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Prospects for a Green Political Party
in the United States

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“Is It Time for a Third Party?”

The “throw-the-bums-out” mood of the 1990 U.S. election reflects a growing dissatisfaction with the present two-party system in the United States, despite the fact that most members of Congress up for reelection in 1990 were voted back into office. The entire electoral process has been called into question not only by radicals eager to change “the system” but also by ordinary citizens who question the increasingly cozy relationship in recent years between money and politics. The high cost of mounting an election in the age of the electronic media means that only the very rich or the very well-connected can run for office in the first place. Politicians come to be dependent on money donated by corporations, special interest groups, and political action committees which in exchange for their financial support implicitly expect, and indeed often receive, favorable treatment in return. The voices not only of the poor, but also of the average citizen are increasingly being shut out, simply because money speaks louder than words. Politicians are less and less accountable to ordinary citizens, and more and more beholden to those with money to donate. As a result the principle of democracy itself is threatened.

The problem is particularly acute for those progressives who have traditionally pursued their agendas within the framework of the Democratic party. An article in the Sept./Oct., 1990 issue of *Utne Reader* entitled “Is it time for a third party?” notes that progressives feel increasingly alienated from the Democratic Party:

The Democratic Party has retreated from the basic issues that concern

millions of Americans: the overwhelming dominance of the economy by huge, unaccountable corporations; the loss of power and income of working people; the plight of the poor; the destruction of the environment; the arms race; and discrimination against women, blacks, Hispanics, gays and lesbians, the elderly, and the disabled. With the notable exception of Jesse Jackson, the leadership of the Democratic Party has more in common with Republicans than with people who seek genuine changes in society. The American people understand that they are not being offered real choices; they understand that politicians in both parties don't speak to their concerns. That's why at least half the voters will probably stay home on election day this November.¹⁾

The article goes on to report that at least four different movements in the United States are presently exploring the idea of launching third parties. In the boldest move to date, The National Organization for Women (NOW) has launched a Commission for Responsive Democracy, which includes John Anderson (former independent presidential candidate), Toney Anaya (former governor of New Mexico), Barry Commoner (founder of the now-defunct Citizens Party), Dee Berry (former clearinghouse coordinator for the U.S. Green movement), and Eleanor Smeal (former president of NOW). The commission will hold hearings throughout the United States to discuss the feasibility of launching a third party. Smeal insists that a third party formed under the auspices of NOW would not be limited to women's issues, but would include a broad program dedicated to peace, justice, and ecological concerns.

Tony Mazzocchi, secretary-treasurer of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union, has proposed launching a nonelectoral labor party in the U.S. which would address the concerns of America's working class. While his idea for a party is not as broad as that proposed by NOW, Mazzocchi's party would confront the power of U.S. corporations and negotiate directly

1) Matthew Rothschild, "Is it time for a third party?", *Utne Reader* (Sept./Oct., 1990), pp. 56-57. Reprinted from *The Progressive* (Oct., 1989).

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with the government on issues of importance to American workers. It would also, Mazzocchi hopes, foster an anti-corporate ideology and attempt to reignite working-class consciousness in the United States.

Ralph Nader has also argued for the formation of a third party which would specifically address the issue of public access to power. In Nader's view, a third party could empower citizens to deal with such issues as consumer and worker rights, campaign reform, and corporate accountability.

Within the U.S. Green movement there have also been voices calling for a new third party. *Utne Reader* quotes John Rensenbrink, who has taken an active role in helping to set up national Green conferences and in initiating policy-making procedures, as saying that a Green party would attempt ". . . to redefine the purpose of government and business from profit maximization to meeting the needs of people consistent with the environment [and] to relocate power away from the elites and the federal government and return it to the community level."²⁾

In an early paper, "The Green Idea Concerning the Recovery and Transformation of American Political Parties," Rensenbrink had argued that "liberty" for Republicans has ceased meaning liberty for the average citizen and has come instead to mean liberty for corporations to form quasi-monopolies which take only their own interests into consideration while disregarding the larger interests of society. As for the Democrats, "equality" has ceased meaning compassion for the poor and oppressed, and has come instead to mean government largesse and the "equal right" of every group to demand a piece of the pie. Rensenbrink writes,

The vision of the Republicans is one of freedom in a plastic consumer paradise where the consumer is at liberty to be governed by the corporation or their representatives. The vision of the Democrats is of equality in a uniformized bureaucratic existence dominated by the State.³⁾

2) Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 59.

3) John Rensenbrink, "The Green Idea Concerning the Recovery and Transformation of American Political Parties," a paper presented to the APSA national meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA on Saturday, August 31, 1985, p. 12.

The vision of the Greens, by contrast, is to restore the concepts of freedom and equality to their original meanings. Rensenbrink adds life—in all its forms—as a third concept in need of restoration, thus completing the Declaration of Independence’s triad of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (equating the latter with the idea of equality).

One difficulty with each of these calls for a third party is that they have arisen out of separate movements devoted to separate causes: women, labor, consumers, and the environment. There is the potential for their agendas to primarily reflect their own distinct priorities rather than to become comprehensive political programs which are truly representative of the concerns of progressive voters. In place of four separate and potentially divisive efforts to create third parties it would seem advantageous for the various groups who are interested in forming a third party to join forces. While there are indeed areas of potential conflict, there is also a great deal of overlap in each of their agendas and ample opportunity for coalition building.

One example is the effort currently being made to overcome the traditional antagonism between labor advocates and environmentalists. Whereas there used to be considerable tension between labor and Greens over the issue of jobs in environmentally damaging industries, both groups are now coming to the conclusion that the real enemy is not the other, but corporate irresponsibility. Jack Sheehan of the United Steel Workers Union, who also serves on the board of the National Resources Defense Council, argues, “You can have both jobs and a clean environment. And as we move into the next decade, it’s become increasingly clear that if you don’t have both, you may not have either.”⁴⁾ Both the Greens and Mazzocchi now advocate retraining workers who are dislocated during the transition to an environmentally sound economy. Surely there are many other points on which the various attempts to build third parties could find (or create) unity.

The assumption that progressive priorities can be best pursued through a third party movement is by no means shared by all progressives, however.

4) Quoted in Laura McClure, “Labor, ecologists grapple with tensions,” *The Guardian* (April 25, 1990), p. 4.

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Some, following the lead of Jesse Jackson, continue to favor working within the Democratic Party despite the difficulties, while others are more in favor of building a broadly-based progressive *movement* rather than forming a *party*. Among American Greens as well, a fault-line has developed between those who favor initiating a Green political party and those who favor further movement-building at the grass roots level. The debate has not yet developed into a full-fledged split, but it has become a central and pressing concern for the U.S. Green movement.

In the following section of this article I shall be concerned with showing that the agenda being put forth by the U.S. Green movement is by no means limited exclusively to environmental concerns, but is rather a broad-based program designed to address the major political, economic, and social issues of our times. In fact, the wholistic approach of the Greens—an approach drawn directly from the model of ecology as a science—is much more encompassing than the common, but much narrower, contemporary view that politics is little more than a means of maintaining the economy and increasing the national G.N.P. In the final section I will discuss some of the difficulties and dilemmas involved with starting a new Green political party in the United States. In addition to describing Green efforts to enter electoral politics as a party, I shall also attempt to show how Greens are working for a more fundamental restructuring of the entire political process—one which would vastly increase the amount of political power held by ordinary citizens in local communities and, correspondingly, decrease the amount of political power invested in the state.

The Green Agenda

The first nationwide Green organization in the United States was created in May, 1984 at the North American Bioregional Congress, an event which eventually led to the formation of the Green Committees of Correspondence in August of that same year.⁵⁾ The Committees of Correspondence, which

5) For an account of the history behind the founding of a Green movement in the United States see Brian Tokar, *The Green Alternative: Creating an Ecological Future* (San Pedro: R. & E. Miles, 1987), especially Chapter 2, "Where Did The Green Movement Come From?"

take their name from the local Town Meetings which helped to coordinate and organize support for the American Revolution, is a network of approximately two hundred local Green groups, which are organized into twenty-five regions,⁶⁾ and coordinated by an Interregional Committee and a National Clearinghouse. The local groups are entirely autonomous ; the Interregional Committee and National Clearinghouse serve merely to coordinate the activities of local groups and to facilitate the flow of information, not to set policy. In addition, an official newspaper, *In Search of Greener Times* is published (recently combined with *Green Letter*) and bibliographies of Green writings, publications, and working papers are circulated.

The U.S. Greens have organized themselves loosely around “Ten Key Values,” which serve as guidelines for both Green theory and praxis. These values were formulated at the founding meeting of the Committees of Correspondence in August, 1984 and revised in March, 1986 by the Interregional Committee. The brief explanations which follow each of the values given below are entirely my own and, while generally reflective of much current Green thinking, should in no way be regarded as official interpretations.

1. *Ecological wisdom*—applying the concept of organic wholeness and interrelatedness to all aspects of life, from the environment to social, political, and economic relationships.

2. *Grassroots democracy*—maximizing citizen participation in the political decision-making process ; moving away from representative democracy and its ineffective system of accountability towards more direct forms of democracy ; relying more on community-based mutual assistance than on government largesse.

3. *Personal and social responsibility*—restoring the concept of citizenship to communities by devoting more time, energy, and resources to the pressing social issues of our times, including education, violence, drugs, and home-

6) The figures are from *In Search of Greener Times* (Fall, 1988), p. 32.

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lessness ; providing a higher quality life by putting genuine human needs before profits ; working to provide the basics of life for the many rather than extravagant lifestyles for the few.

4. *Nonviolence*—eliminating violence at all levels of society, from the family and the streets to the “legitimized” violence of the state ; working for the peaceful resolution of confrontations between nations ; opposing nuclear weapons and supporting the peace movement ; advocating nonviolent forms of implementing social change (the Greens explicitly reject terrorism and violent revolution).

5. *Decentralization*—restoring the primacy of the local community in the political decision-making process ; creating efficient and practical community-based institutions to replace centralized government bureaucracies ; encouraging diverse regional cultures as opposed to single national monocultures.

6. *Community-based economics*—demanding corporate accountability and more democratic control over corporations ; promoting employee-ownership and workplace democracy ; providing basic economic security for all ; restructuring income distribution to reflect wealth created outside the formal monetary economy.

7. *Postpatriarchal values*—eliminating sexism in all its forms and building responsible relationships between genders ; replacing hierarchical patterns of behavior based on dominance and control with non-hierarchical patterns based on mutual sharing, respect, and cooperation ; balancing an overdependence on rationality with a stronger emphasis on feeling, intuition, and contemplation.

8. *Respect for diversity*—respecting cultural, ethnic, racial, sexual, and religious diversity ; eliminating all forms of prejudice and discrimination ; recognizing that diversity is essential to the full functioning of an organically

whole society.

9. *Global responsibility*—ceasing to regard third world countries as “developing” nations trying to “catch up” with the advanced nations and working instead for the creation of ecologically sustainable societies in both advanced nations and the third world by eliminating waste, extravagance, and overproduction in the first world and by helping third world nations move towards self-sufficiency in the basic necessities of life.

10. *Future focus*—redirecting attention away from immediate gain for selfish purposes towards a concern for the impact our present way of life will have on future generations.⁷⁾

It should be remembered that these are *values* and not specific policy statements. The charge, often made, that Greens are too “idealistic” and “impractical” cannot legitimately be made at the level of *values*. Values reflect our highest aspirations, even though in reality we may not always live up to them. The ideal, for example, that “all men are created equal” cannot be faulted simply because the United States has not yet been able to fully realize this ideal in practice. (The Greens and many others would, of course, take Jefferson’s idealism one step further by insisting that all men *and women* are created equal.) When Green values are compared with the dominant values of the present political order the differences are striking: while mainstream political values are concerned mainly with promoting economic growth, corporate profits, and personal gain, the values of the Greens express a much more wholistic and comprehensive concern for the well-being of the world as a whole, emphasizing personal and collective responsibility over instant gratification.

After the first National Green Gathering, held July 2-7, 1987 in Amherst, Massachusetts, the Interregional Committee initiated the SPAKA process (Strategy and Policy Approaches in Key Areas), in an effort to clarify and

7) The values in italics are taken directly from “Committees of Correspondence: Ten Key Values,” a document widely circulated in the Green movement.

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to explicate the ramifications of the ten key values. The entire process, illustrative of the Green commitment to participatory democracy and therefore worth describing in some detail, relied on the local groups to define key areas of political concern which, when collated, eventually amounted to about two dozen in number. Some of the areas were specifically concerned with environmental policies (Animal Liberation and Life Forms, Energy, Food and Agriculture, Forestry, Health and Healing, Land Use, Technology, Waste Management, and Water and Air), while others provided the outline for a much broader and ambitious political program (Arts, Community, Direct Action, Economics, Education, Indigenous People, Internal Organizing, Peace and Nonviolence, Politics, Social Justice, and Spirituality). It is possible that other areas will be added in the future.

Once the areas were defined, local groups were encouraged to generate specific statements for discussion at the Second National Green Gathering, which was held June 21-25, 1989 (the summer solstice) in Eugene, Oregon. Working groups in each key area had the task of taking the various statements submitted by the local groups and formulating them into single position papers, which were then presented at a plenary session. Delegates either adopted the position papers by consensus or "blocked" consensus by registering disagreements. The dissenting opinions were later published along with the adopted statements for further discussion by the locals. This procedure provided ample opportunity for minority positions to get a fair hearing rather than simply to be silenced by a "majority vote."

Following the conference in Eugene, locals further debated the position papers. Objections and suggested revisions were solicited in preparation for the Third National Green Gathering held in Estes Park, Colorado from September 12-16, 1990. On the first day of the gathering the working groups attempted to integrate some 250 objections into their respective position papers; any objection receiving support from one-third of the members of the working group was adopted for discussion at a plenary session the following day. At the plenary session each of the specific proposals was debated and voted on. The results of the decisions made at this national gathering were then published in a document which was cir-

culated to all Green locals for final ratification.⁸⁾ Locals were permitted to object to particular statements, and any statement blocked by more than 25% of the eligible votes would be dropped from the document.

When ratified, the SPAKA's will form the basis of a national Green program, leading possibly—but not inevitably—to a founding convention and the creation of a full-fledged Green Party. Not all elements in the Green movement support the idea of a national party, however, and the Green SPAKA statement on Politics leaves open the question of a national party: “A national Green Party, if and when formed, should evolve from state and local Green electoral efforts.”⁹⁾ Many Greens see the SPAKA process and the evolving Green program primarily as a strategic tool for building a grass roots Green movement, not necessarily as the embryo for a national party platform. Left Greens in the U.S. eschew national party politics altogether.

In its current, unratified form, the Green SPAKA document runs to some 24 large double-columned pages. Space does not permit even a cursory summary of each area, let alone a detailed analysis, but for the purpose of showing the depth and scale of the Green program, a brief sketch of the SPAKA statement on Energy can be provided. The preamble is worth quoting in full:

Our global ecological crisis is a direct result of an energy-use life-style based upon the consumption of non-renewable fossil fuels and nuclear power.

The form of society through which the common individual must consume this energy is not simply one of personal choice. Rather, it is substantially dictated from above by governmental and corporate interests that profit from it.

If we do not alter our energy use soon and drastically, the ecological crisis may be exacerbated past a point where we can resolve it.

8) The entire document was published under the title “Green Committees of Correspondence Program” in *Green Letter* (Winter, 1990), pp. 51-92.

9) “Green Committees of Correspondence Program,” *op. cit.*, p. 70.

This urgency is not communicated to us. Indeed, it is often hidden from us, because a system that would satisfy the energy needs of the world's citizenry while ensuring ecological health and balance would deprive the powers that be of their control and profit.¹⁰⁾

This passage is illustrative of several key Green perspectives. First, it presents the ecological problem of energy not only in terms of personal lifestyles but also in terms of collective political responsibilities. Second, it questions the tendency of both the government and corporations to put their own concern for "control and profit" above the general well-being of the citizenry, and responds by calling for the democratic control of resources. Third, the alternative proposed by the Greens is not a "techno-fix" solution dependent on newer or better forms of technology (which may or may not in fact be developed), but rather an appeal for conservation. Fourth, it argues that satisfying the genuine needs of the populace *improves* rather than *diminishes* our quality of life—eliminating greed and waste does not involve a return to Neanderthal lifestyles for the average citizen, as many critics have suggested, although it may indeed result in considerably diminished lifestyles for the wealthy. Fifth, the urgency of the problem demands that solutions be enacted now. Taking responsible, positive measures at the present time to improve the future environmental situation will not lead to barbarism. On the other hand, to unquestioningly continue on the present course and deny that the problem exists may indeed lead us "past a point where we can resolve it."

The SPAKA statement on Energy goes on to outline a "general energy policy" which calls for increased efficiency (i.e., eliminating unnecessary forms of energy consumption, planned obsolescence, and disposable products), phasing out ecologically harmful energy sources, and fulfilling the remaining energy needs with renewable forms of energy, such as solar, wind, small hydro, and hydrogen. The "general strategy" calls for the elimination of subsidies, tax benefits, and research funding for corporations

10) *Ibid.*, p. 61.

and utilities using non-renewable energy resources (including nuclear energy), and for industries which are not energy-efficient (the virgin-paper, mining, cattle grazing, agribusiness, and airline industries are specifically mentioned). Subsidies would be redirected towards the rebuilding of ecologically sustainable infrastructures, such as public transportation, renewable energy research and development, and small-scale organic agriculture. A “true cost pricing” policy is recommended in which the price of a product would reflect its true environmental costs. Further regulatory measures are also called for.

The section on general policies and strategies is followed by several columns of highly specific proposals. The “Nuclear Power Strategy” essentially calls for the ultimate phase-out of all forms of nuclear energy, including the elimination of food irradiation. As a means to this end it calls for the repeal of current energy laws, the dismantling of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the creation of a “civilian nuclear decommissioning board charged with the rapid phase out of nuclear power nationwide.”¹¹⁾ Workers in the nuclear energy industry would be retrained for new jobs in other fields.

The “General Transportation Policy” calls for the ultimate phase-out of fossil fuel use in transportation. It proposes raising the gas tax gradually but significantly over several years and using the revenue to further develop public transportation. Public transportation planning would be coordinated with “mixed-use development,” that is, rezoning and redeveloping urban areas so that the distances between work, living, shopping, and recreational areas can be reduced. With shorter distances to be traveled, bicycle use can be encouraged by creating separate bike lanes and parking areas. During the transition period, a combination of incentives (such as special lanes and lower tolls for carpoolers) and disincentives (such as eliminating free parking for cars in areas served by public transportation) would help to gradually decrease America’s overdependence on the automobile as a means of transportation.

11) *Ibid.*, p. 62.

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Other specific proposals made in the Green's policy statement on energy include strict building codes which establish high levels of energy efficiency for buildings and promote alternative heating technologies. New buildings would be required to obtain 25%-50% of their heat from solar energy. The statement opposes further offshore oil drilling and exploration, and any further development of hydroelectric power. It calls for community control and ownership of all public power utilities. It advocates a foreign policy which promotes the export of renewable energy technologies and drastically increases the amount of ecological assistance given to the Third World and Eastern European countries. As a response to the greenhouse effect, it calls for a 35% reduction of CO₂ emissions in the United States by the year 2005, a stop to extensive deforestation (in addition to legislation promoting sustainable forestry practices and reforestation), an immediate ban on all CFC's and ozone-depleting substances when environmentally safe alternatives are available, and efforts to slow and ultimately stabilize population growth.

This is only a summary of the main points of the Green's energy policy, and it should be remembered that energy is only one of nearly two dozen areas in which the Greens are currently hammering out policy statements. Even a quick glance through the Green program should dispel the notion that the Greens are long on idealism and vision but short on specific proposals. Granted, Green discussion of these issues is hardly of the sort that can be reduced to a T.V. sound bite, and the level of discussion may at times be confusing to the average voter whose only source of information about the Green movement is the mainstream media. But the depth and sincerity of the Green program can hardly be denied. The Democratic and Republican parties simply have nothing comparable to the policy statements currently being developed by the Greens. The two main parties have few concrete plans or specific proposals for leading the country out of its current social and environment mess, and little of the determined willingness of the Greens to face problems head on instead of simply sidestepping them.

In the 1980 election, voters may have preferred Reagan's rosy promises of a prosperous future to Carter's talk of a "national malaise," but now that

the future has arrived and promises have proven to be chimerical, the United States is forced once again to confront the malaise. It has not gone away, but has in fact deepened over the past decade. The irresponsible indulgence and denial of the '80s must give way to positive and constructive efforts in the '90s to directly confront and solve our problems—environmental, social, and political. The smiling politicians still promising perpetual economic growth and increasingly extravagant lifestyles with neither hard-ship nor sacrifice are truly the unrealistic visionaries, not the Greens.

Difficulties in Forming a Green Party

Electoral work for Greens in the U.S., as well as other minority political parties, has always been complicated by the system of majority rule. Roger Chambers summarizes the main structural problem facing Greens who wish to involve themselves in electoral politics in the United States :

A domestic political reality concerns our inequity of representation. If a party receives 2% or 30% of the vote nationally, that becomes the approximate percentage of representatives in most legislatures, be it a Parliament, Bundestag, Knesset, or Diet. In the U.S. by contrast, a party could receive 20% of the vote nationally and have no representation in Congress. It is necessary to obtain 51% of the vote in a specific locale, be it neighborhood, city, county, state, or congressional district, to elect people to political office.¹²⁾

As a response to the majority rule electoral system of the United States, American Greens have advocated changing to a system of proportional representation.

It can be argued that a system of proportional representation would in fact make the electoral system more democratic. Minority points of view

12) Roger Chambers, "Political Realities and Practical Strategies For Consideration in Founding a New Political Party in the United States," a working paper circulated by the New England Committees of Correspondence (1984), p. 2.

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would not be shut out, but would rather have more of a chance to actively participate in the political process. On the other hand, a system of proportional representation would also open the door to minority points of view which the Greens and many others abhor (eg., those of fascist and racist parties). Moreover, adopting a system of proportional representation would involve fundamental constitutional changes requiring considerable political debate not only among the Greens, but also among the American public at large. Nonetheless, constitutional change in the direction of creating more participatory and less representative forms of democracy is a conceivable long-range goal for the Greens. The SPAKA statement on politics makes a number of other bold proposals for electoral reform, including calls for equal access for all parties to both public campaign financing and the media.

While there were calls from the very beginning of the Green movement in the United States for the immediate formation of a national party, the prevailing opinion has been that efforts should be concentrated first on building local groups, so that when the time is ripe for the formation of a political party, the party can be based on a solid foundation of grass roots support. The primary strategy for Greens who wish to engage in electoral politics has been to work at the local level. Local Green groups run candidates for local offices, such as school boards, city councils, mayorships, etc., in addition to other organizing efforts and direct action projects. The electoral work has brought some success. *The New York Times* reported in 1987 that “. . . Green or Green-affiliated candidates have been elected to municipal offices in New Hampshire, Connecticut, Wisconsin, Michigan and North Carolina.”¹³⁾

Electoral work, however, is not the only thrust of Green politics. Local groups are engaged in a variety of political activities, which range from discussions and organizing efforts to direct action and demonstrations. The New England Green Alliance, for example, has recently involved itself with

13) Philip Shabecoff, “Political Activists Weigh U.S. ‘Green’ Movement,” *The New Times* (July 6, 1987), p. 12.

efforts to close the Seabrook nuclear power plant, worked with Native Americans in opposing hydroelectric dam development in James Bay, and initiated a bill to phase out the use of toxics in New Hampshire by the year 2000.¹⁴⁾ The Greens rightly realize that their greatest potential lies in their network of more than 200 local groups. A key Green working paper suggests that local groups organize themselves around five specific activities: strategic thinking (discussion of ideas and strategies), community projects (everything from planting trees to organizing local boycotts), cultural work (time for the arts, sports, and socializing), intergenerational education (educating oneself and others, especially the young, about Green values), and finally, electoral action (including working on local initiatives and issuing public statements).¹⁵⁾ Even on the local level, electoral activity is not the only, nor even the primary, political work of the Greens.

As for electoral activity on the national level, the SPAKA statement on politics states, “Green parties should be based on a broad conception of politics that embraces electoral efforts, the development of alternative institutions, education for empowerment, nonviolent direct action, and the incorporation of Green values in daily life.”¹⁶⁾ In this single statement at least three distinct—and potentially divisive—approaches to Green politics are clearly reflected: (1) the approach of those who see the Greens primarily as an alternative party engaged in electoral work within the existing system; (2) the approach of those who prefer direct action and the creation of alternative institutions outside of the existing system; and (3) the approach of those who place more emphasis on changing personal lifestyles than on changing social institutions. Since these three approaches have already been the cause of much debate in Green circles, it is significant that the Greens have been able to integrate them into a unified policy statement. This not only reflects the ultimate inclusivity of the movement, but also

14) Reported in *Green Letter* (Summer, 1990), p. 29.

15) “Local Groups: Five Dimensions—A Framework for Organizing,” adopted by the New England Committees of Correspondence on September 14, 1986 at a meeting of the New England Assembly in Burlington, Vermont.

16) “Green Committees of Correspondence Program,” *op. cit.*, p. 70.

the fact that these three approaches are not mutually exclusive but complementary.

Despite the carefully laid groundwork, some Greens have felt that efforts to create a viable Green party are moving too slowly. On March 2, 1990 a statewide group of California Greens, without consulting the national membership, officially registered a Green Party with the State of California. The move touched off a new and heated debate among U.S. Greens on the role of electoral politics in the Green movement. The California party presently needs to enlist 80,000 registered voters in order to qualify for ballot status by 1992. Towards achieving that goal, a network of Green contacts and groups has been set up in 24 counties comprising 75% of California's registered voters.

Opponents of the California initiative argue that the move is both premature and undemocratic in its methods. Carl Boggs, a California Green opposed to the formation of a state party, writes, ". . . [W]e are not yet ready to establish a statewide party. The requirements for success—a broad local base, technical, financial and human resources, experienced candidates, electoral platforms, etc.—are totally lacking."¹⁷ Boggs insists that further movement-building at the grass roots level is absolutely essential before a party can be successfully launched, and he supports this view with a quote from the SPAKA document: "The party must grow out of and be accountable to the movement as a whole. Lone candidates or skeletal parties with no grass roots base risk marginalization, dilution of identity and co-optations."¹⁸ There is genuine concern that a hastily launched Green party could prove as fleeting as Barry Commoner's Citizens Party of a decade earlier, and serve more to demoralize the movement than to build it. More-

17) Carl Boggs, "Why the California Greens Should Wait to Have a Party," *Green Letter* (Summer 1990), p. 42.

18) *Ibid.* The quote is from an early draft of the SPAKA statement on Politics, published in *Green Letter* (Summer, 1990), p. 78. The statement was modified in the later version to read, "Green parties must grow out of, and be accountable to their membership and the Green movement, and therefore must not compromise their explicit principles nor facilitate the their co-optation by other parties."

over, the act of registering the party was done before local Green groups in California had sufficient time to debate the issue and arrive at any kind of consensus—a blatant contradiction of the Green principle that decisions be made from the grass roots up rather than from the party down.

Supporters of the California initiative, however, suggest that a state party could supplement, not replace, the work of Green locals. In response to Bogg's criticisms, Bob Long writes, "Electoral activity should be considered as another way of attracting interest and of carrying on our basic educational work."¹⁹⁾ In fact, the function of a party is almost exclusively educational according to Long:

*One should always remember that our participation in elections should be primarily a matter of education of the public rather than being elected to office. As long as we do basic educational work, we will have accomplished our goal regardless of the actual vote.*²⁰⁾

No doubt Long and the other Greens who launched the California party underestimate the enormous amounts of human and financial resources necessary to successfully conduct election campaigns, especially when competing against the well-funded campaigns of the major parties. Funding is the key ingredient to a successful campaign under the present political system. Long himself admits that it is highly unlikely that the California Green party will actually be able to win an election. But if this is so, then the educational work Long insists is at the heart of the new party's electoral work could be done much more effectively by simply channeling resources directly into educational efforts rather than into party politics.

Moreover, since the party will be organizationally separate from the movement, there is in fact no structure for making the party accountable to the locals. Even if the party did manage to attract new members to the

19) Bob Long, "Why the California Greens Should *Not* Wait to Have a Party." *Green Letter* (Summer 1990), p. 15.

20) *Ibid.* Italics in the original.

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Green movement, there is no guarantee that they would be committed to Green ideals. The chances for co-optation are enormous since California state law stipulates that anyone who simply registers as a party member, regardless of the person's political beliefs, must be regarded as a bona fide member. Long, intending to spur current Green activists to join the new party, unwittingly provides a strong argument *against* the formation of a party by writing, "If the Siloists [an environmental cult with no connections to the official Green movement] register in greater numbers than those who agree with the GCoCs [the Green Committees of Correspondence], they can prevail at the primary conventions and dictate the platform."²¹⁾ So much for the idea that the California party will be based on grass roots accountability! In any event, it is not the Siloists but rather professional politicians, media manipulators, and other opportunists who pose the greatest threat to the California Greens. There is absolutely no guarantee that the "real Greens" will be able to maintain control of their own party even after having expended so much effort to start it.

The strongest arguments against the formation of a Green party have come from Left Greens. The Left Green Network, an officially recognized caucus within the Green Committees of Correspondence, was formed in 1988 to further a left agenda within the larger U.S. Green movement. The caucus developed a set of fourteen principles to supplement the Green's "Ten Key Values."²²⁾ Charges that the left element in the Greens is comprised mainly of recycled Marxists—"reds in green cloaks"—are totally unfounded. The Left Greens are more firmly and consciously rooted in anarchist theory and practice than in Marxism. For Left Greens the ecological crisis is exacerbated not only by capitalism, but also by the state. They explicitly reject the Marxist idea that the state must be taken over

21) *Ibid.*

22) The fourteen principles of the Left Green Network are ecological humanism, social ecology, racial equality, social ecofeminism, gay and liberation, grassroots democracy, cooperative commonwealth, human rights, nonaligned internationalism, independent politics, direct action, radical municipalism, strategic nonviolence, and democratic decentralism.

in the name of a higher cause, whether it be “the people” or “the environment.” Yet they equally reject the notion that a Green agenda can be effectively pursued within the framework of existing national economic and political structures, i.e., capitalism and representative democracy. Rather than seeking to merely replace one set of politicians with another—conventional politicians with “Green” politicians—the Left Greens are working for more fundamental changes which would ultimately restructure the entire political system.

In this sense, the Left Greens are more “revolutionary” than “reformist.” The program they advocate would ultimately base political power in local communities (Murray Bookchin has labeled this idea “libertarian municipalism”²³⁾) rather than in the nation-state. While local communities could federate into larger units, representative democracy at the national level would eventually be replaced by direct democracy at the local level. This is the primary reason why the Left Greens argue against the creation of a political party at the state or national level. Nonetheless, they support electoral work at the local level, where face-to-face democracy can be realized. Left Greens look at the Green movement as the place where this new conception of politics is beginning to work itself out, which is why internal organizing along cooperative, nonhierarchical, and democratic lines is especially important to them. In his attack on the idea of forming a national party, Kelly Stoner writes, “Parties, by their very nature, cannot foster the consciousness nor bring about the changes necessary for self-government free of hierarchy and domination.”²⁴⁾

The current party vs. movement debate among U.S. Greens is similar in many respects to the debate among German Greens between “realos” (realists), who seem willing to compromise certain Green principles in order to integrate themselves more fully into the parliamentary system, and “fundis” (fundamentalists, now openly calling themselves “left greens”),

23) Cf. Murray Bookchin, “Toward a Libertarian Municipalism.” *Our Generation* (Spring/Summer, 1985), pp. 9-22.

24) Kelly Stoner, “The Future of the Greens: A Movement or a Party?,” *Left Green Notes* (Sept./Oct., 1990), p. 8.

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who firmly intend to remain a “non-party party” committed to an uncompromised Green agenda. The electoral defeat of the Greens in the 1990 German election has dampened the party spirit of the realos somewhat, but it has not undermined in the least the more progressive agenda of the fundis. In any case, Greens in the United States can learn much from the experience of the German Greens.

Rensenbrink has suggested, entirely in keeping with the idea that the Greens should be a broadly based inclusive movement rather than a narrowly defined exclusive sect, that there should be space within the Green movement for both electoral work and direct action. He is basically supportive of the California Green party, yet sees the local grass roots work of the Greens as equally important. Persons who might be inclined to join a Green party may not want to become a member of a local Green group, just as Greens who are active in local groups may not wish to involve themselves in electoral politics. If the party proves to be unsuccessful, this will make the continued work of the locals all the more important. Even if the party is successful, there will be a strong need for local activity to make sure the party is not absorbed by the system. Rensenbrink’s notion is that each effort “. . . deserves its measure of autonomy within the green movement, including organizational autonomy as needed.”²⁵⁾

Even though the current effort to form a Green party in California is perhaps ill-conceived and misguided, Rensenbrink is ultimately right, I think, in pleading for space within the movement for various ideological and strategic approaches. Greens thrive on the notion of diversity in unity, which means that there should be room in the Green movement for a variety of approaches, each working to complement the efforts of the others. The ultimate goal, after all, is to build the movement in a democratic and cooperative manner rather than to destroy it with schisms, and to fight on behalf the environment rather than against each other.

Third parties have enjoyed little success in the United States in the

25) John Rensenbrink, “After Estes Park: Thinking Ahead to the Next Crisis,” *Green Letter* (Winter 1990), p. 34.

twentieth century, yet they are nonetheless capable of having a discernible influence on American politics. The U.S. Greens are already helping to shape current political debate. Even if their efforts to create a party are unsuccessful, their ideas can still have an enormous influence on the two existing parties, much as the ideas of the earlier populist and progressive movements were eventually, albeit only partially, absorbed into conventional political thinking. For the Greens, this would be less than a satisfactory reward for all their efforts, of course. The U.S. Greens are proving themselves to be not just an environmental group limited to ecological concerns, but rather a broad, multi-issue political force which is raising fundamental questions about how society is to be organized, how politics are to be conducted, and how democracy is to be furthered.