

FOREWORD

THE STUDY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS HAS LONG BEEN A CENTRAL area of scholarly inquiry. Such movements range widely from political protests by and for indigenous peoples to aspirations of northern middle classes for cleaner air and water, safer playgrounds, and healthy food. Social science inquiry into social and political mobilization has enriched the literature on international environmentalism, and environmentalism has in turn widened cultural understanding, both topically and theoretically, by bringing to the fore questions about emotional attachment to places and about how values and beliefs concerning multigenerational well-being shape political agendas.

Environmental questions have compelled scholars to examine mobilization at many levels of social organization, as well as to investigate the interplay across these levels in establishing purposes, shaping struggles, and creating modes of cultural representation that infuse activism with meaning. The rethinking of staple formulations of social-movement analysis necessitated by environmental cases is presented here elegantly by Edward Snajdr.

Snajdr takes on important issues concerning the formation of political ideals and the emergence of varied forms of political consciousness in moments of historical transformation, as exemplified in the rise and decline of environmental movements in Slovakia, both before and after the Velvet Revolution and the end of totalitarian communist government in Czechoslovakia in 1989. *Nature Protests* begins with a puzzle: why did environmental activism dissipate and subside, failing to inform the mainstream of democratic political agendas after the end of communism

in Slovakia? As Snajdr shows, the dialogues around what is nature and why it should be preserved not only shape an ethic of altruism and an attitude of self-discovery but present, in practical terms, lessons for direct democracy. The combination results in a spiritually realized ethic of care about human health, natural beauty, and the freedom to imagine different ways of living in the city or in the countryside.

As civil society sprang to life in Slovakia and Bratislava, ecological thinking was submerged in the establishment of a multiparty democratic polity, as necessary contention and debate fragmented the pioneer environmentalists and downgraded their cause in response to pressing local demands and to the geopolitical concerns of separation from the Czech Republic, engagement with the European Union, and the definition of a Slovak nation. As a result, in post-socialist Slovakia there arose an ethnicized environmental consciousness, in which “natural elements” like the Danube and its valleys were not embodiments of environmental qualities like fresh water but, rather, landscapes to be claimed for the history of Slovak identity.

Slovakia’s separation from the Czech lands was followed by a violent introduction to the fast-paced capitalism of post-Communist globalization and its unbridled exploitation of ethnic divisions, unstable markets, and weak new democracies. In this tumult, Snajdr reflects, ecology (as an issue and as a worldview) was diminished in the hurly-burly of public debate—sixty-eight political parties sprang up in Slovakia in four years after 1990—and the turmoil of adapting a small country to a world capitalist order. We are left to ponder nothing less than the political future of environmental consciousness in burgeoning democracies.

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