

THE GREENS

Reconciling ecology and economy



Where are **the Greens** at in 2020? **Michael Wedell** and **Georg Milde** take stock in their new book **“Avant-garde or conformist?”**.

In an interview with prmagazin, they explain why companies should not chase green goals simply for their own sake, why lobbyists will have gained an ally if the Greens are part of the next government, and why ecology and economy have long been inseparable.

In your new book you address the question of whether the Greens are on their way to becoming a new mainstream “people’s party”. Can this be answered reliably and clearly today?

Wedell: About as clearly as the answer to the question whether the SPD can still be considered a people’s party. The Greens are certainly on the right track for becoming a party that can represent all layers of our society – with a focus on the younger generations.

Where do companies need to change the direction of their communications strategy?

Milde: It doesn’t help much if companies just blatantly chase after green goals. It is better if both sides – business and politics – clearly state what is possible and what is not. For companies, this means supporting decarbonization and climate protection measures, but it also means that they must make it equally clear that key industries in Europe cannot survive if they cannot obtain affordable industrial electricity, for example.

Wedell: Basically, most companies do not have to change course at all, there is already a large overlap: The Green New Deal and the Paris Climate Agreement fit in with most companies’ plans to reduce their CO₂ emissions – especially within the next ten years. Politicians should focus less on symbols and more on helping industry to implement its own transformation. In doing so, companies whose CO₂ emissions are particularly high can have a major impact. If thyssenkrupp succeeds in using green hydrogen and producing steel without coal and blast furnaces, for instance, this will be of enormous importance for Germany as an industrial location.

Assuming the Greens are in the next cabinet, what does that mean for Berlin lobbyists?

Wedell: I have noticed a change in their self-perception for some years now. Lobbying is increasingly no longer perceived as a means of enforcing certain interests, but as a means of helping to shape a sustainable social and economic order through organized advocacy. Most lobbyists would thus have gained an ally in the Greens, but both sides will probably still have to get used to this idea.

Milde: Green business congresses and initiatives such as the “Green Business Dialogue” already show that both the party and companies want – and must – engage in greater dialogue with one another. Greens who have moved from the Bundestag to the business community, such as Kerstin Andreae and Matthias Berninger, also show that they are able to use their skill sets in a business context. Nevertheless, lobbyists are also likely to rely heavily on there being a coalition partner to balance out the Greens.

Philipp Amthor claims the following in his guest article: “The Greens are and will remain a left-wing party.” Assuming that this is true, can corporate PR argue in an ecologically driven manner at all, or do the systemically relevant political issues move to the forefront of the debate?

Wedell: The answer lies in the question: the systemically relevant issues are the ecological issues. Companies must place their ecological efforts at the core of their business purpose. The head of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Johan Rockström, recently reminded us that COVID-19 will ultimately not be as harmful to humanity as the climate crisis. Accordingly, the financing of climate protection – no matter who is in government – should be the systemically relevant issue. So it is not about the question of who is the true left-wing party, but which party treats the climate question in the most “systemic” manner.

Milde: In another contribution to the book, Dietmar Bartsch makes the opposite claim to Amthor, namely that the Greens have never been a left-wing party. It’s all a question of perspective – and that also applies to corporate PR. The topics that are going to be particularly important in the near future will naturally also depend on further economic developments and other factors.

In a double interview with Winfried Kretschmann, Luisa Neubauer complains about a generation that “thinks of ecology more radically”. Does this leave room for economically and socially relevant topics in communications?

Milde: That’s why Ms. Neubauer’s economic criticism is also very clearly thwarted by Mr. Kretschmann in the interview: as minister



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Michael Wedell is as a partner at the global strategic communications consultancy Brunswick Group.



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Dr. Georg Milde is a publicist and was previously editor of the magazine politik&kommunikation.

president of Baden-Württemberg, he knows only too well that in this world nothing at all can be achieved against or even without the economy, as he puts it. So there must also be room for the topics you mention.

Wedell: If we want to feed eight billion people on earth and not burden the climate even more than we already do, then much more needs to be changed than we are currently aware of. I am certainly not a pessimist, but an attitude of just “continuing along the same path, but with a little more green paint” isn’t going to be enough if we want to save the earth.

Will communications then have to adapt or submit to the dictates of radical ecologists or will this be the predetermined “breaking point” on the way to becoming a “people’s party”?

Wedell: The question already seems like something fallen out of time. The zeitgeist speaks a different language: ecology and economic interests must be reconciled, perhaps not because economic interests want to be, but because the economy is ultimately a learning system. It knows that there will be no economy in the long run without ecological balance.

Milde: Submitting to the dictates of radicals can never be the solution. Since the Greens have announced that they want to move to the political centre, they should take a similar view. The party has had bad experiences in some election campaigns with overly ambitious attempts at re-education, such as its “Veggie Day” demand from 2013 or its blanket criticism of air travel in 1998. ◀