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In response to the Soviet Union’s deployment of medium-range, road-mobile SS-20 missiles, NATO foreign and defense ministers met in December 1979 and agreed, should future arms reduction talks with the Soviet Union fail, to station additional nuclear arms in Western Europe. This dual-track decision was one of several international developments – including the 1979 Iranian revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and U.S. President Jimmy Carter’s decision to boycott the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow – that prompted a ‘new’ western European peace movement to protest a new phase in Cold War hostilities. Particularly noteworthy was the so-called Krefeld Appeal, a petition signed by almost five million people over a four year period, which called on the West German government to withdraw its support for NATO’s new policy. As these numbers would suggest, the movement that formed in the wake of the dual-track decision was large and broad-based. The era witnessed public protests of unprecedented size in West German history. On one day alone, October 10, 1981, between 250,000 and 300,000 people gathered in the West German capital, Bonn, to protest NATO’s Euromissile policy and the prospect of nuclear death.

According to the historian Heinrich August Winkler, the Krefeld Appeal was initiated by the East German Ministry of State Security; the associated signature campaign directed by organizations like the German Peace Union, regarded as a subversive Soviet *Tarnorganisation* in the Federal Republic. Aiming to attract as much support as possible, the appeal was written in broad language that spoke to West Germans from across the social spectrum. An indication of its success was that “[a]mong the first signatories were two prominent members of the Greens, Petra Kelly, one of the party’s founders, and Gert Bastian, a former Bundeswehr general.”

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The efforts of Soviet officials to instigate grassroots opposition to western strategy raise questions about how scholars ought to interpret and explain social movement mobilizations against the NATO dual-track decision. To what extent were protesters agents of Soviet interests? If their acts did serve the East’s purposes, is this all that we need to know about the ‘new’ peace movement? Is its significance encapsulated by its meaning for the geopolitical tug of war over Euromissiles?

Setting themselves up against a functionalist and instrumentalist explanation of peace activism in the wake of NATO’s dual-track decision, Holger Nehring and Benjamin Ziemann propose a synthetic analytic framework that takes protesters seriously as historical agents. Unlike the scholar Gerhard Wettig, who ascribes significance to protest exclusively in terms of Soviet intentions and geopolitical outcomes, Nehring and Ziemann seek to capture “the complexity of the relations between protest, policy-making and public opinion” during this period of large-scale movement mobilizations (15). In their able hands, protesters appear as actors on an international stage; the Cold War as a factor contributing to the development of West German political culture.

According to Nehring and Ziemann, while scholarship like Wettig's is soundly grounded in empirical research, it suffers from an exceedingly narrow analytic framework, namely, the geopolitical effect of protest on the Euromissile conflict. Moreover, it relies on outdated theories of the crowd to explain the functional logic of mass protest. When scholars ignore the intentions of protesters, the majority of participants in mass protest actions are reduced to a politically inexperienced and easily manipulated base, directed by a small cadre of East German agents who were well-placed to steer the rhetorical line followed by the western alliance of protesters. When scholars take protesters seriously as historical agents, East German attempts to influence, let alone control, western peace mobilizations appear much less meaningful than the fact that non-communist peace activists were willing to work with them. Indeed, unlike an earlier postwar generation of West German peace activists who sought to draw clear distinctions between their own and Soviet-sponsored peace work, by the late 1970s, non-communists were likely to tolerate – if not wholly embrace – a communist presence during protest actions. In the context of the type of alliance-structures that typified so much activism of the era, the presence of communist activists alone cannot be taken as a clear indicator of Soviet appropriation and subversion.

By attending to activists’ engagement in a complex of dialogues over peace, security and democracy, Nehring and Ziemann perform several tasks. They break down peace movement rhetoric into a collection of interlocking rhetorical frames. Above all, they

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demonstrate multiple ways that international affairs influence seemingly domestic political concerns. Responding to the call of scholars of international relations to consider the impact of international relations on agency within domestic contexts, they “explain how the peace movements not only expressed fundamental opposition to the Cold War order, but also intervened in political debates on the appropriate forms of democratic participation, rejecting the idea that ‘democracy’ is a parliamentary system of representation which is mediated and organized by political parties as the key actors” (3-4). Furthermore, following Eckart Conze, they describe the peace movement as an expression of “basic scepticism” over the meaning of security in the context of nuclear, environmental and economic risks, and the ability of both NATO and the West German state to deliver security in acceptable terms: “The controversy about NATO’s double-track decision was an essential part of the debates about how to maintain the West German state’s claims to create ‘security’. They were situated in a time that contemporaries perceived as one of ‘crisis,’ as the pillars of the post-war West German political system – its economic prowess, its corporatism in economic life and its stable party-political landscape – appeared to face major challenges” (14). From this perspective, West German protests against Euromissiles were as much about domestic considerations as they were about geopolitical maneuvers.

The argument is compelling. Its strength lies in the nexus of domestic and international political concerns that it identifies and explores. Nehring and Ziemann describe “a highly complex patchwork of motivations for participation and modes of perception” in acts of protest, undermining claims to foreign control of mass protest in any but a narrowly-construed way that has limited analytic value (6). And the analysis of peace movement activism moves well beyond activists’ stated agitation for peace; even more than in the preceding decade, peace activism became a site for the expression of creeping economic anxieties and mistrust of the party-state. Moreover, the peace movement gave expression to West German ambivalence over an arms build-up and the associated concept of security that, as Nehring and Ziemann make clear, was in no way limited to the ranks of protesters.

Historians generally provide a more nuanced view of Soviet influence over the ‘new’ peace movement than the instrumentalist account of appropriation, so it is both curious and unfortunate that Nehring and Ziemann set up Wettig as their straw man. The authors seem caught up in the idea that historians should dispense entirely with analyses oriented by “the coordinate system of the Cold War” (15). While Nehring and Ziemann are to be lauded for reading the mobilization against NATO’s dual-track decision against the grain of Cold War ideologies, their call for a post-Cold War historiography falls a bit short of its mark. First, as the debates over ‘democracy’ and ‘security’ attest, peace activism cannot be understood and evaluated in isolation from the geopolitics of the era. Indeed, the analysis Nehring and Ziemann propose is oriented largely by the same Cold War coordinates, though, admittedly, their account of the motives for protest challenges standard accounts of Cold War politics.

What these authors propose is an account of protest that “moves beyond [...] specific political interests expressed by rational actors” (15). While this is praiseworthy and necessary, we cannot write the latter out of our histories. This, I fear, is a consequence of Nehring and Ziemann’s efforts. Elsewhere, Wettig argues that, *nolens volens*, the ‘new’ peace movement benefited Soviet strategic aims. For Nehring and Ziemann, the claim is neither interesting nor meaningful. Furthermore, where in their conclusions is there room for Soviet influence over peace movement strategy and rhetoric? By broadening our field of inquiry, instrumental analyses of protest may take on less importance than in existing scholarship. But in this case, moving ‘beyond’ the limits of Cold War history, the authors abandon one path of inquiry for the pursuit of another at the expense of a truly holistic perspective.


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5 Wettig, "Der Kreml und die Friedensbewegung," 143-9.