to leave their lord’s land (or indeed to marry without the lord’s permission, and so on). They were ‘rooted’ in a very real, (very unpleasant) way. The serfs *stayed* serfs from generation to generation – it was in their ‘blood’ (keep your eye on that word ‘blood’). Their status was inherited and legally enforced. And the aristocrats stayed noble from one generation to the next, no matter how inept or imbecilic. Their privileges were a blood-right. A lord was as different to a peasant as a horse was to a dog. The age-old social order seemed to them as natural as the trees.

The Volkist H. S. Chamberlain said that society, and our respective class positions within it, had *evolved* and were therefore natural: ‘nobody acquainted in detail with the results of animal breeding can doubt that the history of mankind before us and around us obeys the same law.’

Volkish anti-capitalism was not on the side of the masses. Quite the opposite. The Volkists saw capitalism (rightly) as the great liberator of the masses. It was this liberation which was ‘unnatural’ to them. As one of them put it, ‘Nature is a many-splendored thing, but one aspect will not be found in nature: equality.’

In his great work, *The Destruction of Reason*, written in 1952, the philosopher Georg Lukács pointed out that the idealisation of ‘nature’ and the ‘organic’ was, from the very beginning, *political*. It was, he pointed out, an attempt to defend ‘naturally grown’ feudal privileges, ‘Biologism in philosophy and sociology has always been a basis for reactionary philosophical tendencies ... it cannot permit of any essential change, let alone progress .... Oppression, inequality, exploitation and so forth were presented as “facts of nature” or “laws of nature” which, as such, could not be avoided or revoked.’

Society was ‘naturally’ hierarchical. Nietzsche even insisted, ‘In the last resort there exists an order of rank of states of soul’ and there is no point of aspiring to achieve a higher rank because, ‘one has to be born or, expressed more clearly, bred for it.’ One is superior ‘by virtue of one’s origin; one’s ancestors, one’s blood.’ People in different classes had different ‘blood’. They were indeed a different race. For Volkish thinkers the terms ‘race’ and ‘class’ amount to the same thing. Nietzsche grieved over ‘Europe of today, the scene of a senselessly sudden attempt at radical class – and consequently race – mixture’. He talked of the ‘semi-barbarism into which Europe has been plunged through the democratic mingling of classes and races.’

Professor Mosse says that for the Volkists, ‘Even within the race, the most promising stock was to be encouraged and the inferior left behind ... Aryan nobles and warriors were to be

formed, as they had always been, by selection and selective propagation. Social division, a special class, indeed a caste system, was thus essential.’ Hitler said he aimed for ‘a racial quality fashioned on truly noble lines.’

As Lukács observes, ‘The ancient racial theory was extremely simple; indeed we can hardly call it a theory at all. It proceeded from the thesis that anyone could tell an aristocrat. For, as an aristocrat, he was of pure stock and descended from the superior race.’ It was, says Lukács, ‘a pseudo-biological defence of class privileges.’ The Volk movement turned the ‘class struggle into a racial struggle “ordained by nature” ... It was out of these struggles that racial theory sprouted.’

The Volk movement viewed the advent of capitalism with dismay. As serfs, the masses had been charming. As ‘proletarians’ they were threatening. The proletariat, says Mosse, was ‘the unfortunate product of modernisation, which itself entertained an anti-Volkish malevolence.’ He says, ‘The big city and the proletariat seemed to fuse into an ominous colossus which was endangering the realm of the Volk: “dominance of the big city will be equivalent to the dominance of the proletariat”.’

Because of capitalism, the serfs, instead of being “rooted” to the land, were now *physically* and *socially* mobile. The money economy - market capitalism - had shaken loose the old feudal bonds, as it had done in England, and the great commercial centres – the cities - were seen as driving this change. As one Volkish writer put it, ‘Cities are the tombs of Germanism.’ Professor Mosse tells us, ‘the city came to symbolize the industrial progress and modernity that all adherents to the Volkish ideology rejected. It was the very opposite of rootedness in nature and, therefore, antithetical to the spirit of the Volk. Worse still, it represented the accomplishments of the proletariat; it was the concrete expression of proletarian restlessness. The fear of urban centers became synonymous with apprehension over the alarming rate at which the proletariat increased in numbers and asserted itself.’

If the proletariat was to be feared, said the Volkists, *capitalism and the bourgeoisie was to be blamed*. ‘The bourgeoisie, by raising the cry of liberty, equality, fraternity,’ says Mosse, ‘had ignored the natural difference between the strong and weak, the clever and the stupid – in short, the “natural” contrast between master and servant.’ For Riehl, says Mosse, ‘the bourgeoisie was a disruptive element that had challenged the “genuine” estates ... this new element was composed mainly of merchants and industrialists who had no close connection with nature.’

And the people singled out for special culpability were the Jews. For, as Professor Mosse, says, ‘the Jews were not a Volk, had no peasants, and owned no land, but were only traders and parasites.’ ‘The Jews were identified with modern industrial society’, they were ‘weaving a net of business and trade’ around innocent Germans, and they were essentially un-green: ‘the rootlessness of the Jew was contrasted with the rootedness of the Volk.’ So, ‘to oppose the Jews meant to struggle against the champions of the materialistic world view as well as the evils of modern society.’

We must make the point here that Volkish and Nazi hatred of Jewish people was not religious. The Volkists and Nazis hated Christianity, at times almost as much as they despised Judaism, and they tried to establish a State pagan religion to replace it (see the laughable librettos of Wagner’s turgid operas for a list of rehabilitated gods). No, the Jews were hated because they were visibly non-rural and capitalistic, and in particular they were



pre-eminent in the world of finance (the greens have always hated bankers). Of course the Jews had, historically, ended up in those roles precisely because they had been expelled from the land in much of Europe and had been forced to find occupations on the fringes of feudal society. That abused group of people had been punished once, and now they would be punished again.

(We might mention here that one of the marked features of the declining feudal nobility in Europe was its tendency to get into debt and thereby lose control of its land. Law after law was passed to stop feudal domains from slipping into private hands and entering the world of commodity exchange. But such was the desire of lavish but useless aristocrats to have money, and such was their inability to make it, that they were constantly borrowing, and then selling land to repay the loans. They nobles were prepared to entertain Jewish bankers when they needed the stuff, but loathed them with a passion when it came to paying it back).

As Professor Mosse describes, 'Economic prejudices were always prevalent in anti-Semitism and they attained academic respectability with Werner Sombart's *Die Juden und des Wirtschaftsleben* (*Jews and Capitalism*, 1910). This eminent economic historian linked the growth of capitalism to the role played by the Jews. As usurers in the Middle Ages and entrepreneurs in modern times, the Jews had been a vital force in building the capitalist system ... The stock-exchange jobber, the corpulent banker, these were the stereotypes of the Jew that were widely accepted and disseminated through popular literature. The stock exchange in particular became the symbol of the nightmarish capitalism that had been fostered on the Germans by the Jews.'

For Adolf Hitler, in *Mein Kampf*, it was the Jews who had dissolved the Volkish feudal bonds and brought capitalism to Germany. It was 'the Jew' says Hitler, who 'included landed property among his commercial wares and degraded the soil to the level of a market commodity. Since he himself never cultivated the soil but considered it as an object to be exploited.' It was the Jews, he said, who had brought to Germany all those devilish democratic modern ideas, 'bubbling over with "enlightenment", "progress", "liberty", "humanity", etc.'

For the Volkish right-wing anti-capitalists, the 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat' merged into one urban, industrial, commercial enemy. Mosse says that Volkish thinkers 'feared that the "world bourgeoisie" and the "world proletariat" would recognize their mutual compatibility and exercise a suzerainty over a world in which all that was natural had been destroyed, especially the estates.' The proletariat and the bourgeoisie was a common enemy. They shared a world-view which was commercial and extended beyond borders. (In this respect, Volkish right-wing anti-capitalism was a more accurate portrayal of reality than its Marxist offshoot).

Just as today's greens idealise pre-capitalist society, so did the Volkists and the Nazis. Their 'blood and soil' racism was wholly the product of this backward fantasy. It was nothing more than the desire to cling onto the world as it was before. As with the Nazi's demonization of Jewish people, it was an expression of their fear and loathing of the physical and social mobility which came with capitalism.

Like Nietzsche and the Volkists, Hitler and the Nazis hated the Enlightenment. They rejected its humanism just as they spurned the human-centered morality of the Judeo-Christian tradition. They despised the moral restraints of civilisation, and embraced the romance of

pagan savagery as more 'authentic'. They held bourgeois liberal tolerance and internationalism (or globalisation) in contempt. These were all features of the despised new capitalist order.

The Volkist deep hatred of capitalism extended to all the trappings of industrial and urban development. As Mosse says, 'These sick individuals [the bourgeoisie and proletariat] had subsequently stamped their surroundings with diseased characteristics. The result was an unhealthy, "degenerate" landscape marked by smoking factories, overcrowded cities and insatiable natural resource exploitation.' The Volkists hated advertising billboards and hydro-electric dams and railway lines. They hated modern farming techniques and the mass production of food. They idealised peasant life.

In short, the Volkists and Nazis were *green*. In 1934, a year after the Nazis took power, as Professor Thomas Lekan describes, they 'declared that the Third Reich had ushered in a new era of environmental stewardship ... They foresaw a new era of 'organic' land use planning that stressed long-term sustainability over short-term profitability.' The leading Nazi Walther Schoenichen declared that the German countryside was to be purified of the 'un-German spirit of commerce.' The same year they passed a law 'Concerning the Protection of the Racial purity of Forest Plants', and the following year the wide-ranging *Reichsnaturschutzgesetz* (Reich Nature Protection Law).

Hitler appointed his most trusted general Herman Göring supreme commissioner for nature conservancy, and made him *Reichforstmeister* (Reich master of forestry) whose job it was to promote *waldgesinnubg* (forest-mindedness) and the close-to-nature ideals of the *dauerwald* (eternal forest). Göring's *Reichsforstamt* (Reich Forest Office) oversaw the *Reichsstelle für Naturschutz* (Reich Nature Protection Office). He declared 'The people are a living community, a great organic, eternal body', which was echoed in the Nazi slogan, 'Ask the trees, they will teach you how to become National Socialists!' As Mosse says, 'In Volkish thought the image of the tree was constantly used to symbolize the peasant strength of the Volk, with roots anchored in the past while the crown aspired to the cosmos and its spirit.'

Walter Darré, head of the SS Race and Settlement Office was made *Reichsbauerführer* (Reich peasant leader). He led the Nazi campaign described by one author as 'the Nazification of the countryside'. A new Nazi law attempted to re-impose feudal relations on peasant land, forbidding inherited land from being bought, sold or mortgaged. Needless to say, this met with resistance from the peasants. The peasants also resented production quotas and other forms of state interference. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of Polish peasants were reduced to serfdom once more. The Nazis attempted (unsuccessfully) to re-establish a Volkish peasantry by distributing free plots of land to workers, and it was this that sent the German army into Poland, and beyond, in search of *lebensraum* (living space), made available by the mass slaughter of east Europeans. It was Darré, who said he wanted to breed a new rural nobility, who coined the chilling slogan 'blood and soil' (*blud und boden*).

Of course the green policies of the Nazis, like the policies of the greens today, were riddled with contradictions. They wanted organic, peasant farming, but discovered very quickly that it would not produce nearly enough food (though a special supply of organic food was secured for the SS). Likewise, though they despised capitalism and industry and commerce, they also needed it. The sprawling Nazi State bureaucracy was a ravenous parasite that needed a host (we will deal with Nazi economics in another article). But the fact that the

absurd green fantasies of the Nazis were impractical did not seem to disturb them, as indeed it seems not to disturb greens today. Perhaps this was because every bit of green legislation justified and involved a further extension of planning and state intervention. As Professor Lekan politely puts it, 'The discourse of organic planning meshed well with Naziism's corporatist approach to economic intervention.'

But is important to note that environmentalism and the appeal to Nature was at the heart of Nazi belief. As Adolf Hitler insisted in *Mein Kampf*: 'Man's effort to build up something that contradicts the iron logic of nature brings him into conflict with those principles to which he himself exclusively owes his existence. By acting against the laws of nature he prepares the way that leads to ruin ... Our planet has been moving through spaces of ether for millions and millions of years, uninhabited by men, and at some future date may easily begin to do so again – if men should forget that wherever they have reached a superior level of existence, it was not the result of following the ideas of crazy visionaries but by acknowledging and rigorously observing the iron laws of nature.' As Dr. Mark Bassin says (in the useful book *How Green Were the Nazis?*), 'The very appeal to the authority of organicist-ecological principles for guidance in interpreting society and political organization was seen as a fundamental aspect of what fascism was all about.'

There are those greens who insist that the environmental movement started in 1962 when Rachel Carson published her misguided rant against DDT, *Silent Spring*. But this is clearly nonsense. To emphasise our point, let us look at the writings of Martin Heidegger, the famous Nazi philosopher who still exerts a powerful influence on Western intellectuals. Heidegger's appointment to rector of his University of Freiburg was celebrated with Nazi flags and songs, his lectures were accompanied by Nazi salutes, he destroyed the careers of rival academics by reporting them to the Gestapo and he remained a member of the Nazi party to the end. (I will quote at length, lest I am accused of cherry-picking).

Heidegger contrasts wonderful peasant life, which involved 'dwelling', with horrid footloose capitalism which involves 'homelessness'. He says, 'The Old High German word for building, *buan*, means to dwell. This means to remain, to stay in place ... The old word *bauen*, which however, also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for. Specifically to till the soil and cultivate the vine.'

His feudal Eden has been destroyed by capitalism, 'Bridges and hangars, stadiums and power stations are buildings but not dwellings; railway stations and highways, dams and market halls are built, but they are not dwelling places ... The truck driver is at home on the highway, but he does not have his lodgings there; the working woman is at home in the spinning mill, but does not have her dwelling place there; the chief engineer is at home in the power station, but he does not dwell there. These buildings house man. He inhabits them but he does not dwell in them.'

Heidegger contrasts the crass modern machine-powered technology that disturbs nature with the healthy use of tools by handicraftsmen, which involves a 'revealing and unconcealment' of nature. Industrial capitalism, says Heidegger, 'challenges' nature in a way that primitive peasant society does not, 'The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In sowing grain it places seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase. But even the cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which sets upon nature ... Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry.' He says, 'To save the earth is more than to exploit it or even wear it out. Saving the earth

does not master the earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from boundless spoliation.'

Into Heidegger's imagined rural idyll, the poison of market forces is seeping, 'The forester who measures the felled timber in the woods and who to all appearances walks the forest path in the same way his grandfather did, is today ordered by the industry that produces commercial woods.'

Heidegger argues against the 'monstrous' building of hydroelectric dams on the Rhine and sings the praises of wind power: 'modern technology is a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such. But does not this hold true for the old windmill as well? No. Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind's blowing. But the windmill does not unlock the energy from the air currents in order to store it.'

Heidegger lambasts production of 'the maximum yield at minimum expense.' He deplors the fact that "The coal has been hauled out of some mining district ... it is on call, ready to deliver the sun's warmth that is stored in it ... to deliver steam whose pressure turns the wheels that keep a factory running.'

How can anyone read the Nazi Heidegger, or the writers of the Volk movement, or indeed *Mein Kampf*, and say, with a straight face, that environmentalism started with Rachel Carson? The Nazi Martin Heidegger is to the tips of his fingers, a romantic anti-capitalist. He is, to the toes of his fascist jack-boots, an environmentalist.

Should we be at all worried about any of this? After all, modern environmentalism, to many people, seems so innocent. But in the words of Bruggemeier, Cioc and Zeller (editors of *How Green Were the Nazis?*), 'The green policies of the Nazis were more than a mere episode or aberration in environmental history at large. They point to larger meanings and demonstrate with brutal clarity that conservationism and environmentalism are not and have never been value-free or inherently benign enterprises.' We should heed the warning of Lukács, that, 'fascist demagogy and tyranny was only the ultimate culmination of a long process which initially had an "innocent" look'.

Green thinking was not a side-line for the Nazis. The idealisation of nature and the organic, the nostalgia for the Middle Ages, the anti-capitalism, the hatred of bankers, the hatred of cities and industry, the idealisation of peasant life ... all this defined their poisonous ideology. It was the green attempt of the Nazis to recreate a peasant society which led them to invade Poland in search of 'living space'. It was their green nostalgia for the Middle Ages which led to their 'blood and soil' racist ideology. It was their green anti-capitalism and loathing of bankers which led them to hate Jewish people. It was their green rejection of the Judeo-Christian tradition and of the Enlightenment and its humanist values, and their green return to pagan animal-worship - their idealisation of pre-civilised barbarism as more 'authentic' - that led to them to treat humans as worthless creatures with no more claim on our sympathies than viruses and pests. Green ideology was at the core of National Socialism. When we wonder what diseased thinking could motivate people to turn on the gas taps at Auschwitz, this is where we must look.