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## **U.S. Greens Abroad get organized for wiser, more principled politics** BY STEPHEN HESSE

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Once, green was just a color. Now the word evokes numerous shades of fear, anger and optimism, and pops up in discussions of politics, economics, trade and environment. Mention the word "green" and some will visualize environmentalists scampering up ancient trees to thwart loggers.

Others will think of ecomarks, the symbols that help shoppers find environmentally friendly goods. Still others will see an opportunity for masquerade marketing, such as expensive kitchen composters that use metal, plastic and electricity to do what nature does for free. Many just won't get it at all.

A number of years back, a city in western Tokyo wanted to enlarge its incinerator. The proposal included a smokestack that would have towered over surrounding residences and a famous university. When locals rose up in protest, the city fathers agreed to meet with them, hoping to assuage their concerns.

To their credit, the officials realized that a 100-meter smokestack might be an eyesore. Their suggestion? Paint the tower a calming shade of light green.

Greenness is often misunderstood in politics, even though the green political movement has been active for decades. The Green parties of Europe are best known, especially Germany's, but the United States has its Greens as well. The U.S. Greens were first organized in 1984 to promote principle-based politics, values including ecological wisdom, social justice, grassroots democracy, nonviolence, decentralization, community economics and feminism.

There are state Green parties in at least 25 states, and a total of 68 Greens holding elected office in 17 states. Ralph Nader was the Greens candidate for president in 1996. He and his running mate, Winona LaDuke, were on the ballot in 21 states and won 800,000 votes. Candidates at the local, state and national level are expected to run for offices this year.

This month, U.S. Greens Abroad was established in Japan to help Americans living overseas become more actively involved with both the U.S. Greens and the worldwide green movement.

USGA will also work to facilitate international interactions between Greens and green organizations in the U.S. and other nations.

"But I'm not green," you say, "though I am concerned about human rights, fair trade and the environment." Well, you may be greener than you think. According to Richard Evanoff, coordinator of the USGA, there are several common misconceptions that many Americans still have about Greens.

First, Greens are not just concerned with environmental issues. Rather, they are trying to build a broad-based movement that includes people working on a variety of issues, from human rights, labor issues and trade, to sexism, media, culture and alternative lifestyles.

Second, Greens do not just do electoral work. They pursue various strategies to effect change, including direct action campaigns, lobbying, research, education, media and the creation of alternative social institutions, such as food circles and cooperatives.

Third, Greens do not have a particular party line that members must follow. Dissent is openly encouraged, according to Evanoff, and built into the structure of the organization. Political tendencies within the Greens run from revolutionary to conservative, and from socialism to capitalism. The idea is to provide a forum in which individuals can join together on common projects in pursuit of social change.

Finally, contrary to popular wisdom, American Green candidates are viable. They frequently receive a higher percentage of votes than the 5 to 15 percent garnered by Green Party candidates in Europe. The reason European Greens win seats, while U.S. Greens do not, is that most European nations have proportional representation. Even if your party only gets 10 percent of the vote, you still win seats in the legislature. The U.S. has a "winner-take-all" system that denies representation to all those who back a candidate that loses. Evanoff believes Greens can be pivotal in creating "a society that allows individuals to reach their fullest potential in the context of a just society and a healthy natural environment, rather than one which forces the vast minority to serve the interests of an elite minority in ways that are both socially unjust and environmentally destructive."

If you are still in doubt about your greenness, check out the "Ten Key Values" below. These were adopted by the U.S. Green Party, and will guide USGA activities. If you get through the list without any major objections, then you may be greener than you think.

- \* Ecological wisdom: The Earth sustains all life forms. Whatever we do to the web of life, we do to ourselves.

- \* Social justice: The worldwide growth of poverty and injustice is unacceptable. We are working for a world in which all can fulfill their potential regardless of their gender, race, citizenship or sexual orientation.

- \* Grassroots democracy: The powerless suffer the most from resource exhaustion and toxic pollution. All citizens should have direct participation in the environmental, political and economic decisions that affect their lives.

- \* Nonviolence: Greens reject violence as a way of settling disputes. It is shortsighted, morally wrong and ultimately self-defeating. We are working to end war forever.

- \* Decentralization: Power and responsibility must be restored to local communities within an overall framework of ecologically sound and socially just values.

- \* Community economics: We seek a new economics based upon the natural limits of the Earth that meet the basic needs of everyone on the planet, under democratic, decentralized control.

- \* Feminism: The green movement is profoundly influenced by feminism. The ethics of cooperation and understanding must replace the values of domination and control.

- \* Respect for diversity: Greens honor the biological diversity of the Earth and the cultural, sexual and spiritual diversity of Earth's people.

- \* Personal and global responsibility: Greens express commitment to global sustainability and international justice through political solidarity and in personal lifestyles based on sufficiency and living lightly.

- \* Future focus: Like the Iroquois Indians, Greens seek a society where the interests of the seventh generation are considered equal to the interests of the present. We must reclaim the future for ourselves and our children.