

Green Politics or Party Politiking

A View from Australia

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The British Green Party decided at its recent conference to dismantle the formerly 'decentralised' nature of its party structure in favour of a more centrally dominated approach. The Green Party in Germany despite some early promise is weak and in disarray. All over central and Eastern Europe we are hearing down with the Party!! All Parties!!! — Red, Green, White or Blue. And yet in Australia we are being met with the politically and tactically inept question: is it in our interests to form a Green Parliamentary Party or not? — when evidence from all over Europe would suggest that it quite obviously is not! Let us the people of Australia take our mighty continent down the path of free federation and diversity and build upon the autonomy, independence and organisation that exist in the varied green groupings that cover our land in a complex and spontaneous pattern of multi-various local activity.

There are groups that spring up like day lilies — composed of local people trying to preserve a treasured piece of wilderness from the state-capitalist bulldozer. There are educational and practical horticultural and farming groups which aim to research and educate people about practical ecological agriculture. There are parliamentary lobbyists organisations down to groups of people who grow trees for other people to plant on their land for free. There are organisations dedicated to the disruption and sabotage of the state-capitalist power-monopoly who know the price of a padlock, chain or monkeywrench better than the comfort of their own beds. Some organisations remain purely local in character whilst others cross oceans, mountains, and other frontiers assuming an international and even global identity. The green movement consists of thousands of independent and autonomous organisations and even if the Green Party were to become established it could only represent one small fraction of the organised green movement. Namely, those people who believe that the ecological revolution in all its many and varied aspects — social, economic, political, and biological — can be realised by parliamentary reforms within the present state-capitalist system.

The present diversity of groups, movements and organisations all performing various specialist tasks according to the needs of the moment and unified by a common aim of 'saving the Earth' (or at least that portion of it closest to them) represents a force stronger than any central party which will inevitably interfere with this great multiplicity of multi-layered green activism in its attempt to impose a 'party line' upon organisations which are always better left in the hands of its members. Strength through diversity and not the centralist uniformisation of the party.

Leave the initiative and control entirely at the level of the individual green organisation allowing them to develop according to their own unique histories, purposes and aspirations and we shall achieve a green movement that will grow in harmony with the widely differing local problems and ecological concerns that confront our vast continent. Impose a centralist party line and we shall lose local initiative – policy and direction becoming the dictates of parliamentary intrigue in Canberra. Through diversification, autonomy and self-determination of all the great multiplicity of green organisations we shall avoid the flimsy ‘unified front’ of the tantalising but abstract and fragile bubble of ‘the Party’ and achieve true strength capable of delivering a devastating attack against all those who wish to damage the health of our living and freely evolving planet. If we avoid the party trap, we shall develop a green movement that is also a people’s movement – able and willing to throw a pitchfork into the system in the most novel and unexpected places imaginable. The eco-revolution cannot be the subject of a single plan, however brilliant and inspired. It must be the constructive and destructive work of the people. ‘The Planet and its People’ and not ‘The Party’ must become the catch cry of our movement.

For sure our movement contains many eco-gurus whose egoistic desire to lead their own self-styled movement and philosophy often leads to unnecessary conflict, jealousy, and stupidity. But many, many egos is still a much surer method of achieving success, democracy, and progress than that of the One Big Ego implied in party leaders and parliamentary executive committees. Let us rejoice in the fact that a truly organic unity of our various egos can only be meaningfully achieved by the dynamic balancing of each others’ differences in free and open discussion – and cannot be artificially produced by a bureaucratic smog-screen of ‘party unity’ through hierarchical and administrative methods. There is no ‘lord over nature’, no ‘king of the jungle’. In a rainforest everything is adapted around everything else in a non-centralised and complex web of both co-operation and conflict – creating thereby a lasting and durable equilibrium resulting from the free and open interaction of all the various energies, habits and life forms of which any natural system is composed. Let us not ignore this fundamental feature of natural order in favour of ‘centralised party’ or ‘administrative’ order. Let the green movement remain truly green and reject such concepts of order in an organisation as are inherently authoritarian and contrary to the basic principles of harmonious stability observable in nature.

“Such idealism is fine”, I hear in reply, – “... but what have you to say about the practical results to be gained from having a Green representative?” Surely by having people ‘on the inside’ we can achieve more than always being ‘on the outside of parliament and the law’? In answering such questions it is fruitful to look at the international labour movement – a movement that was in the 19th and 20th centuries all powerful in both strength and ideas but which through the intervention of ‘the party’ has come to be represented on the one hand by the authoritarian centralism of China and the former soviet bloc, and on the other the ineffectual and dishonest ‘labour parties’ in both Australia and England – neither of which have progressed the ‘cause of labour’ one single bit in fifty years or more. The ‘eight-hour day’ and all of the other concessions to labour that occurred during this century were not won¹ through parliamentary representation, rather, they were fought for with Mood through strikes, demonstrations and the picket line – every single small step in the improvement of conditions was bought by the lives of countless people throughout the world. The labour party merely gave a ‘legal status’ to the demands which had already been won through direct-action. Since this time the labour party has done nothing

¹ Editors’ note: It has still not been won in Britain!

to progress the ideals of socialism. It has rather, merely made compromises with the interests of capital and has modified the real power of the organised working classes by manipulating their unions according to the interests of the capitalist classes. Every forest activist knows that it is only through the continual threat of further protest — and in direct proportion to their readiness to make such threats action — that the green movement has had any victories. Why should we now hand over this responsibility to tamed party bureaucrats? Green legislation can at best simply consolidate what has already been won and then attempt to placate the more radical elements of our movement. Besides, they can always change the laws!

The parliamentary candidate — surrounded by the paraphernalia of the media circus — stuck like a spider in its web in Canberra or Berlin, necessarily becomes detached from the everyday concerns and aspirations of the movement. Correspondingly as soon as our activity is reduced to placing an X by a green candidate in a box on a ballot form people are apt to become complacent (the party is seeing to it — vote and wait for the green revolution) and cease becoming actively and directly involved in the practical, local, and everyday battles. The strength of the popular green movement will be drained. Beyond this, the most ardent parliamentary reformer maintains his/her vigour only so long as there is noise and protest in the street and forest-lands to remind him/her that their goal is to ‘save the planet’ and not to please their parliamentary colleagues. Without loud protest and direct activity to spur him/her on the reformer becomes just another useless bureaucrat and a parasitic drain upon the resources of the popular green movement. Principles are always the first victims in the electoral rush for parliamentary seats.

Again, comparison with the labour movements of the past is both illustrative and instructive. The original labour movement called for equal access to the means of production, land, housing, and machinery to all those who worked them — in short it asked for the disappearance of capitalism and the capitalist classes altogether. These goals and principles were, however, talked about only so long as the workers’ movement remained in the hands of the workers themselves. In England and Australia, the labour party using the ‘eight-hour day’ campaign and other social palliatives as a spring-board into parliament, soon turned the word socialism into nothing more than a belief in a somewhat more benevolent system of middle-class corporate and capitalist exploitation in which the workers were to have higher wages, shorter hours and industrial injury compensation etc. Though his/her rations improved, the worker was to remain a wage-slave to capital and the whole point of the socialist movement was to have destroyed the master/slave relationship once and for all. So much then for the parliamentary socialists. What then of the authoritarian socialists or communists? These people were literally obsessed by the ‘Party’. They lived and breathed for It. “If only”, they argued, “the party appropriates everything can the means of production be properly administered and distributed for the people”. And what was the result of this foolishness — the communists robbed the workers and the peasants of their fields, factories and workshops and placed them in the hands of party bureaucrats who took the best of everything and left the producers of all this wealth with the shoddy things of life, or more often — with nothing at all! The once flourishing peasant communities and rural co-operative societies that could have formed the basis of a decentralised, egalitarian, and ecologically integrated approach to the land were destroyed by enforced collectivisation. The door of the prison cell and the labour camp being of course always open to anyone who dared whisper a word in protest against their God ‘The Party’. Whether or not you agree with the economic and social goals of the early socialist movement is secondary to the fact that the socialist party in all its various manifestations — both parliamentary and authoritarian — has proved a traitor and an enemy to its

practical realisation. The last-gasps of Hawke's bankrupt and hypocritical 'labour government', the breakdown of the Soviet power monopoly and the atrocities of the communist party in China all testify to this fact. Why do the Greens, at present 'ever so radical' feel that a green party will serve their interests any better than it did the once so vigorous labour movement? Free people do not need a party to achieve their ends — free people achieve it by themselves. Down with 'The Party — All Parties' and long live the social-ecological revolution. The green movement cannot make compromises with the past. This time it is not just social and economic justice which is at stake. It is the very future of our planet.

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