



GREEN HORIZON

Magazine

..... AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE GREEN HORIZON FOUNDATION

TURNING POINT

A "New Normal" is Needed

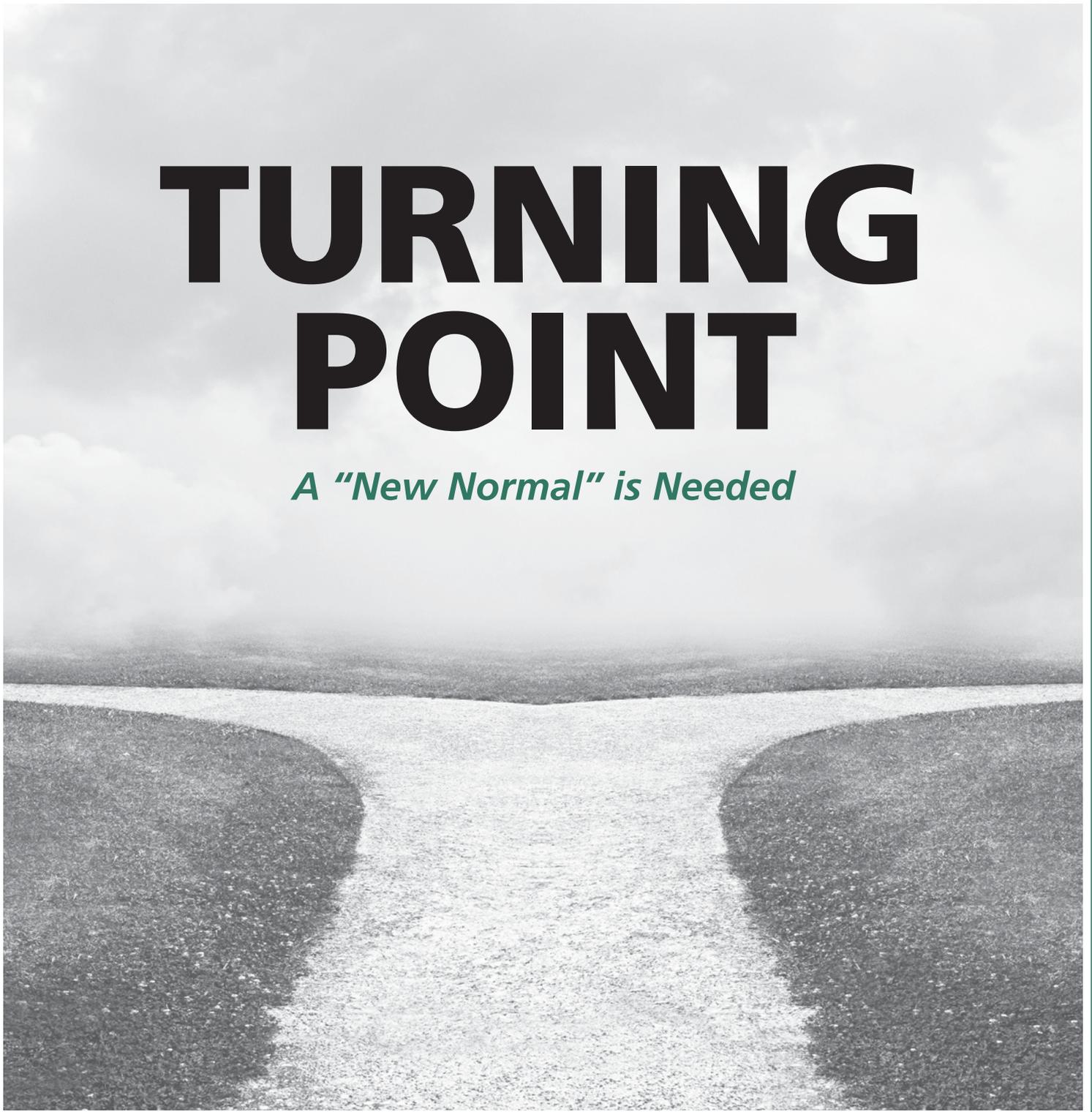


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Letters to the Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

I work [as a nurse] in a hospital in Alabama. I see myself as one of the lucky ones, as my daily routine has changed little since the onset of the virus. I am still working two days a week and have fortunately not been asked to work on the hospital's COVID floor. I have always loved to cook and so go to the grocery store a couple of times a week, always with a mask.

But even with the rhythm of my day largely unchanged, I still find myself on a rollercoaster of emotions that fluctuate between calm and productive, desperate, hope for the future, dread for the future, excitement for new possibilities, and paralysis. It is a very unsettling period for sure, and the only thing that seems to be constant is the uncertainty of every aspect of life.

I appreciate the existence of *Green Horizon Magazine* and am especially enjoying the recent John Rensenbrink "celebrating a legend" edition! John can be satisfied that he's lived life, and continues living it, with purpose and compassion.

My free time these days is spent volunteering for a few organizations I feel passionately about. One is Prism United, an organization that provides facilitated,

curriculum-based support groups for at-risk LGBTQ+ teens, preteens, and their families. We are small but growing (the only service of its kind in lower Alabama) and also provide counselling referrals, free STI testing, a lending library, and LGBTQ+ sensitivity training to educators and businesses (www.prismunited.org).

The other is my church, Open Table United Church of Christ, a place where, after 28 years of not attending, I have found a spiritual home. Our Sunday school class shared a book study with our Episcopal host church last summer, Jim Antal's *Climate Church, Climate World*, and were inspired to create a faith-based alliance of congregations hoping to focus the Gulf Coast's moral attention to the climate crisis. We call our little group Gulf Coast Creation Care and so far have had four committed Christian congregations, two Unitarian Universalist congregations, the temple, the synagogue, and one of our mosques working together to care for our Earth Home!

The hardest part about climate change is maintaining hope and building resilience against what seem like insurmountable

...continued on page 26

THE TEAM

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Turning Point?

2020.

May saw the publication in *Nature Scientific Reports* of “Deforestation and world population sustainability” by Dr. Gerardo Aquino, a research associate at the Alan Turing Institute in London, and Prof. Mauro Bologna at the University of Tarapacá in Chile. These two theoretical physicists specializing in complex systems concluded that global deforestation is on track to trigger an “irreversible collapse” of human civilization within the next two to four decades. They say that if the rate of deforestation continues, “all the forests would disappear in approximately 100–200 years.”

Then in July former German Green Party leader Joschka Fischer circulated an opinion piece (“A Turning Point for Humanity”) in which he advised: “There is no playbook for a scenario in which a high-tech world economy interconnected by global supply chains is brought to its knees by a microscopic pathogen... The crisis will have consequences that last far beyond the coming months and years. This could be the moment when, having realized the consequences of how we have organized our economic systems and engaged with nature, we finally commit to a decisive shift toward sustainability. But if we fail to make the necessary changes, the pandemic of 2020 will mark the beginning of an unprecedented human catastrophe... We can either assume responsibility and muster the courage and vision to undertake a Great Transformation, or we can wait, with eyes wide open, for the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. With COVID-19, the first rider has already appeared.”

* * * * *

So: Are we at a turning point... or on a runway toward collapse?

There is widespread agreement that, after the pandemic dissipates, we must not go back to the “old normal.” But American society seems immobilized, unable to respond in a way that Aquino, Bologna, and Fischer indicate is absolutely imperative. One might be encouraged by the fact that this is a major electoral year, a year that could conceivably offer hope for the start of transformative change. But. To the contrary, unfortunately, people are expressing an unusual degree of dissatisfaction with the presidential nominees of the establishment parties this year.

Where, then, is hope to be found?

A gratifying response to our last issue was how many readers commented on the inspiration engendered by John Rensenbrink’s vision and his orientation to social change. I remember having that thought myself when I read *The Greens and the Politics of Transformation* all the way back in 1992.

Green Horizon prides itself on offering solutions and suggestions for pathways forward. Such can be the basis for hope. We believe that a Green future can be just over the horizon. After all, the “greening” movement has come far since the first Earth Day fifty years ago. Many of us took encouragement from the overview of the ensuing decades, the recounting of the developments and breakthroughs John participated in, evident in the tributes and testaments of Issue No. 40. In acknowledgment, John submitted the following to convey his own sense of encouragement and appreciation:

A huge Thank You to Steve and all who wrote about me in the last issue, Winter/Spring #40. It was and remains for me an amazing experience, making me by turns humble, proud, refreshed, renewed, instructed, and abundantly eager to live and contribute as much as I can, in various ways as seems possible, in my few remaining years. You are my brothers and sisters and I treasure each one of you.

— John Rensenbrink

* * * * *

2020.

Business-as-usual is a dismal prospect; politics-as-usual is nothing short of disheartening. But the message from the Green movement is: Yes, a turning point is possible, and the beginnings of such may be at hand. The inevitable crises consequent to misguided praxis—deforestation, climate disruption, trajectories of overshoot in myriad spheres—are serving to jolt human consciousness, hopefully toward a higher level of ecological wisdom and social enlightenment. Perhaps our memory of this anything-but-ordinary year will turn out more sanguine than the immediate discomfiture, at this point, might lead us to believe . . . after all.

— SW

The Rise of the CANADIAN GREENS

INTERVIEW BY SEDEN ANLAR

Last year Seden Anlar of the Big Green Politics Podcast spoke with Abhijeet Manay, Deputy Leader of the Ontario Greens, about the recent climate change-related scandals in Canada, the potential for electoral reform, and the prospects for the Green Party in the federal elections. The following is an abbreviated transcript of their interview.

One day in June of 2019
Canada's parliament
declared a climate
emergency. The next
day it approved the
expansion of a massive
pipeline that will
increase oil production!

SEDEN: During the summer of 2019, a grave scandal occurred in Canada which was overlooked by mainstream media, but I think what happened set the scene for the fall electoral campaign. On June 17, Canada's parliament declared a climate emergency. Only one day later, the same parliament approved the expansion of a massive pipeline that will increase oil production in Alberta and release more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. How do you make sense of that? Is it the donations from oil lobbies? What is it?

ABHIJEET: To give a bit of context about what happened even before that: The Greens won the Nanaimo-Ladysmith by-election where Paul Manly was elected as the second federal Green Member of Parliament (MP) in the House of Commons. Suddenly, the pressure was on for the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Liberals to prove their "environmental credentials." They started submitting their parliamentary climate emergency motions in order to change the narrative around the 'Green Wave.' Approving the pipeline exposed how disingenuous their efforts were. It was almost like green-washing, and the irony of it didn't escape Canadians.

SEDEN: What did the Green Party do after that?

ABHIJEET: Paul Manly and Elizabeth May are finally a two-person caucus in the House of Commons. And even if they can't submit any motions, they have expanded the Green Party's exposure to the Canadian electorate. Before, when the Greens were just considered a "fringe party," we weren't given the same amount of media coverage. But now, across the board, we are.

Climate change is fast becoming the top issue for Canadians. The other parties are now playing catch-up to the Greens, who have released a comprehensive plan to deal with the climate crisis. Our plan—"Mission: Possible"—is modeled after the recommendations of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report. Our targets are aggressive, but they're necessary. We call for a just transition—what Mike Shreiner, the Leader of the Ontario Greens, calls "a clean and caring economy"—so we can make sure that we're transitioning to a green economy but at the same time building a bridge between the new and the old so that no one gets left behind (<https://www.greenparty.ca/en/mission-possible>).

The messaging is important and something we struggled with, especially when people viewed the Greens as "just the environmental party." This is changing now. Elizabeth May put it well when she said that we're not a one-issue party, but if we have to be, the environment is a good one issue to have.

Climate change is fast
becoming the top issue
for Canadians.

We call for a just transition to a “clean and caring economy”—so that no one gets left behind.

SEDEN: Considering all this momentum around the climate crisis, would you say that the election is about the classic battle between the different economic models of the Liberals and the Conservatives, or are there new dynamics involved?

ABHIJEET: This election feels different—even the polling dynamics. If you look at the TV pundits, even *they* are talking about the fact that the Greens are surging and in some provinces are in third place, ahead of the NDP. And the Green Wave is one of the reasons why the Greens have adopted the slogan, “Not left, not right, but forward together.” We can’t play to those old left-right political paradigms anymore. We can’t afford to be a fractured society at this point.

SEDEN: Looking at the recent local elections, what you said is quite evident. For instance, in June 2018, Mike Schreiner was elected as the first Green member of the Provincial Parliament of Ontario.

ABHIJEET: That’s right. And the Greens in New Brunswick advanced from one seat to three. On Prince Edward Island, the Greens went from one seat in 2015 to two in 2017, and now they are the formal opposition there with eight seats. The Greens have held the balance of power in British Columbia for two years now. There are also many Greens who have gotten elected at the municipal level.

SEDEN: Why is Canada experiencing this Green Wave...why now?

ABHIJEET: The most obvious reason is the immediate effects of the climate breakdown that we’re experiencing: the rampant floods, storms, drought, and forest fires. All of it is right there staring Canadians in the face. Insurance companies are starting to recognize that premiums are going to go up and the crisis is essentially going to make their business model moot. So, the fact that corporations are getting on board is evidence of how serious

the issue is. Finally, the old political inertia is now obliterated. The fact that small parties are now rising to the fore is very disconcerting for all the status quo parties.

SEDEN: Most of the recent Green Wave took place on a local and provincial level. When this has been the case in other countries, we often haven’t seen the same level of success at the federal level. What do you think the Greens’ challenges are on the federal level here in Canada?

ABHIJEET: The main challenge is the “first-past-the-post” system. The fact that the Greens are getting elected at the rates they are in Canada is nothing short of a miracle, because it’s such an unfair system and so stacked against the smaller parties. One of the reasons why the Greens in Europe are doing well is because they have proportional representation (P.R.) systems there, except for the UK. It’s incredibly undemocratic here, considering Elizabeth May was for the longest time the only Green MP even though we were polling around 5-6 percent. With P.R. that number would be much higher.

First-past-the-post leads to all sorts of frustrating conversations around strategic voting when people don’t want to split up the progressive vote either for the Liberals or the NDP. The fact that people are not voting for what they actually want but against what they don’t want is such a pessimistic way of looking at politics. It doesn’t inspire people to go out and vote, and that’s one of the reasons why we have such a low voter turnout.

SEDEN: That also means that the Green Party has to persuade voters to believe not only that they will best serve Canadians but also that other Canadians share the same set of preferences. That’s a lot of work, isn’t it?

ABHIJEET: Exactly. We have to show our electability. It’s frustrating, but if you look at it through a marketing lens it makes sense because the brands of the Conservatives, the Liberals and

On Prince Edward Island, the Greens went from one seat in 2015 to two in 2017,
and now they are the formal opposition there with eight seats.

First-past-the-post leads to all sorts of frustrating conversations around strategic voting when people don't want to split up the progressive vote.

even the NDP have longevity. On the other hand, the Greens, who have been around for only a couple of decades, don't have that yet. Nonetheless, there is an urgency to execute the plans we need to have in place.

If we had P.R., people would vote for whoever has the best platform. Whether it was a mixed-member or proportional system, it would be a different political landscape and we would be able to deal with issues like climate change more profoundly. First-past-the-post is an antiquated system, not designed to deal with the problems of this century. One of the greatest betrayals of Prime Minister Trudeau was when, in 2015, he campaigned on electoral system reform and then, when he got into power, went back on his promise. That was one of the reasons why I left the Liberals to join the Greens.

SEDEN: So what are your predictions, what do you hope to see happening?

ABHIJEET: I don't know if Trudeau's "Black and Brown Face" scandal is going to affect the Liberal Party's numbers—maybe somewhat, but it seems like they might hold steady. Currently the Liberals and Conservatives are statistically tied in terms of the overall percentage of the vote, though the Liberals are predicted to win more seats [the outcome was: Liberals 33%, 157 seats; Conservatives 34%, 121 seats; New Democrats 16%, 24 seats; Bloc Québécois 7%, 32 seats; Greens 6%, 3 seats].

SEDEN: So, let's say there was proportional representation, Elizabeth May had the same approval ratings, and the Green Party came to power. What would Canada then look like?

One of the greatest betrayals of Prime Minister Trudeau was when, in 2015, he campaigned on electoral system reform and then, when he got into power, went back on his promise.

ABHIJEET: That would be a Canada ready for dealing with climate change; ready to lead the world in the climate action revolution; ready to take its place back in the geopolitical order where it once was a respected member of the world community for its genuine action on the issues that are most cared about, action based on the values that we embody. That's exactly what the Greens will bring to the table when we're able to form a government, because it's all the things that are mentioned in our Mission: Possible plan, i.e., making sure that we transition to a clean economy and making sure that we take care of our most vulnerable citizens. Those policies reflect Canadian values of cooperation and social community.

The Greens will lead a fantastic government when that time comes. Not if, but when!

For the full audio version of this interview, check out the Big Green Politics Podcast. It's available on most podcast platforms, including Soundcloud, iTunes, Google Play, and Spotify. The Big Green Politics Podcast provides an environmental and feminist angle on global political news, plus interviews with Green thinkers, politicians and activists . . . @biggreenpolpod.

FYI: For reference, Elizabeth May earlier reported on the advancement of the Canadian Greens in the pages of *Green Horizon* issues No. 5 (Fall 2004), No. 13 (Fall 2006), No. 16 (Summer 2007), and No. 24 (Fall/Winter 2011).



SEDEN ANLAR

is a law school graduate and a political journalist who writes on a variety of issues from political psychology and geopolitics to social/racial justice and feminism. She is the host and co-producer, along with Julia Lagoutte, of the Big Green Politics Podcast. Seden is currently working in the field of international relations in Brussels, Belgium. She tweets @SedenAnlar.

Public Power *and* Energy Democracy

The electric power industry was created by entrepreneurs in the 1880s, and it wasn't until the 1930s that the government entered the industry. Until the deregulation era of the 1990s, private utilities were heavily regulated. As a result of the spectacular failures of deregulation, the concept of public ownership of utilities is taking off again. In fact, the ability to develop decentralized community-owned electricity is critical for the transition to 100% renewable energy needed today.

BY DENISE A. BRUSH

THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

In 1882, Thomas Edison turned on the first electric power generating station in Manhattan, and within a few years there were Edison Electric plants all over the US. A distant relative of mine, Charles F. Brush, invented the arc light, and “installed the first true central station service for arc lighting in San Francisco in 1879” (Cohn, p.16). In 1881 “the Brush Electric Light Company installed one of the first hydroelectric generators in the world on the US side of Niagara Falls” (Hampton, p.22). The Ontario government was eventually able to take control of the Canadian portion of the power generated by Niagara Falls from various competing private interests, leading to the prevalence of government-owned electric power in Canada. Power generation on the US side of the falls stayed in a succession of private hands until the late 1950s when it was taken over by the New York Power Authority, a state-run utility created in 1931 by then-Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Canadian writers Howard Hampton and Bill Reno assert that “the NYPA was then, and still is, America’s largest state-owned public power enterprise” (Hampton, p. 94).

Technology historian Julie Cohn says that “[though] electrification began in the United States as a competitive private sector enterprise, legislators, managers, and civic leaders eventually determined the power system was a natural monopoly” (Cohn, p.6). Private electric utilities became the norm in the US in the early 20th century by using a “strategy of freezing out public power by agreeing to regulation in return for monopolies” (Hampton, p.88). Then they found a contrivance by which to avoid regulation entirely, the holding company: “The holding company was a corporate entity that owned utilities in more than one state. The significance is that the US Constitution gives the federal government all authority over interstate commerce, which means that if you operate in more than one state, you are subject to federal, not state laws” (Hampton, p.88).

“At their peak in the late 1920s, the 16 largest electric power holding companies controlled more than 75 percent of all US generation. Of these 16, three dominated: The Southern Company, now known as North Carolina’s Duke Energy (after its founder, James Duke); The Morgan Group, which now includes companies such as New York’s Consolidated Edison and Public Service of New Jersey; and Samuel Insull’s Middle West Utilities, which still survives as Commonwealth Edison of Illinois, which itself is a subsidiary of Philadelphia-based mega-utility Exelon, the largest nuclear operator in North America” (Hampton, p. 90). Exelon is the parent company of Delmarva Power, Atlantic City Electric, and PECO—which control all electricity transmission and distribution in the Philadelphia area.

As a result of the failures of deregulation, the concept of public ownership of utilities is taking off again.

In California, private company Pacific Gas and Electric has been found liable for multiple wildfires while the publicly-owned Sacramento Metropolitan Utility District has handled the situation in an exemplary way.

“When Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democrats swept the 1932 election, correcting the abuses of private power became a government priority. This led to the Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935 (PUHCA), which put holding companies under the regulation of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). As well, utilities involved in interstate wholesale marketing or transmission of electric power became regulated by the Federal Power Commission, which evolved into the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)” (Hampton, p.92). The abuses of the private electric companies of the 1930s led to “the creation of federally owned utilities such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Bonneville Power Administration, as well as the Rural Electrification Administration” (Hampton, p.92). The Chairman of the TVA Board, David Lilienthal, was a strong advocate for public utilities and local community control of assets like water and electricity. In 1944 Lilienthal published a popular book, *TVA: Democracy on the March*, in which he promoted decentralization and grassroots democracy as benefits of public power. He was a Green ahead of his time!

Historian Jeremiah Lambert says that President Roosevelt had hopes of repeating the success of TVA with regional public hydroelectric systems all over the US. But the construction of Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams for hydroelectric power in the Pacific Northwest, against fierce opposition by private utility interests, was his last success. The Army Corps of Engineers built and operated the dams and delivered the power to civilian administrators who contracted with local utilities to buy it. But the contracts did specify that they were to prefer public utilities over private ones in selling their power. Many rural cooperatives and public utilities that were created in Washington State in the 1930s to take advantage of this clause still exist (Lambert, p.99).

In 1942, the federal government demanded that public and private providers pool their power due to the war (Lambert, p.100). The act that was adopted directed the Federal Power Commission “to divide the country

into regional districts for the voluntary interconnection and coordination of facilities for the generation, transmission, and sale of electric energy” (Lambert, p.132). Unfortunately, the FPC was never able to get the investor-owned utilities to voluntarily cooperate as hoped. Over time they did create multi-state power pool agreements and “informal coordinating organizations”—over 20 existed by 1970 (Lambert, p.134). But each state retained the right to regulate each utility independently. State-based electricity regulation remained in place for over three decades until President Carter’s 1978 National Energy Act “... gave the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) sweeping authority to order utilities to interconnect, sell, and exchange power and provide necessary transmission services” (Lambert, p.138).

DEREGULATION

Dennis Kucinich (who later ran for president in 2004) was the mayor of Cleveland in 1978. He refused to sell the city-owned electric utility despite pressure from the bank that held the city’s debt. Cleveland suffered from financial difficulties for years, but eventually emerged stronger with an intact Cleveland Public Power. Banks frequently collude with private utility companies to try to force cities into privatizing their electric power, but their promises of lower consumer rates rarely come true. In fact, rates tend to be lower with public power.

There are two kinds of electric utilities: those that generate electricity and those that transmit and distribute it. While a given utility can operate in both categories, and until the 1980s generally did, they were eventually regulated very differently. Mary Timney explains that “transmission is arguably a true natural monopoly in that competition in transmission would require duplicate systems crisscrossing the landscape” (Timney, p.49). But “[t]he impetus to deregulate the industry came when one element of the vertical system—generation—began to be seen as a potential competitive market and no longer a natural monopoly” (Timney, p.49).

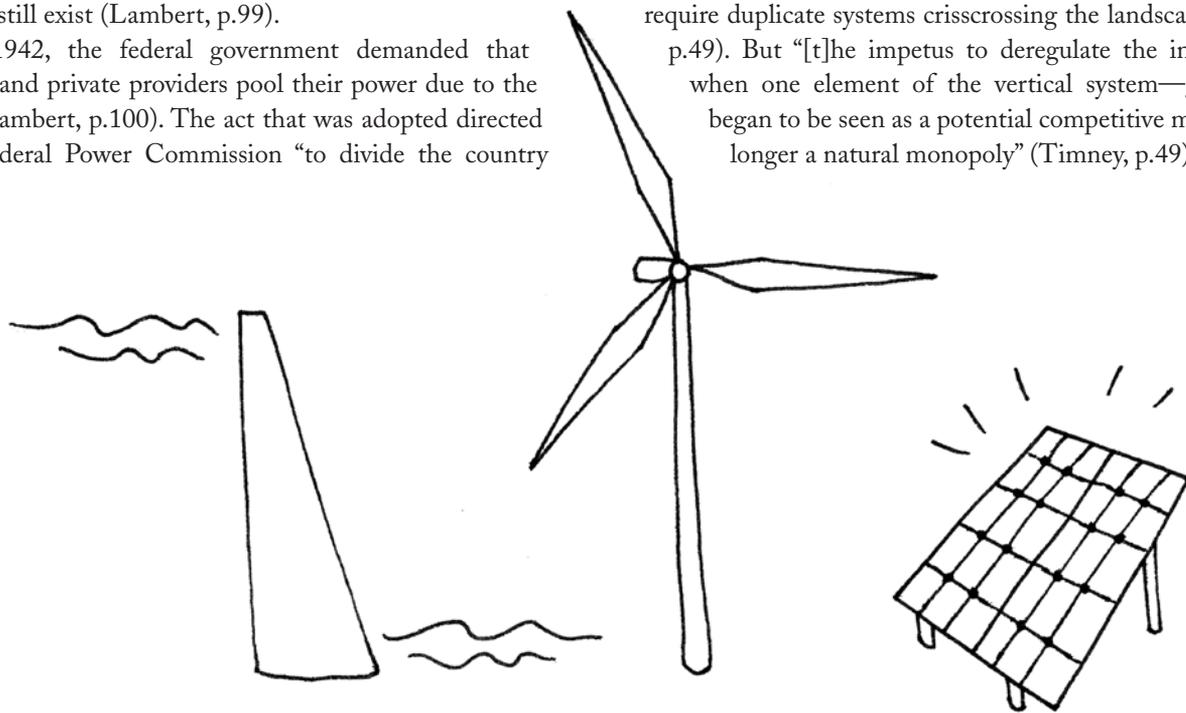


ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF BECCA ROBERTS

The 1978 National Energy Act was the first step toward nationwide deregulation in the 1980s and 1990s. Next came the 1983 book, *Markets for Power*, by MIT economist Paul Joskow, advocating for deregulation of power generation companies. The final step was President Bush's 1992 Energy Policy Act. With this Act the federal government opened up electricity deregulation nationwide, allowing consumers to buy electricity from anyone. Private electric companies were over the moon; but then Enron went spectacularly bankrupt. "Just like in California, customers back East greeted the exciting prospect of getting to choose their own energy supplier with a big yawn" (Hampton, p. 174).

The United Kingdom privatized their previously public electricity sector during that same period, and some of the resultant companies were powerful enough to buy up generating capacity in other countries. A British company called National Grid (which is now building interstate gas pipelines) bought the New England Electrical System and Massachusetts Electric (Hampton, p.156). Having foreign-owned companies control our electric power started worrying people.

By the late 1990s, American city governments began seeing the benefits of public power ownership, starting with the 1998 "municipalization" of the once privately-owned Long Island Lighting Company, a New York utility serving more than a million people. "Now called the Long Island Power Authority, the newly public utility reduced rates in one year by an average of 20 percent, the largest across-the-board rate reduction in US history . . . Long Island joined Los Angeles, San Antonio, Seattle, Phoenix, Kansas City, Austin, Memphis, Orlando, Omaha, Sacramento and more than 2,000 other cities in the US that own their own utilities. A few, such as Los Angeles, Sacramento, Phoenix and now Long Island, own generation facilities as well as the local wires systems. Most, however, purchase their power from others and sell it to their customers at cost. Many buy from publicly owned generators, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and Bonneville Power Administration" (Hampton, p.232).

In the summer of 1999, extreme heat led to rolling blackouts. The newly deregulated companies were not doing the required maintenance because they had laid off many workers and stopped voluntarily cooperating with companies who were now their competitors. In testimony before Congress in November 1999, David Nevius, vice president of the North American Electric Reliability Council, warned that under the newly competitive system, "We may not be able much longer to keep

the interstate electricity grids operating reliably" (Hampton, p.176). In summary, deregulation was a complete failure.

THE GRID

There tends to be an assumption that the United States has a national electric grid, but, in fact, we do not. We have privately owned interconnected grids that cross both state and national borders. "In 1965, a major power failure blacked out the northeastern United States from New Jersey to Canada. This led to the development of the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC), established by the utility industry to better coordinate electricity transmission in cases of power failures. The NERC established ten regional councils that were responsible for maintaining the reliability of three transmission grids: the Eastern Intertie, the Western Intertie, and the Texas grid. These grids span the United States, Canada, and parts of Mexico..." (Timney, p.48).

It's worth repeating that the entity that controls and manages all electrical power transmission between states in the United States is a *private corporation*. NERC, certified by both US federal and Canadian provincial governments, oversees reliability of the system. The network consists of regional "interconnection" groups that are further bundled into "power pools," several of which include portions of Canada—Northwest Power Pool, California Nevada Systems, Rocky Mountain Pool, Arizona New Mexico Systems, Texas Systems, Interconnected Systems Group (Midwest/South), PJM Interconnection, Ontario, and CANUSE Systems (Cohn, p.208). While these groups have interconnection points, the connections are rarely used. Because of the fact that the system is operated by private providers, it is difficult to obtain definitive information about how the system works!

According to Jeremiah Lambert, "The United States is home to vast clean energy resources but lacks a modern interstate transmission grid to deliver carbon-free electricity to customers in highly populated areas." For example, although there are wind energy sources in Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska, "construction of new connecting lines, although sorely needed, confronts technical, jurisdictional, and cost allocation barriers." Construction of new lines is still decided by the lowest-level local utility. "Capital-intensive transmission projects, it has become clear, require a more top-down process of approval and cost allocation." But states keep filing lawsuits complaining their constituents are being forced to pay for electricity consumed by

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Banks frequently collude with private utility companies to try to force cities into privatizing their electric power, but their promises of lower consumer rates rarely come true; in fact, residential customers of private utilities in the US pay an average 16 percent more than customers of publicly-owned utilities.

residents of other states. This is why investment in renewable energy has remained primarily the realm of individuals and not a national program (see: Lambert, p.217).

Under the current profit-oriented system, “No one has the incentive to invest in upgrading the grid.” (Timney, p.152). More critically, no one has the incentive or the authority to secure the grid from foreign adversaries. According to reports aired on the Rachel Maddow Show last year, Russian and Chinese hackers have, in fact, hacked into our electric grid and may be capable of taking control and shutting it down.

PUBLIC POWER TODAY

In Franklin Roosevelt’s inauguration speech as governor of New York in 1929, he stated that “the water power of the state should belong to all the people” (Hampton, p.94). Not only does that also make sense in regard to electric power, but it would save money for consumers. According to Hampton and Reno, “Residential customers of private utilities in the US pay an average 16 percent more than customers of publicly owned utilities. In Maine, the privately owned utilities are twice as expensive as the publicly owned ones. In only eight states are private power residential rates lower than those offered by public power, and the differences are typically measured in fractions of a penny” (Hampton, p.232).

It seems to me that public power appeals to both the head and the heart! The heart recognizes that power can be generated from water, wind, and sun, which are natural resources that belong to the people. The head recognizes that electricity is a capital-intensive industry and government-backed utilities can

borrow money at more favorable rates. Many have understood the advantages of public power for decades. Hampton and Reno say, “There were successful municipal public power campaigns throughout the US, including Seattle, Cleveland, Phoenix and Los Angeles. There was even an entire state that went public: Nebraska, which remains a public power haven to this day” (Hampton, p.87).

Public power contributed 12 percent of total US utility generation in 1941. In 2003 the figure was 25 percent. By contrast, as of 2003 about 80 percent of Canada’s electric power was publicly owned (Hampton, p.93). The American Public Power Association (APPA) says that public power can be found in 49 states (all except Hawaii) and all five US territories. They offer a 52-page guide for communities considering creating a public power utility, which includes facts like “1 in 7 electricity customers in the US are served by public power” (APPA, p.8).

According to the APPA, most states “allow a municipality to establish or acquire an electric system to serve customers or the residents and businesses,” a process known as municipalization. In some states the municipality may take an existing system by eminent domain, but in others they must negotiate a fair purchase price. In some states the voters must approve it by election or petition, and in others the municipality can decide unilaterally. But the process of convincing your local town to take over a local utility is lengthy and arduous even for the highly motivated. An important caveat is that many states below the Mason-Dixon line are run on a county level, and most of the population lives outside formal municipalities where public utilities can be created.

A FUTURE OF ENERGY DEMOCRACY

Public power embodies the Green values of grassroots democracy and decentralization. It enables communities to use ecological wisdom to combat climate change by transitioning off fossil fuels and purchasing or generating renewable energy. The APPA says that between hydroelectric power and other renewable sources like wind, almost 20 percent of public power comes from renewable sources (APPA, p.11).

Jeremiah Lambert tells the story that in 1976 young physicist Amory Lovins wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs*, “Energy Strategy: The Road Not Taken,” which called for a “soft path” of decentralization and a switch to renewable energy sources, using a carbon tax to level the playing field. He even predicted that if we took the “hard path” of centralized fossil and nuclear fuels, the increased concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would cause irreversible climate change (Lambert, p.208). And here we are, in exactly that world in 2020. The United States is locked into a corporate-controlled fossil fuel-based capitalist system for electric power. Even when they are government owned, utilities are forced by law to prioritize the bottom line over any other goal (like saving the earth for future generations).

Feed-in tariffs have been used very successfully in Europe, “democratizing the grid and allowing energy producers to

become energy consumers” (Farrell, p.3). But no American states have chosen to use them. Some states even make it illegal for homeowners to install solar panels. Despite opposition from fossil fuel interests and little support from the federal government, some states have enacted Renewable Portfolio Standards which specify the percentage of power that must be generated by renewable energy. Texas and California have already exceeded their initial goals and New Jersey is close. But for that strategy to meet long-term climate targets, progressively higher goals need to be established over time.

Public power is necessary but not sufficient for the critical transition to 100% renewable energy. We need energy *democracy*—power must be renewable, distributed, and decentralized. Al Weinrub of the Local Clean Energy Alliance says that the energy democracy movement started in California with the Community Choice Act of 2002. Community Choice “means that local communities can decide to procure their electricity from renewable energy sources: either by purchasing renewable electricity on the market, or more important, by developing local renewable energy resources in the community. Under a Community Choice energy program, the incumbent utility company continues to own the grid infrastructure and to deliver electricity and service customers” (Weinrub, p.6). At least half a dozen states now offer Community Choice aggregation, and local organizers are working to bring this option to many more. John Farrell of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) notes, “The growth of democratic, distributed renewable energy will also mitigate the need for new backup generation to smooth the variations in wind and solar power production” (Farrell, p.3).

Another idea gaining in popularity around the United States is community solar. A community solar project is a solar array whose output is divided among subscribers. In its first year (2019) the state of New Jersey approved 45 community solar applications, with a combined capacity of 77.6 MW. The arrays “will all be located on landfills, brownfields, rooftops, or parking

canopies” (BPU). Some are community owned and others are privately developed.

Groups like the Local Energy Clean Alliance, promoting community-based public power, are popping up all over the US. The Community Power Network coordinates state-level Solar United Neighbors (SUN) groups, which help communities navigate the many legal and financial barriers to creating decentralized community-owned solar power projects. The Institute for Local Self-Reliance is a leader in the promotion of energy democracy around the country.

A recent ILSR podcast explained how Maine state representative Seth Berry is working to replace Central Maine Power, a private corporation, with a state-owned utility along the model of Nebraska. He noted several benefits of publicly owned power: it keeps money in the state, keeps power costs down for homes and businesses, and makes it possible to transition to a clean energy economy sooner. Berry foresees that over the next few decades we will have to electrify everything, which has major implications for the grid. He expects that it will have to carry four or five times more power 20 or 30 years from now—and it needs to be under public control. As John Farrell of ILSR points out: “Community choice aggregation and municipalization can give communities the power and authority to establish energy self-reliance” (Farrell, p.5).



DENISE BRUSH

is a member of the Green Party of New Jersey and the national party's Eco-Action Committee. She was a founder of Transition Town Glassboro, an affiliate of the international Transition Town movement. Denise has a B.S. degree in Civil & Environmental Engineering from MIT and an M.S. in Library & Information Science from Drexel University. She is the Engineering and Earth Sciences Librarian at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ.

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Planet of the Humans: A Review

MOVIE REVIEW BY DAVID COBB

Planet of the Humans debuted on the 50th anniversary of Earth Day and has provoked widespread praise and criticism. Almost everyone in my circles either loves it or hates it, and I can see why.

The core premise of the movie is that our civilization is on the brink of collapse (if not actual extinction), and that “Big Green” mainstream environmental groups have been hijacked by corporate interests and are duping the general public into believing that we can solve this crisis using renewable energy.

On the one hand, I am deeply appreciative that filmmakers Michael Moore and Jeff Gibbs are willing to state the obvious—infinite growth on a finite planet is suicide. They confront the severity of the ecological collapse more directly than most films that reach a more mainstream audience and expose the reality that allowing the billionaire class to “solve” this existential crisis simply won’t work.

The film also accurately highlights the problems of the Sierra Club’s “Beyond Coal” campaign, which has helped shut down over 300 coal plants across the country. That seems great, but in short order we learn that the program’s biggest donor is billionaire Mike Bloomberg, who has helped to ensure that natural gas plants have replaced most of those shuttered coal plants. Bloomberg is making hundreds of millions of dollars on natural gas, arguing that it is a “bridge fuel.” That is absolutely false, and virtually every environmentalist and climate scientist acknowledges that inconvenient truth.

The film also exposes the ecological destruction and social violence being perpetrated across the global south associated with the production and distribution of lithium, and serves as a much-needed take-down of biomass, pointing out that use of this so-called “green alternative” usually spews more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than do the coal plants replaced.

But the film also has a lot of negatives. One huge problem: The film argues that solar and wind power are as problematic as biomass, and that is objectively, demonstrably false. One glaring example—they claim that solar panels take more energy to produce than they generate over their lifetime. This claim (which was originated by climate crisis deniers) has been frequently and thoroughly disproven. Is this just journalistic laziness, or an intentional effort to deceive?

In another scene co-producer Ozzie Zehner falsely asserts, “You use more fossil fuels [manufacturing renewables infrastructure] than you’re getting benefit from. You would have been better off burning the fossil fuels in the first place instead of playing pretend.”

Studies have repeatedly proven that the lifetime carbon footprints of solar and wind power are about 20 times smaller

than those of coal and natural gas. Further, the energy produced during the operation of a solar panel and wind turbine is 26 and 44 times greater than the energy needed to build and install them, respectively.

But the most egregious problem with this film is how it erroneously concludes that the only solution is to “get rid of enough people.” While it is true that the human population is in overshoot, the cavalier manner with which Moore and Gibbs approach the subject is grossly negligent. It’s no wonder that right-wing mouthpiece Brietbart is praising the film. I am not arguing that Moore and Gibbs are racist white nationalists. I am arguing that both what they say—and what they don’t say—feeds into a disturbing narrative of some of the most disgusting beliefs of the last 200 years, and they should know better.

It confronts the severity of the ecological collapse more directly than most films that reach a mainstream audience.

It is too bad they missed the opportunity to share the good news that the simple solution to human overpopulation is to empower women and to promote family planning. Studies show that women

with access to reproductive health services break out of poverty, and those who work are more likely to use birth control. Further, education about contraception has a huge impact.

Most disappointing of all is what this film did not do.

First, they failed to interview any of the leaders of Just Transition, a vision-oriented movement led by front-line impacted communities that builds economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy.

Second, they failed to acknowledge that capitalism itself is unsustainable, and that we must transition to a solidarity economy framework in order to survive.

Third, they failed to address how electoral politics could be used as a positive force.



DAVID COBB

helped to co-found the Green Party of Texas and was the Green Party nominee for president in 2004. He currently serves on the Interim Steering Committee of the Green Eco-Socialist Network and is a co-founder of Cooperation Humboldt.

Three COMMENTARIES

ONE

BY JOHN RENSENBRINK

POLITICAL CENTRISM: A NEO-LIBERAL SACRED COW

There is a plethora of publications on the news stands, each with their auxiliary website, reporting and commenting on the news of the world and the trends of political activity here and abroad.

They present themselves and regard one another as moderate, centrist, middle of the road. They are well-funded by the big corporations. I am thinking of publications like *The Economist* (from Britain), the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *U.S. News & World Report* and many, many similar others, including *Time* and *Newsweek*.

No doubt about it, *The Economist* et alia point to real problems, they report about positive things being done; they offer critiques that are often insightful on selected aspects of politics, economy, and culture.

BUT

Something is screened out. There is a curious and culpable absence of any inclusion, as a vital factor in the local, national and world situation, regarding the takeover of the political economy and political culture of the nation, and of the world, by mammoth corporations.

The latter have stoutly (and stupidly—meaning, against their own long term interest) resisted even moderate economic reform. They have grossly intervened in electoral politics with gigantic sums of money for the monopolizing benefit and corrupting of the two major parties, converting them into ploys and decoys of deceit to confuse and bamboozle the voter. They have intimidated (shut down) countless intellectuals who, as a result of relentless and soothing intimidation, turn to a typical “willing suspension of disbelief” to protect themselves and millions of people who listen, or might listen—immunizing themselves and their audience from political reality.

Nor have they stopped there. The mass media, the chump of all chumps, has become the mass conduit for corporate-approved news and commentaries done persuasively in the name of freedom of the press and the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States. They—the mammoth corporations and their politicians—have blatantly continued, if not intensified, their shameful treatment of nature and the consequent diminishing quantity and quality of the once abundant resources of air, water, land, minerals, and other staples crucial to survival of our species, other animals and of the planet itself.

The resulting suppression of third parties that has ensued has aborted and prevented the emergence of a serious third political force. This is an astonishing fact. Most often it has been the case in the past history of the United States, that when existing political parties persistently failed to address social, economic, and political crises, a serious political alternative *was able to emerge*. They emerged either side by side with the failing parties or even within one of the them. But that has changed. It is very important that we who long for a better world, and fight for it, realize this, comprehend it, adjust our thinking about politics, and focus our action accordingly.

Wedge issues, especially racism, are shamelessly used to produce division. Consumerism distracts multitudes. Rancid infighting preoccupies new social forces.

The mass media has become the mass conduit for corporate-approved news and commentaries.

Wedge issues, especially racism, are shamelessly used to produce division within new social forces.

The slow-to-be-realized threat of species extinction causes it to become a wedge issue. All these, plus others, abound. Especially to be noted and put foremost is the covert (and not so covert) use of race and racism devised and/or supported by scores of corporations, as in mass incarceration, selective assassinations and, over a period of decades, denial of voting power to millions of people of color on the basis of current or previous felon status. This has been a sinister force suppressing the rise of potential black, brown and red political leadership.

All of this and more have left scores of millions of voters out on a limb with nowhere to go. Most have quit politics. A vast weary segment has settled for trying to get help and some sort of steerage by going along with the inadequate Democrats. Enthusiastic young voters get warped back into the prevailing system again and again.

The correlative rampant exploitation, economic oppression, and calculated deception of the majority of the population has given fertile and swampy ground for the rise of cheap and vulgar showmen who in their slovenly way act as saviors of the “masses.” Their demagoguery succeeds in the short term because there is no integrity in the system, only weak and errant opportunistic band-aids for the people.

Bill Clinton and Barack Obama had opportunity AND responsibility to restore integrity but opted for shallow approaches. Trump and his gang are the fruit of their failure.

We’re dealing with fundamentals now. I have had (and still have) hopes that the pandemic will so shape our attitudes that serious attention to fundamentals will ensue. The corporate funded “middle of the road” publications sadly fail to address the startling absence of attention to the fundamentals of our situation.

TWO

WHAT DOES “CONSERVATIVE” MEAN?

A number of reports this summer say that in Europe Green Parties and right-wing parties have gotten together. For example, the widely read London *Economist* in its June 28, 2020 edition carried the headline, “GreenCons Are a New Political Alliance for an Uncertain Age.” Conservatives and climate activists, once political opposites, are joining forces, the article reports.

The article was written the day after new elections in Ireland. The new political lineup includes the old rivals Fianna Fail

and Fine Gael. They are now allies for the first time since the Irish Civil War roughly a century ago. These two parties of the center-right are joining forces with the 29-year-old Irish Green Party. They unite on climate change concerns. There are areas in which they are unlikely ever to agree, notably defense and foreign affairs. So goes the *Economist*’s article. *The Economist*, a neo-liberal publication, seeks the middle of the road on just about everything. They downplay the significance of the pull of defense and foreign affairs on the Green party in such a coalition.

I believe there is considerable danger here for the future of the Green parties in Europe. And it will affect other Green Parties, as well as having an impact on the Global Greens. What basis in theory and in Green Party principles is being, or will be offered in each case by the Green Parties as they pursue these coalitions?

Traditional conservatism (or “Tory Radicalism”) goes back well into the 18th and 19th centuries and in various times and places in the 20th and the beginning of this millennium. Edmund Burke is a leading conservative voice (from Ireland) who spoke in British Parliament on behalf of the struggle of the American colonies for independence from Britain, contrasting their revolution to the French Revolution which he described as harsh, self-righteous, violent, and hideously out-of-control. Continuing in his conservative theme was Alexis De Tocqueville in France and in the United States, Benjamin Disraeli in Britain, Charles De Gaulle in France in mid-20th century, and recently Edward Goldsmith, a keen British Green Party member about whom Steve Welzer wrote respectfully in a former issue of *Green Horizon Magazine*. There are many others of course, among whom I would place the great Johann Wolfgang Goethe of Germany, poet, philosopher, playwright, and statesman.

Their emphasis is on conservative values, which they honor. Or say more bluntly they believe in a conserving approach to life—not by way of throwback, but to address the future by honoring the past. They believe in finding and backing policies that can meet the other guy maybe even half way, not cancelling them as beyond the pale, not as someone to be resisted and if necessary trashed and killed. They believe in local vitality, thrift, self-reliance, and in taking account of the interest of the whole. One could go on and on in this vein, but one gets the drift. In Maine we have had Margaret Chase Smith. We continue to have similar, though now in shrinking numbers because of the Trump takeover of the party, what might be called “downeast Republicans.”

Is there any connection between the conservatism of these conservative icons and the Right Wing rhetoric of the parties in

Enthusiastic young voters get warped back into the prevailing system again and again.

Europe entering into coalition with the Greens? I doubt it, but it must be monitored carefully in the months and years ahead.

As just noted, the far right in the United States is dominated by Trump and his proto-fascist ensemble. They are not conservatives. They are reactionaries moved by bitterness, fear, and resentment. They enjoy and revel, if one can believe this, in assaulting, ridiculing, hating the opposition. They are indelible racists. They get a rise out of other people's pain. They double and redouble their penchant for causing pain and harm.

Is there a link between U.S. Trump-led proto-fascism and the rightward direction of Green Parties in Europe? This is an important and fateful question. Again, careful monitoring is crucial.

THREE

THE PERSON AND IDENTITY WARS

This may or may not be helpful in the current debate among Greens and others about the issues of identity and the relationship of one identity with another and the various implications thereof for both political strife and political unity across different identities.

I start with a simple observation: A person is not the property of an identity, but identity is the property of the person. Your identity does not possess your identity, it's you who possesses the identity. A crucial distinction, don't you think?

For example, one is born a person, a whole person in a whole body. As a person, I have identifiable biological characteristics that go along with being a person: male or female or transgendered. But no one at birth is already definitely and inevitably male or female or transgendered. There is no determinism there. In maturing and growing up, a person may want an identity that is

different from the one they have grown up with. It is a matter of choice; a matter of growing awareness; and/or a matter of the pressures of the culture (and of its upholders) one has grown up with and in.

My concern in all this is to retrieve conceptually, culturally, and politically the notion of person. Person comes first. Identities follow via choice, personal awareness and culture.

I am thinking just now of the historic 14th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." Note the distinction: persons are citizens, not citizens are persons.

The word *person* leaps out of the page. It appears again and again in the Constitution and in our common general discourse throughout our lives.

When you stop being male and you become female does that mean you stop being a person? When you stop being female and become male, does that mean you stop being a person? When your identity is neither male nor female, but transgender, does that mean you are not a person?

For analogy: When you stop being a white and become a black, does that mean you stop being a person? When you stop being a black and become a white, does that mean you stop being a person?

Ridiculous question, right?

Think about it. How can unity be fostered among the many identities that abound? A focus on the *person* is relevant and can be a source and foundation for unity.

Bill Clinton and Barack Obama had opportunity AND responsibility to restore integrity but opted for shallow approaches. Trump and his gang are the fruit of their failure.



JOHN RENSENBRINK

Co-editor of *Green Horizon*, John lives in Maine, is professor emeritus of government at Bowdoin College, co-founded the Maine and U.S. Green Parties, is founder and member of the latter's International Committee, and the author of *Against all Odds: The Green Transformation of American Politics* (1999). His latest book is *Ecological Politics: For Survival and Democracy* (2017).

A Dialogue About POTENTIAL ELECTORAL IMPACT

There was controversy within the Green politics movement this year when the Green Party of Rhode Island decided that “we cannot in good conscience participate in a presidential campaign which has even the slightest chance of helping return Donald Trump to the White House.”

Similar discussions about electoral impact occur among Greens periodically. For example, in 2000 the Green Party of New Jersey had an idea to field candidates for US House in all thirteen of the state’s congressional districts. But there were objections to running against Donald Payne, a longstanding and unusually progressive African American representative. So the party refrained from running in Payne’s district. Decisions like that make it clear that some Greens are in favor of exhibiting a degree of flexibility and feel it’s constructive to demonstrate consideration for progressives concerned about the possibility of “spoiling.” In the same vein, regarding presidential races, some advocate a strategy of avoiding campaigning actively in “battleground states.”

Such issues are vigorously debated. But it’s rare that a state party opts not to list the national ticket on its ballot at all. In fact, a clause of Article 1 of the national Green Party’s Rules and Procedures re: “Criteria for State Party Membership in the Green Party of the United States” stipulates that a state party: “[a]grees to support national candidates selection by the Green convention.” Has Rhode Island violated that agreement? Can there be “support” without ballot placement?

Below is the statement issued by the Green Party of Rhode Island on May 28. It’s followed by a variety of commentary about Rhode Island’s decision, specifically, and/or about the general issue of electoral deferral.

* * * * *

STATEMENT OF THE GREEN PARTY OF RHODE ISLAND

Green Friends and Allies:

After gathering insights from rank-and-file Green Party members and supporters, and a weekend-long discussion among State Committee members, the Green Party of Rhode Island has decided not to place a Green candidate on this year’s presidential ballot.

This was an extremely difficult decision. We were one of the nation’s first state Green parties, and we’ve successfully placed a Green presidential candidate on the Rhode Island ballot for the past six elections (1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016).

We remain fully committed to the Green Party’s values and platform. But we cannot in good conscience participate in a presidential campaign which has even the slightest chance of helping return Donald Trump to the White House.

Here is our press release: “R.I. Green Party Won’t Run Presidential Candidate”

Citing the danger of Trump’s re-election, the Green Party of Rhode Island says it won’t put a Green candidate on the presidential ballot.

Citing the danger of Trump’s re-election, the Green Party of Rhode Island said it won’t put a Green candidate on the presidential ballot.

In a state committee vote taken over the Memorial Day weekend, the Green Party of Rhode Island, one of the nation's oldest Green parties, has broken ranks with the national party and decided not to nominate a candidate in this year's presidential election. Instead, the local party will focus on local and state races and a campaign to adopt ranked choice voting for state elections.

This will be the first time since 1996 that Rhode Island's presidential ballot won't include a Green Party candidate.

"Running a presidential campaign in Rhode Island, as we've learned in the past 24 years, takes a great deal of work that gains short-term visibility, but very little long-term progress," declared Greg Gerritt. "This year the stakes—and risks—are greater than they've ever been for us. Beyond the health risks of gathering thousands of face-to-face signatures this summer, there are major political risks as well."

The local party says a top priority for the Greens this year has to be defeating Donald Trump in his re-election bid. "Trump threatens everything Greens stand for," declared a party statement.

The statement pointed to immigrant children in cages, countless victims of escalating racist, anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, and anti-Asian attacks, tens of thousands who have needlessly died or lost their financial lives in the coronavirus pandemic, and millions who suffer in the ongoing turmoil of a world unmoored from international norms and human rights protection, as the kind of future the world can expect should Trump win re-election.

In addition, Greens said, Trump promises to continue the lawless rollback of 50 years of environmental protections, and a catastrophic disdain for climate science which condemns countless species, including perhaps our own, to extinction.

Other likely outcomes of a Trump victory include unprecedented, shameless misogyny and homophobia from the Oval Office; unrestrained corruption in Washington; and the further capture of federal courts by nakedly reactionary forces, even as neo-confederates, white supremacists, and outright Nazis, are set loose on the people.

Party leaders say this was a difficult but necessary decision, intended to support allies in the frontline immigrant, people of color, Indigenous, environmental, feminist, and LGBTQI communities, who've said that anger towards Trump would overwhelm the Green candidate's message.

State committee members supporting the vote argued there is unlikely to be a 'green wave' this year, and a presidential campaign offers little benefit, with much to lose. Others advocated a focus on local issues where the Green message is clearer and the likelihood of winning is greater.

On the other hand, committee members who voted against the suspension argued for again offering voters an alternative to the corporate parties, to speak out against the Democratic Party's militarism, and stand up to Trump's bullying tactics.

In the end, the vote to suspend presidential campaigning was approved by a nearly 3 to 1 margin.

Some advocated focusing on local issues where the Green message is clearer and the likelihood of winning is greater.

After suspending any role in the presidential race, the Greens voted to step up recruitment efforts for municipal, legislative, statewide, and congressional candidates, and to campaign for state adoption of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). The state of Maine has adopted RCV, allowing voters to rank-order candidates—this year including for US Senate—to avoid the "spoiler" effect, where voting for the candidate you most prefer can help elect the one you like the least.

When the Rhode Island party was more active in the past, running legislative, statewide, and municipal candidates, public support was significant. From the early 1990s until 2006, the party's candidates for lieutenant governor won as many as 24,000 votes, while a Green candidate for state senate in 2006 earned 30% of the vote in Providence's Federal Hill neighborhood. In presidential elections, Green candidates have earned single-digit support.

* * * * *

COMMENTARY BY GREG GERRITT

Uprise RI calls Greg Gerritt "the Green Party of Rhode Island's most visible spokesperson." He currently serves as the Administrator of the Environment Council of Rhode Island. Greg helped found the Green Party of the United States and in 2002 was the party's candidate for Mayor of Providence. Greg blogs at ProsperityForRI.com.

SITTING ONE OUT

This story is not done, the tale continues, and will not be finished until next year at the earliest, but inquiring minds want to know how it all started, so it falls to me to tell of the beginnings.

The Green Party of Rhode Island is a relatively low-key organization with about 15 active core members, mostly elders. Some people call us a "paper party" (by which they mean "existing on paper but otherwise barely functional") . . . but an evaluation of our relatively small membership numbers doesn't take into account the size of our state. Fifteen in Rhode Island, adjusted

for population, is the equivalent of having 600 core members in the Green Party of California or 300 in New York, neither of which does have that kind of core membership.

Few of us were enthused about any of the candidates seeking the Green presidential nomination, nor did we hold any illusions that the eventual Green Party presidential nominee would get many votes to speak of as the progressive forces in the US worked to unseat Donald Trump. None of us are enthusiastic about Joe Biden, in fact we intensely dislike him, but the damage that Trump has done to America and the world in his three-plus years in the White House has been devastating to the planet and to communities.

Almost everyone we talked to, even among people who are not Democrats, were most interested in removing Donald Trump and not interested in any other presidential politics.

Despite a lack of enthusiasm, the Green Party of Rhode Island was preparing to run a bit of a presidential campaign, even hosting nomination front-runner Howie Hawkins at an event in RI last February. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and by May it was obvious that it was not going to be safe to petition a Green Party candidate onto the ballot over the summer, especially for a party in which the most active petitioners are elders or live with vulnerable people. The more we thought about it, and the more the pandemic spread, the less and less inclined some of the leadership became, either to participate in the campaign or to have Greens come in from other states to petition. In fact, quarantines for folks coming from other states were reinstated, so the situation did not appear to be safe or smart.

With the pandemic raging, an in-person general meeting of the party to discuss the matter was out of the question. So we used the GPRI email list, which has almost everyone who has ever participated with us in any way, to poll the membership. Response was not large, but what response we got was heavily on the side of sitting out the campaign. We originally had some hope that the state would waive petitioning requirements, but by the end of May news reports were saying that that was not going to happen. So we decided to sit it out rather than put ourselves at risk. It turned out that after the filing deadlines, in other words after the period when a decision had to be made, the state ruled that electronic petitioning would be acceptable.

Based on the response to our polling, and clearly noting that our bylaws allow the State Committee to act in an emergency, a few folks crafted a resolution for the state committee stating that we shall sit out the presidential campaign and rededicate ourselves to local candidates and upgrades to democracy like Ranked Choice

Voting. The resolution passed by a vote of 8 to 2. Following its passage, the State Committee, in addition to posting the official resolution which focused on the pandemic, issued a press release. It discussed the pandemic and the other reasons for our deferral regarding the presidential campaign, and then we did something that many of us feel other Green parties should do more of: we attacked the record of Donald Trump and asserted that he had to be defeated.

None of the local media, except *Uprise RI*, carried the release, but the information that we posted on our Facebook page and our Twitter feed (which have a combined readership of about 3,000 people) ended up being forwarded to about 65,000 people. A few Rhode Islanders who have never shown up for any of our events and were not on any of our mailing lists said we were denying them the right to vote for a Green. We replied that we were not denying anyone an opportunity, considering how RI

election laws work, but that we knew we did not want to actively participate. Some Rhode Islanders wrote in support of our decision, but the out-of-state comments were an ideological mishmash of disgust and threats to throw GPRI out of the national party.

We knew that as a corporate entity in Rhode Island we were able to prevent the GP nominee from using the 'Green' name in Rhode Island but that the Green Party nominee could get on the ballot under almost any label other than one that was already taken (such as 'Democrat' or 'Republican').

Just before the deadline to file a candidacy in Rhode Island, leaving no time for a real process even if we had wanted to change our minds, the Hawkins campaign manager tried to sweet talk us into giving them the ballot line; we said no, as we were not giving away something of value without receiving value in return. They really did not even give us time to poll the state committee. The result was that they decided to file to get on ballot using the label "Independent Left."

Again, the refusal by GPRI to participate in the presidential campaign generated threats to throw us out of the national Green Party, but so far nothing has resulted aside from a couple of strange letters from the GPUS Accreditation Committee that elicited no response when we asked them for an explanation of the process they were using. We wish they had actually read the resolution we passed rather than just the press release in which we blasted Donald Trump.

As I write [at the end of June] the filing deadline to get on the ballot in Rhode Island has passed, and petitioning will soon begin. The GPRI for the first time in a few election cycles has a local candidate running for State Senate and we are gearing up to

We did something that many of us feel other Green parties should do more of: We attacked the record of Donald Trump and asserted that he had to be defeated.

push for Ranked Choice Voting and a new state party platform for 2022. The national party will coordinate a campaign for the Hawkins/Walker ticket in our state. If it turns out that a large infusion of new people coming off the campaign grows the GPRI, that would be great, but presidential campaigns have never had a lasting positive effect for us, so we are not holding our breath. Our judgment is that the ticket will likely get fewer votes than Jill Stein did in 2012 and 2016. When we were told by a campaign supporter that Howie is expecting to get 5% in Rhode Island we frankly were incredulous (and took it to mean the person probably could not even find Rhode Island on the map!).

It is a strange year, with the US in danger of becoming a failed state and the real danger that a Trump defeat will lead to some sort of armed insurrection. The Green Party of RI, beyond the pandemic, understands quite well that when the Donkeys and the Elephants rumble the little parties get stomped on. We hear rumors that other state Green parties have also decided to basically sit it out this year, they just are being less honest about it and not putting out press releases. We are taking the heat for being honest about what a great many Greens already know: at the presidential level this is not our year and we should use our energy on local candidates and preparing for the next round.

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THE AVOCADO DECLARATION (EXCERPTS)

The current presidential candidate, Howie Hawkins, published a whole volume of essays addressing this debate in the wake of the 2004 controversy about running/not running/how to run a presidential campaign. A counterpoint to Greg Gerritt's article can be derived from Peter Camejo's contribution to that volume. If you substitute 'Trump' for 'Bush' as you read along, you'll get a sense of what Camejo might have written in 2020.

The 2004 elections place before us a clear and unavoidable choice. On one side, we can continue on the path of political independence by running our own campaign for president of the United States. The other choice is the well-trodden path of lesser evil politics, sacrificing our own voice and independence to support who the Democrats nominate in order, we are told, to defeat Bush. But we believe it is precisely by openly and sharply confronting the two major parties that the policies of the corporate interests these parties represent can be set back and defeated.

The Democratic Party acts as a “broker” negotiating and selling influence among broad layers of the people to support the objectives of corporate rule. The Democratic Party's core group of elected officials is rooted in careerists seeking self-promotion by offering to the corporate rulers their ability to control

and deliver mass support. And to the people they offer some concessions. One important value of the Democratic Party to the corporate world is that it fosters the maintenance of stability essential for business as usual. A shift toward authoritarian rule has been accelerated by the present Republican administration. The Democrats allow their lower level representatives to present themselves as supporters of mass opposition [think, currently, of AOC and her colleagues].

Soon after the 2000 presidential election the Democrats began an attack on the Green Party, declaring that Ralph Nader was responsible for George Bush becoming president. This campaign has achieved success in part because of the support it has received by the more liberal wing of the Democratic Party and some of the “progressive” journals such as *The Nation* and *Mother Jones*. Never in the history of the United States has a magazine claiming to favor democracy run a front-page article calling on an individual to not run for president—until *The Nation* did so against Ralph Nader in 2004.

The Nation's editorial board is free to campaign for the Democratic Party and urge people to vote for the Democrats. But they want something else. They want the Greens to join with them in a conspiracy to not allow the voters a choice.

Some who support the platform of the Greens will vote against their own views by voting for the Democrat. The voters will make that decision. But *The Nation*, along with many others, is calling on the Greens *not to allow voters to have a choice*. This campaign's effectiveness has penetrated within the Green Party, where a minority supports the concept that the party should not run a presidential candidate in 2004. Such a view fails to grasp the essence of the matter. For the Greens, there is nothing more important or effective long-term than to expose how the corporate interests use their two-party system. We must let all Americans who question the policies of Bush, who favor the rule of law, peace, and our Constitution and Bill of Rights see the Democratic Party's hypocrisy.

It is precisely by openly and sharply confronting both major parties that the policies of the corporate interests these parties represent can be set back and defeated.

The Green Party welcomes diversity, debate, and discussion on issues of strategy, tactics and methods of functioning.

The role of these two parties is not a conspiracy. Boxer, Wellstone and many other Democrats become part of a system that will have them removed if they do not follow the rules of support when corporate America insists. To rise in the Democratic Party there is a process that leads to compliant people unable to question, who remain silent before betrayals or criminal acts. Cynthia McKinney is an example of a Democrat who refused to go along, stepped across the line within the Democratic Party and was driven out of office by the combined efforts of both the Democratic and Republican parties and the corporate media.

The Democrats should be seen historically as the most successful political party in history in terms of maintaining stability for rule by the privileged few. For example, they co-opted the powerful and massive rise of the Populist movement at the end of the 19th century precisely using the same “lesser evil” arguments now presented against the Green Party. They blocked the formation of a Labor Party when the union movement rose in the 1930s. If a massive opposition develops, the corporations will put more money behind the Democrats, the media will become more sympathetic to the Democrats and promote its more “progressive” voices. The media would also become more critical of the Republicans’ lack of sensitivity, all in an effort to maintain the two-party system.

The call for a “lesser evil” is what makes possible the greater evil. Those voices who say that the Greens should consider withdrawing, or who advocate that the Greens not campaign in states where the vote may be close are, unconsciously, actually helping Bush’s re-election by weakening the development of an opposition political movement that shifts the balance of forces. Nothing is more important than the appearance of candidates and mass actions that tell the full truth, that call for the rule of law, respect for the Bill of Rights, and speak out for peace and social justice.

The idea that there is a conflict between the short term and the long term is a cover for capitulation. It has been the endless argument of the Democrats against challenges to their policies. When independent movements appear, they call on people to

enter the Democratic Party and work from within; they say there is no time to go outside the two-party framework. This argument was made 100 years ago, 50 years ago, 25 years ago and, of course, remains with us today. Very powerful groups, like the AFL-CIO, have followed their advice. Rather than success, these movements have found the Democratic Party to be the burial ground of mass movements and of third-party efforts that sought to defend the interest of the people throughout American history.

In 2004 some will abandon us, but others will be attracted by our courage and our principled stance. We may receive a lower vote than in 2000. But if we do not stand up to this pressure, hold our banner high, and defend our right to exist—to have our voice heard, to run candidates that expose the two-party system and the hypocrisy of the Democratic Party and its complicity with the Republicans—we will suffer the greatest loss of all.

The Green Party can and will win the hearts and minds of people when they see us as reliable and unshakeable, if we stand our ground. In time this leads to respect and then support.

Those Greens who agree with our Ten Key Values but have disagreements with this Avocado Declaration need to be respected. We need to allow open and honest debate as an essential part of our culture. Truth can only be ascertained through the conflict of ideas. The Green Party seeks to bring all those who agree with its values into one unified political party. It welcomes diversity, debate, and discussion on issues of strategy, tactics and methods of functioning. A healthy organization that fights for the interest of the people, by its nature will always have internal conflicts, sharp differences, personality difficulties and all other things human. This is not only normal, it is healthy. The Avocado Declaration includes a call for the Greens to accept diversity and maintain unity as we seek to build an effective mass organization.

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COMMENTARY BY GLEN BENNETT

Glen Bennett is a chair of the Green Party of Rhode Island. In 2016 he was the Rhode Island coordinator for the Jill Stein presidential campaign.

In late January 2020 the Green Party of Rhode Island received communications from the staff of the Howie Hawkins campaign. This was weeks before the COVID-19 virus had grabbed the attention of the federal government and the state of Rhode Island. The state committee of GPRI asked me to work with the campaign and assist in preparing a visit to RI by Howie. I was happy to do so, in the spirit of being of service to Green Party presidential candidates. I had done similar work for Jill Stein in 2016 and have always been proud to be part of the effort to serve

US voters by providing a genuine alternative to the duopoly of corporate power.

My wife and I invited Howie to stay at our home, and we did our best to be of assistance to him. A public meeting was arranged. It was held February 22 in a meeting room at a food co-op, Urban Greens, in Providence. The GPRI treasurer, at the direction of the state committee, invested money in an advertisement encouraging people to come and meet one of the Green Party candidates for president. Though we had only a modest number of attendees, otherwise the meeting went fine. Howie did an interview with a local reporter from *Uprise RI* and it was posted on that website. The day before the meeting I set up an interview between Howie and John Gonzalez, an Indigenous friend with a substantial following and presence on Facebook . . . the point being that a good faith effort was made to support the Green candidate. Communications with Dario Hunter had taken place, but no activity came to fruition. We would have been happy to extend similar courtesy to Dario and other recognized candidates seeking the nomination.

Normally, GPRI would hold a Spring General Meeting for conducting business. Due primarily to the influence of the virus and state lockdown, that was not possible. Instead, something virtual online had to be done.

It was apparent to me before the virus became an issue, that there was significantly less enthusiasm for collecting signatures in 2020 than in any previous election. There has not been a groundswell of interest among the Rhode Island populace for Green Party viability. It was not from lack of effort. Post-2016, we held a celebration of our 25th anniversary. Between 50 and 75 people attended. Several townhall public meetings have been organized since, but with minimal results. GPRI maintains an active digital presence with a website, Twitter account and two Facebook pages. People do know of us, and our individual members maintain a high visibility on the political scene.

In late May, a member of the state committee floated the idea that 2020 had some unique qualifiers as regards the presidential election. Others made the case, and I could see where it is a reasonable one, that sitting out participation might be an appropriate choice. In mid-2021, we will have an opportunity to evaluate the results of GPRI's decision to not list a Green presidential candidate on the ballot. The national Green Party has an opportunity to observe and learn how this different approach plays out. States can be laboratories for experimentation. The national can blame GPRI, but a little introspection wouldn't be a bad thing.

As to the issue of President Trump, I recently read an interview with Noam Chomsky, in which he identifies Trump as the biggest criminal in history, largely on the basis of his anti-environment posturing in the face of global warming. Readers might agree with me that Chomsky is a mixed bag. On the one hand, he has always criticized the US government's policies and noted that the Democratic Party falls short. On the other hand, he generally directs voters to vote Blue.

Among the anti-war people in Rhode Island, most seem to prefer a contest between Biden and Trump on the basis that Trump has offended enough of the populace to offset the undeniable weaknesses of the Democratic candidate. I have attempted to change minds without success.

Among the anti-war people in Rhode Island, most seem to prefer a contest between Biden and Trump on the basis that Trump has offended enough of the populace to offset the undeniable weaknesses of the Democratic candidate. I have attempted to change minds without success. And so, given that Rhode Island Greens are in touch with the general populace here, many concluded that the strategic thing to do was allow the voters to be unencumbered by the need to exercise bravery and instead to go with the 'lesser evil' one more time. *This was not my own position*, since I believe there is little salvation in a Democratic Party presidential candidate and hasn't been since FDR. Maybe, had Sanders been the nominee, we could have been forgiven for not challenging them in 2020, and then seen how things turned out.

The idea that one state party is entitled to place demands on others or interfere therein, is not a new one. The US Constitution, even with all its flaws, addressed the extant chaos then by establishing a federal structure. In our own movement, back in the 1990s, the Association of State Green Parties served an important purpose, but it, too, saw the necessity or inevitability of forming a national identity. The trick seems to be in establishing a proper balance, and I would submit that is a dynamic which is variable depending on conditions.

Maybe, had Sanders been the nominee, we could have been forgiven for not challenging the Democrats in 2020.

On Leftism and Leftists, Reds and Greens

BY STEVE WELZER

The appearance fifty years ago of works such as “Ecology and Revolutionary Thought” and “The Closing Circle” signaled the development of a new paradigm of leftism.

There’s nothing formal (or formulaic) about it, but I think we can talk in broad terms about a modern progressive social change movement. Maybe it could be dated from the struggles of the English Parliamentarians of the seventeenth century or the American or French revolutionists of the eighteenth century. They all expressed antipathy toward monarchs, emperors, and autocrats generally, employing a discourse (*if not praxis!*) of democracy and equality.

During the European-wide ferment of 1848 the political critique was extended to capitalist economic relations. Thereafter the movement was divided between reformists and those advocating a thorough-going kind of systemic change. It used to be phrased as “reform vs. revolution.” This article will make the case that, while reforms are not enough, “revolution” is a romantic fantasy that the movement should leave behind.

The revolutionists have been the radicals. “Radical,” of course, means “going to the root.” Good! But for more than a century the far left has tended to conceive of systemic transformation as “socialism replacing capitalism via class struggle.” Well, it’s not good if a movement’s theoretical orientation is radically divorced from the exigencies of reality.

The system changers need to get more sophisticated in their thinking. Toward that end, an encouraging transition of worldview started to emerge during the sixties. The appearance of works such as “Ecology and Revolutionary Thought” by Murray Bookchin and “The Closing Circle” by Barry Commoner signaled the development of a new paradigm of leftism. It manifested as Green politics and the establishment of Green parties during the seventies. Those of us who thought the transition “from Red to Green” would sweep the movement were somewhat disappointed as the ensuing decades passed.

Observing how the ideological proclivity of the majority of the world’s Green parties inclines toward liberalism or socialism could be disheartening. But we need to keep in mind that a profound paradigm shift takes time to take hold. A sage once opined: “A new worldview does not get accepted by persuading its opponents, but rather because its opponents eventually die off!”

At this point I want to address those who get their backs up when criticism is directed at “the Reds.” Their banners are red, their websites are drenched in the color red, etc., but if an “outsider” says Red they say they’re affronted about the “red-baiting.” Please. I call it many things—old-paradigm socialism, retrograde leftism, workerism, misguided theory, a nineteenth century worldview—but ‘Red’ has been well-understood to represent that current of the movement since the cover of *Das Kapital* was that color in 1867. (It’s just one of the ironies of history that the news media in the United States, for some reason, assigned the color red to the very-anti-socialist Republican Party sometime about thirty years ago!).

PREMISES OF THE OLD PARADIGM

I’m convinced that the transition of thought advocated by Deep Greens is happening—but slowly. The old ideologies, after all, have the force and momentum of decades, if not centuries, still propelling them. And much of the left has continued

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to believe in the imminent ascendancy of “working-class politics” until fairly recently.

This year’s US Green Party presidential candidate, Howie Hawkins, *still* thinks the objective is to “build a working-class party.” Read his literature. Why do I say it’s “retrograde”? All the way back in 1970 Howie’s original mentor, Murray Bookchin, pointed out in a booklet titled *Listen, Marxist!*: “. . . to infect the movement of our time with ‘workerism’ is reactionary to the core . . . to barge in with the worn recipes of Marxism, to babble about the ‘role of the working class,’ amounts to a subversion of the present and the future by the past.”

Of course the Greens should appeal to wage earners, naturally we should stand up for labor rights, without question we should support strikes and all struggles against workplace exploitation. But we should have long ago transcended the kind of Red-leftist delusions still reflected—fifty years after *Listen, Marxist!*—in the key ideological literature of Howie Hawkins’ campaign.

Here’s what is delusional: Yes, there is a ‘working class’ in a sociological sense (wage earners) . . . what Marx called a “class-in-itself.” But the idea of that aggregation taking power and socializing the economy is dependent upon the idea that workers will gain a sense of collective agency and thus become what Marx called a “class-for-itself” . . . aware of and acting upon (a) their ability to extend democracy into the economic sphere, and (b) their “historical mission” to establish a classless society.

Insightful Green theorists, from Bookchin onward, have recognized how wrong Marx was in this realm of his thinking. It shouldn’t require theorizing, though, it should be obvious just from observing who supports Bernie Sanders-type campaigns, who subscribes to Red-paradigm magazines like *Jacobin*, who joins DSA (Democratic Socialists of America): college students and counterculturalist youth in general, academics, middle-class people in the semi-professions (teaching, tech, healthcare), public interest lawyers, declassed radicals, ultra-liberal elites. Not so much “the proletariat.” Why? Working class oppression does not foster what Marx called “class-for-itself consciousness.” Rather, what it does is inhibit development of a sense of agency. Socialists want the workers to want to run their enterprises and run the economy. But actual workers are not very often inclined to think that way, and for good reason. In the Summer 2019 *Fifth Estate* John Zerzan notes: “How radically interesting or inspiring could it be to call for self-management of oppressive institutions?”

In this country, many workers who still identify with the Democratic Party voted for Bernie Sanders in the primaries in 2016 because they disliked Hillary Clinton who, in their eyes, represented the cosmopolitan elites. Some wound up voting for Trump in the general election for the same reason.

Red-leftists tend to be middle-class or upper-middle-class social-engineering types who have a heroic self-image of leading a working class revolution, educating “the masses,” cultivating liberatory movements among “the people.” *They* (the leftists) have a sense of agency, but the masses generally *don’t*. In a certain sense, “the workers” know better. In my student Marxist days I used to go to factory gates at six in the morning and hand out my organization’s socialist newspaper. It was not well received. Later it occurred to me that the thought process probably went something like: “Good luck with your ideas about running the system democratically, no less socializing it. A bit of utopian hubris on your part, there, kid.”

Similarly, most workers really couldn’t take Bernie’s “working class revolution” too seriously. Bernie Sanders has a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Chicago. His hero, Eugene Debs, came from a prosperous family (father owned a textile mill and a meat market). Marx had a Ph.D. in philosophy. Lenin was a lawyer.

Howie Hawkins went to an Ivy League university (Dartmouth). He likes to wear a Teamsters shirt, but he didn’t seem to have much success trying to bring socialism to his union comrades at UPS. The delusions among Red-leftists about who the workers are and what the workers want is sorry to witness. It permeates Howie’s recent touchstone essay, “The Case for an Independent Left Party.” The latter contains whole passages that would make sense if referring to a Green Party. But, instead, Howie goes on and on about trying to build a “Workers Party.”

Worse, he conflates the two.

THE GREEN AND RED WORLDVIEWS

The ‘Green’ concept does have the potential for broad resonance throughout the population. The ‘Workers Party’ concept resonates among a tiny segment of marginalist old-style leftists. It’s vital that we base our praxis on an understanding of the distinction.

I believe you can distinguish a movement by its literature. Included in a Red/workerist bibliography you’d be likely to find (in roughly chronological order): Marx, Engels, Bakunin, Lenin,

The 'Green' concept has the potential for broad resonance throughout the population;
the 'Workers Party' concept resonates among a tiny segment of marginalist old-style leftists.

Trotsky, William Morris, August Bebel, Karl Kautsky, Eduard Bernstein, Robert Michels, Eugene Debs, Rosa Luxemburg, John Reed, Emma Goldman, Antonio Gramsci, George Lukács, Norman Thomas, Herbert Marcuse, Louis Althusser, Mao Zedong, Max Schachtman, Paul Sweezy, Isaac Deutscher, Frantz Fanon, Hal Draper, Erich Fromm, C. Wright Mills, E. P. Thompson, Michael Harrington, Howard Zinn, Stanley Aronowitz, Slavoj Žižek, Victor Wallis, John Bellamy Foster. That's what my personal library looked like back when I was a student Marxist!

Most of those books are in boxes now in my attic. My own "Red to Green" transition started during the eighties, and my bookshelves have since become populated with the essential works of the eco-communitarian Green movement writers:

Nineteenth century: Henry David Thoreau, William Morris, Élisée Reclus, Edward Carpenter, Peter Kropotkin, John Muir.

Early- and mid-twentieth century: Ralph Borsodi, Murray Bookchin, Rachel Carson, Stanley Diamond, Paul Goodman, Ivan Illich, Robinson Jeffers, Leopold Kohr, Mildred Loomis, Aldo Leopold, Lewis Mumford.

1970s: Wendell Berry, Barry Commoner, Ernest Callenbach, Edward Goldsmith, Theodore Roszak, Marshall Sahlins, E. F. Schumacher, Gary Snyder.

1980s: Rudolf Bahro, Herman Daly, David Ehrenfeld, Chellis Glendinning, Petra Kelly, Ursula Le Guin, Carolyn Merchant, Stephanie Mills, Arne Næss, Fredy Perlman, Jonathan Porritt, Charlene Spretnak, Langdon Winner.

1990s: Gar Alperovitz, Andrew Dobson, Riane Eisler, Richard Heinberg, David Korten, Jerry Mander, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Daniel Quinn, John Rensenbrink, Wolfgang Sachs, Kirkpatrick Sale, Vandana Shiva, David Watson.

2000s: Samuel Alexander, John Clark, Charles Eisenstein, Rob Hopkins, Caroline Lucas, Michael Shuman, Ted Trainer.

Some ecosocialists have an idea that our movement can take the literature of the traditional left as a core and then simply expand the critique by grafting on ideas from some of the above ecology-oriented theorists. They assert that our movement should be a hybrid; we should identify as "watermelons" (green on the outside, red on the inside). But I've become convinced that we're really dealing with two profoundly different worldviews—as those distinctive and hardly overlapping bibliographies indicate.

Most of the left still skews toward the Red. For example, the 'Resources' page of the website of the Green Eco-Socialist Network references *Jacobin Magazine* but not *Green Horizon Magazine*. Nonetheless, Deep Greens shouldn't despair. Rather, I think we should appreciate how far things have come, how much we've already constructively influenced the left. We should recognize that there is an unfolding process. During the transition, for better or worse, the "watermelon" idea will figure to have some appeal.

Have patience and persevere. Keep in mind that the Red worldview has been predominant on the left since the nineteenth century. Right now the movement seems to be in a phase characterized by the kind of ideas expressed in Victor Wallis' *Red-Green Revolution* (2018). If that's the case, okay; we should proactively participate in Red-Green coalitions, heartened by the acknowledgment that our emphasis on ecology, community, sustainability, and decentralization is, in fact, gradually being embraced. There are even signs that the process is accelerating. A *Slate* article by Joshua Keating in July ("In Europe, Green Is the New Red") noted that "in several European countries the Greens appear on the verge of eclipsing old-school socialist or social-democratic parties as the main electoral voice of the left." How encouraging!

Europeans, of course, have more experience with socialism and therefore more skepticism about it. Seeing that phenomenon raises the prospect that this might be the last generation of leftists, worldwide, to take the idea of "working class revolution" seriously. As ecosocialists try to meld the Red and the Green, what we may be observing is a last gasp attempt to cling to the old. Joel Kovel, a founding father of that current, went to great theoretical lengths to buttress his case that, rather than a full paradigm shift, we're at the beginning of a *new epoch of socialism*: "Proto-green ideas were there in Marx, and you can find them if you look hard enough, but it didn't occur to Marx to emphasize humanity's alienation from nature. The issues of his times made him focus on labor exploitation. If he were writing today I'm sure he would highlight the need for a new, eco-centric mode of production" (excerpted from "The Transition to Ecosocialism: The Ecological Crisis and the Future of Capitalism," Kovel's presentation to the Historical Materialism Conference at The New School in New York in May, 2011).

It wouldn't be surprising if this turned out to be the last generation of leftists, worldwide, to take the idea of "working class revolution" seriously.

A CENTRAL ISSUE THE WHOLE MOVEMENT NEEDS TO ADDRESS

Meanwhile—for all the justifiable discussion and debate about worldviews, perspectives, and agencies—there's a fundamental issue of practical programmatic concern to everyone in our broad social change movement: what to do about the socially and ecologically irresponsible concentrations of wealth and power in the extant corporations and nation-states? Not only do Reds feel that they know the answer, but that answer constitutes the very essence of socialism: The large productive enterprises must be taken out of private hands (they must be socialized via nationalization or municipalization or cooperativization) and the nation-states must deepen democracy by extending it into the economic sphere.

Regarding the latter, it's a righteous sentiment, and to the extent that any headway in that direction can be achieved, great, but it should be clear by now why the Robin Hahnel/Michael Albert advocacy of "participatory economics" on a national scale has gotten no traction whatsoever. Complex, technocratic modern economies just can't be "of, by, and for" the people. Few any longer even contemplate the absurd idea of grassroots-democratic direction of a national economy.

But the dominance of the corporations *can and must be reined in*. How? Socialization, yes, should be a consideration, but not the only consideration. The Green movement can be viewed as post-socialist in light of the fact that it developed within a context of dawning recognition that *socialization has issues of its own*. For that reason the Greens are (or should be) more nuanced when addressing the question of property relations. The left has been reticent about confronting the obvious fact that socialization works out well in some circumstances but not in others. So: at the macro level the corporations might in some cases be tightly regulated and in other cases be socialized. Neither of those prescriptions is a panacea. Ultimately the function, authority, and power of the behemoths (which cannot possibly conform to the Green principle of being "community-based") must be *undermined at the micro level* via a process where people opt to turn their backs on all the institutions of the Leviathan and go local.

After two hundred years of knocking its head against a wall and not making much progress, the left ought to come to terms with the fact that the governments, economies, and technologies of

the industrial state cannot be fully democratized or humanized. Reforms can be won—and every reform is worth fighting for. But the thoroughgoing Green transformation that's so badly needed will mostly come about through piece-by-piece, place-by-place, building of the new society within the shell of the old.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Lenin famously asked that question in 1902. He'd be surprised to hear our current answers:

- * recognize the importance of scale as an independent and critical factor;
- * deconcentrate wealth and devolve power by decentralizing the extant polities and economies;
- * encourage bioregional diversity in place of the current globalized monoculture;
- * elect Greens to office.

The latter is imperative in order to: (a) win the reforms advocated in the Green Party platform, and (b) open pathways toward the deeper changes embodied in the creation of Transition Towns, ecovillages, and alternative institutions in general. We surely can't rely upon Republicans or Democrats to help move society in that direction. Conservatism and liberalism have both been part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Socialism, the supposed alternative ideology, has not had much of a track record, either; which indicates that we need to let go of the Red "working class to power" perspective. The truly transformational *greening of society* idea suffers when identified too closely with old-style, retrograde leftism. Instead, our movement needs to—patiently, but persistently—keep shifting the paradigm.



STEVE WELZER

a co-editor of this magazine, has been a Green movement activist for over thirty years. He was a founding member of the Green Party of New Jersey in 1997 and formerly served on the Steering Committee of the Green Party of the United States. Steve holds a master's degree in Economics from Rutgers University. He lives in East Windsor, NJ, and is active with the Altair Ecovillage project in Chester County, Pennsylvania.

odds. As a follow-up study our class watched a really great DVD series called “ProFuture Faith: The Prodigal Species Comes Home” with Rev. Michael Dowd, followed by another great book by Buddhist student and ecologist Joanna Macy and psychologist Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We’re in without Going Crazy*. This last book pulled me out of a bit of a depression about the whole thing and gave me a new way of looking at it. Since I am a problem solver by nature, I often focus on result rather than process. But Joanna and Chris maintain that every action taken toward healing has merit in its own right, regardless of outcome. Here is one beautiful passage: “There is no need to hide from bad news ... When we rise to a challenge, our strengths are activated and our sense of purpose switched on. There is no guarantee we will succeed in bringing about the changes we hope for, but the process of giving our full attention and effort draws out our aliveness.” Being part of the Great Turning is so much more meaningful than remaining part of Business as Usual!

Although the Trump presidency has been an awful burden to bear, I hold with my earlier assessment that it is a good thing that we “laid bare the underbelly of our nation” so that we can “clean out the rot and start to heal and mature.” True healing comes first with awareness and acknowledgment of the problem. For the first time ever, we have looked through the window and seen the awful truth of our racist institutions, structures, and past, and it can’t be unseen. I don’t know how quickly we’ll move to make real and lasting changes, but at least we’ve taken the important step of individual awareness and acknowledgment. I would love for our nation to also collectively and publicly acknowledge our wrong. That’s when healing can truly begin.

Rhoda Vanderhart
Mobile, AL

EDITOR’S NOTE: *Rhoda is a long time Green from the days in Kansas City when she participated alongside Dee Berry and Ben Kjelsbus in their chapter of the Missouri Green Party. She and her husband, Tom, moved to Mobile and have continued their support of the local and US Green Parties.*

TO THE EDITOR:

As the spring issue of *Green Horizon*, a tribute to John Rensenbrink, was circulating, the Maine Green Independent Party held its Annual Convention on June 14 (online via Zoom). I introduced John to the convention as follows:

I have been given the honor of introducing our next speaker, who is an important American.

There have been other important Americans who are remembered for leadership in times of crucially needed change. It occurred to me a few years ago that John Rensenbrink’s license plate suggested a kinship with our first president—by sporting the initials GW. Like John, George took on a challenging moment that needed new ideas and new energy. Granted, they were very different moments in history, but can you picture John standing in the bow of a small boat crossing a stormy river of change, Green Party banner flying proud?

And there’s another important American who is even more like John in stature and origins—Honest Abe Lincoln! Whoever thought that a rural Midwesterner could rise unexpectedly to greatness from humble beginnings to found a political party worthy of the color green—the color of life and sustainable values?

He’s not our President, alas, but he is Speaker of our own House—and we are deeply proud of all that John has brought to light and made possible.

Rosalie Paul
Brunswick, ME

TO THE EDITOR:

After receiving *Green Horizon* No. 39 [Summer/Fall 2019] and reading the fine article by Madelyn Hoffman—“Any Blue Will Do vs. Trump??”—I’ve sent in a small contribution to help cover your publishing costs. Madelyn summed up my feelings perfectly as to the morass we face in the current marathon election debacle.

Jason G. Murray
Portland, ME

TO THE EDITOR:

A problem with the lies Donald Trump tells is that there’s sometimes a grain of truth in them. Take, for example, his constant attack on the press. As a decades-long member of the media, I can tell you it’s pretty difficult to know everything about a story—especially in the limited amount of time and space most newsrooms give a reporter to tell the truth. But that doesn’t excuse creating an incomplete narrative.

For example, the media has done a pathetic job covering the United States Postal Service (USPS). In July it was announced

...continued on page 38

... after the Turning Point:

Our New Normal

We're demanding a New Normal
what our normal oughta be

a normal where it is not a crime
to be black or brown
a normal where violence
is not inflicted because of
skin color or race

where my brothers
and sisters of color
receive the same treatment
as I, a white male
receive from law enforcement
from judicial proceedings
from incarcerating sentencing

where a black youth doesn't need
to be told how to act
when confronted by police

I saw white privilege in the holding cell

where a white suburban youth
was released on his own recognizance
while others of a darker hue
remained in custody until their trial

where a white suburban youth
received a three-month sentence
while others of a darker hue
were shackled off
to state prison
for a lesser offense

our New Normal can
no longer have the knee
of a murdering white cop
on the neck of George Floyd

— Gil Harris

PROGRESS REPORT: Electoral System Reform

BY ROB RICHIE

The past year has been a notable one for RCV, and the November ballot promises even bigger breakthroughs.

American Greens have been among the most stalwart backers of replacing our eighteenth century methods of election with ranked choice voting (RCV) and proportional representation (PR). A string of their presidential candidates have backed it, and local organizers have catalyzed key local wins. While sweeping national success for RCV and PR is far from assured, it's now within reach. Here's an overview of where we are and what changes are possible in the coming decade.

Ranked choice voting is grounded in the simple idea that you should be able to rank candidates (rather than be limited to one) and have your backup rankings counted if your first choice can't win. The past year has been a notable one for RCV, and the November ballot promises even bigger breakthroughs. Among developments:

- Maine's legislature extended RCV to this year's presidential election, one in which Donald Trump, Joe Biden and Howie Hawkins will seek electoral votes awarded statewide and in Maine's two congressional districts. RCV was used in the spring primaries and will be used in November in US House races and the high-profile Senate race with Susan Collins, Sara Gideon, Lisa Savage and Max Linn.
- After unanimous support from the Democratic National Committee's Rules and Bylaw Committee, all Democratic voters in four states cast RCV ballots in their party-run presidential primaries, and more than two-thirds of Nevada caucus voters cast RCV ballots in early voting. Turnout hit record highs, and more than nine in ten backers of losing candidates ranked a backup candidate who earned delegates.
- This November, RCV is on the ballot in at least two states: Massachusetts will vote on passage of Maine-style RCV for all major state and congressional elections after a grassroots campaign, while Alaska will vote on a package of changes that includes RCV in a "Top Four primary"—as might North Dakota and Arkansas. Cities voting on RCV this November include Burlington, VT and Eureka, CA, with Albany, CA seeking to become the first new American city council to go to the proportional representation form of RCV since the 1950s. With 73% of the vote, New York City last November became the largest jurisdiction to approve RCV, starting with primaries and vacancy elections; and 81% of voters in Maine's largest city of Portland this year voted to extend RCV to all city offices.
- Major and minor party leaders have embraced RCV for key party contests and nominations, including: the Utah Republican and Democratic parties both used it in races for governor and Congress at their state conventions; the Indiana GOP used it to nominate an Attorney General candidate (who trailed by 10% in the first round); and the Virginia Republican Party nominated two congressional candidates with RCV, including one who started out in third place during the first round of vote counting.
- Virginia passed two local options bills for RCV, enabling cities to opt in starting next year. Across the Potomac from Washington DC, Arlington County appears

Maine's legislature extended RCV to this year's presidential election.

poised to seize the opportunity to adopt RCV; the county Democratic Party already regularly nominates candidates using it.

- Last November, 11 cities used RCV, five for the first time—including two in Utah and New Mexico's second-largest city of Las Cruces. This year, Basalt, Colorado used it in its three-candidate race for mayor, while Benton County, Oregon will use RCV for the first time in November.

RCV is changing the national electoral conversation. It was featured in Hasan Minhaj's Netflix show *Patriot Act*, and earned editorial backing from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and leading papers in Buffalo, San Antonio and St. Louis. In June, the weighty American Academy of Arts and Sciences released a comprehensive commission report that called for Congress to use RCV in all federal races and to allow states to use proportional representation.

At the League of Women Voters US biennial convention in June, 93 percent of its 1,143 delegates voted to approve a new position to "support electoral systems at each level of government that encourage participation, are verifiable and auditable and enhance representation for all voters." This position enables LWVUS and its state and local chapters to endorse bills and ballot measures for RCV and PR.

The number of colleges and universities using RCV for student elections soared past 75, with 13 new adoptions and uses including Auburn, George Washington, Swarthmore, UC Santa Cruz, and the universities of Houston, Michigan, and Wyoming. The Academy of Motion Pictures, which uses the proportional form of RCV for nearly all its Oscar nominations, will now do so for Best Picture nominees; RCV was already used to pick the Best Picture winner. The Academy also expanded its use of RCV to elect its Governing Board; winners this year included Whoopi Goldberg and Ava DuVernay.

State groups continue to form and build support for change. Among many examples: Voter Choice Connecticut worked with legislature allies on a bill to establish a task force to study RCV; FairVote Washington has held regular well-attended webinars; Rank My Vote Florida boasts active groups in several cities; and Utah RCV is working with cities across the state that will be considering it in 2021.

Nationally, Congress will soon start seriously debating how to make it easier for states to adopt RCV.

At FairVote, we see the next five years as one where RCV can move closer to being fully normalized—the arguments for it being so compelling and straightforward for improving elections. If there's not a state group already near you working to advance RCV, there likely will be one soon.

These next five years will also be critically important for building a coalition for what may be the single most important electoral reform: proportional representation for Congress—where like-minded voters can elect candidates in proportion to their voting strength—as currently embodied in HR 4000, the Fair Representation Act. HR 4000 deeply connects with vibrant social movements like those for ending climate change and achieving racial, gender and economic equality, and a growing body of political science suggests it would uniquely address concerns with congressional dysfunction and partisan polarization.

So: buckle up! It will be an exciting ride, and I hope readers will continue to find ways to support electoral reform amidst their other important work for social and political change.



ROB RICHIE

is president and CEO of FairVote (www.fairvote.org).

Last November, 11 cities used RCV, five for the first time.

BIG Family, BIG Opportunity

BY LISA SAVAGE

This article is condensed from a speech Lisa presented to the Green Party presidential nominating convention last July.

Budgets are moral documents. Resolving the climate crisis must be the priority of our budgets at every level of government.

I reside on land stolen from the Wabanaki people, what is now called Maine, in the Penobscot Nation's watershed, regretting that my European ancestors did not heed the wisdom of the indigenous elders who had been living sustainably here for at least twelve thousand years. Had we listened and learned, rather than seeking to dominate and colonize, human beings would almost surely not be faced with the climate catastrophe now threatening the security of all life on our planet.

I have been thinking a lot about family lately. As a candidate for US Senate I pledged to neither accept nor solicit donations from corporate lobbyists, corporate executives, or the super PACs that launder corporate money for candidates. This led to an interesting comment: "While her opponents are supported by big money, Lisa is supported by big family."

My grown children all contributed to the campaign in significant ways, as did my sisters, and many members of our extended family. My eldest said to his siblings: "Ask not what mom can do for you, ask what you can do for mom's campaign"! Beyond that, it was the extended family of supporters who have made the campaign a success. Many were members of the Maine Green Independent Party. I'm grateful that John Rensenbrink and others were inspired to establish the party 36 years ago; grateful that party members then worked diligently for years to mount not just one, but two (!) successful referendums to inaugurate ranked choice voting (RCV).

RCV offers an unprecedented opportunity to invite voters to vote their hopes rather than their fears—because it gives them the chance to vote for the candidate they really want, the one who best aligns with their values, as a first choice, rather than holding their nose and voting for some corporate candidate deemed "safe" by the corporate press. Prior to the implementation of RCV, all that nose holding was too painful for me! Disappointed time and again by the policies of progressive-sounding candidates who turned into warmongers and Wall Street enablers once they were in office, I vowed to move forward by always voting my conscience. I stopped listening to establishment party "spoiler" accusations—because exit polls have shown time and again that the presence of a strong progressive candidate brings out voters who would not otherwise have voted.

But ranked choice voting takes the "spoiler" issue off the table completely. That will help independent and alternative party campaigns be taken more seriously. Our nation and our planet will benefit. The complete and total abdication of responsibility shown by our current corporatized government argues for an opening up of the political system in order to enable victories for candidates with new ideas.

PROFITING FROM HEALTHCARE PROVISION IS A MORAL ABOMINATION

An unprecedented, but predictable, health crisis has laid bare the structural inequality of our wretched, racist, for-profit health care system. Black, indigenous, and other people of color have suffered disproportionate infection rates from COVID-19, as they are more likely to work in jobs that can only be done in-person. They have suffered disproportionate death rates as victims of underlying conditions resulting from poverty

An unprecedented, but predictable, health crisis has laid bare the structural inequality of our wretched, racist, for-profit healthcare system.

and unaffordable health care. What more stark evidence do we need to demonstrate that Medicare for All is well past due? Public health means that our well-being is dependent upon that of all the people we share our space with. I, for one, do not think that the words “for profit” and “health care” even belong in the same sentence! It is a moral abomination.

Our vacuous leadership at the national level has misguided us through the pandemic. A national health care system could have planned for a crisis, it could have stockpiled the vital Personal Protective Equipment for health care workers and been at the ready to develop testing for everyone so as to contain and control the disease, as other nations have successfully done. Instead we saw rampant profiteering and states forced to compete with one another for scarce supplies and equipment.

Nonetheless, as the pandemic raged, we noticed that there was no scarcity of military equipment for police departments throughout the nation responding to the millions demanding justice. There was no shortage of tear gas, or batons, or armored personnel carriers. Well, budgets are moral documents. The US spends almost 70% of its discretionary budget each year on the military! It drops a bomb in another country every 12 minutes. Meanwhile, as a schoolteacher, I am asked nearly every year to do more with less.

Police departments nationwide send officers to Israel for training in the tactics of a violent occupation force that continuously abuses Palestinians—with US taxpayer support! These are not my budget priorities. Are they yours?

TOWARD A FUTURE THAT VALUES PEOPLE, PLANET, AND PEACE

It is thrilling to see people demanding that this country grapple with the deep inequities built into our white supremacist justice system; thrilling to see young people marching to protest a system that has cost so many of them so dearly. Finally! I recently watched a documentary about the Black Panther Party and was struck by the fact that their demands—crafted more than 50 years ago—were the very same demands made by the Black Lives Matter movement today.

Rage is an appropriate response to the fact that we’ve made so little progress over the course of those decades. But I hope we’ve learned by now that a government owned and operated by corporations can never achieve justice or put forth a budget grounded in the values of caring rather than dominating and killing; the values of community rather than patriarchy, class hierarchy, racial discrimination, ableist discrimination, or cis

discrimination. The “greening of society” that our movement family advocates is based on a vision that another and better world is not only possible—it is essential if we as a species are to survive.

And our survival is very much in question. The most compelling security threat of the twenty-first century may be hard to see at times through clouds of tear gas, hard to focus on while enduring pandemic and social trauma, but it is still the unfolding climate crisis. The latter must be the priority of our budgets at every level of government. Yes, the Pentagon is the biggest polluting organization on the planet, and it must be defunded, but so, too, must we change nearly every choice our society makes on a daily basis. The energy requirements of capitalism’s insatiable need for expansion in order to line the pockets of the ultra-wealthy must be challenged.

Thanks to the Greens and the youth in our streets and to the electoral system reforms we’ve been winning, I have real hope for our future. Think of how much intelligence and creativity will be unleashed when we break down the system that impoverishes schools serving Black, indigenous, and people of color. Think of how the factories that now build weapons could build clean energy systems seemingly overnight with conversion using federal funds under a Green New Deal—and how that could create millions of additional union jobs paying a living wage.

We see the corporate parties squabble and cling to the past with all of their might because they know a better future will leave them in the dust—a future that is more equitable, sustainable, and moral; a future that values people, planet, and peace.

There once was a truism in American politics: As Maine goes, so goes the nation. With the growing family of supporters of alternative politics in my state, I believe we can win electoral victories and begin in earnest our transition to that future. Our opportunity has arrived. We lead together!



LISA SAVAGE

is a teacher, organizer and grandmother from Solon, Maine who has spent decades fighting for people, planet and peace. A committed environmental advocate, Lisa founded the Maine Natural Guard; was a coordinator of the Bring Our War Dollars Home campaign; and served as chief negotiator for her local bargaining unit of the Maine Education Association. Lisa has a history degree from Bowdoin College and a master’s degree in education from the University of Southern Maine.

Soon to be Picturesque Ruins!

(on the passage of a very large number of people through a brief bottleneck in time)

BY DAVID WATSON

A specter now haunts industrial capitalism, and with it our species and the entire life web in which we evolved.

Recently I was invited to comment on “collapsology.” It was the first I had heard the term. I guess I shouldn’t have been surprised that mass society’s tendency to baroque proliferation, and capitalism’s tendency to turn everything into commerce, would leverage widespread anxieties about social collapse and even potential human extinction into fodder for an academic discipline, literary fashion, YouTube jeremiads, experiential retreats, and consulting businesses. “Seems / everybody’s having them dreams,” Dylan once put it. And since anyone who takes up the subject of the current peril could be called a *collapsologue*, I must be one, too.

Yes, a specter now haunts industrial capitalism, and with it our species and the entire life web in which we evolved. What is commonly called the “end of the world as we know it” is no longer a matter for the future tense: invisibly, and also very visibly, the specter is already turning its grim wheel. A sense of ecological dread, depression, even panic (now categorized by psychologists as “climate grief”) has become a topic hard to avoid for anyone stopping to consider human prospects and the prospects of so much that is precious to us. It’s a daunting subject. Activists, bless them, continue to advocate and organize against complacency and distraction. But already by 2018, that inveterate optimist of the will, Bill McKibben, was writing that if the present situation continues to unfold as it has, “we will have drawn a line in the sand and then watched a rising tide erase it.”

My own position in what has been aptly called the climate caste system is an undeniably privileged one. But climate or environmental grief, and “climate-disruption-related mental health issues,” concern not only privileged worriers in the Global North. A cascade of ecological catastrophes—floods, fires, heat, drought, and so on—is synergizing social breakdown, violence, forced migration, and other problems, and generating profound suffering everywhere, in the North and the South. Trauma is particularly acute among “frontline” communities in low-lying slums along the coasts, arid regions of the African and Asian interior, and in indigenous communities. But climate and environmental disasters also plague the developed world (witness Australia and California most recently). And anxieties about scarcity and conflict are now common, especially in the places where migrants seek refuge and have become fodder for fascist reaction.

BACK TO THE GARDEN

Decades ago, my friends and I in Detroit were vaguely, and perhaps too confidently, proposing a critique of the “principles” of collapse. For us this collapse referred not only to resource depletion, the purported end of oil, and an increasingly top-heavy, ineffectual bureaucracy, but the cultural constellation of scientific-technological hubris, bureaucratic capitalist social relations, the atomization and breakdown of communities, and the emergence of an entropic petrochemical-driven mass society. In September 1977, we published an issue of the *Fifth Estate* newspaper with a photo of the downtown skyline on the cover with the headline: “Soon To Be Picturesque Ruins!”

Detroit seemed a suitable site for such activities. Parts of the city *were* in ruins after an industrial Boom throughout the first half of the twentieth century, a protracted decline starting soon after the Second World War, and a Bust and breakdown after the radical turmoil of the 1960s. Several thousand buildings had been looted and damaged and hundreds burned, accelerating the closing of factories and businesses due to suburbanization, globalization, and the economic aftershocks of the Vietnam War. Continued decline, population flight, and the drug wars of the 1970s and 1980s made Detroit a kind of laboratory of post-industrial entropy. From there it evolved—or devolved, you pick—into an icon of what some have called the post-industrial sublime, and that others (especially around here) dismiss as ruin porn. Detroit became famous—or infamous, you decide—for its haunting images of waste and decay; of abandoned and burned-out stores, houses, and factories. In what had become broad swathes of open prairie, one could see wildflowers and once-planted tulips and other perennials coming up every spring around the foundations and in the gardens of houses long demolished; and the ailanthus trees we called ghetto palms, and mulberry and honeysuckle, growing along the rusted perimeters or out of the roofs of desolate factories, like the vegetation on semi-buried Mayan temples.

Lately there’s been a lot of planting and gardening in the neighborhoods, and some feckless talk about those gardens and small urban farms “bringing the city back.” But people

Naomi Klein’s reporting on the network of communities fighting the extractivist behemoth, and starting to call themselves “Blockadia,” is vivid and hopeful.

We now get almost weekly updates that the scientists’ previous warnings were too optimistic, and increasingly fevered talk about looming thresholds, precipices, tipping points, feedbacks, and domino effects.

are in fact eking a modest, dignified living, creating small and commendable communities among the ruins. And that is something. The ruins are starting to recede. The meadows are starting to fill in, sometimes with new development, more concrete and steel—and in some places with small peasant holdings. Tourists and new residents are flocking in—some looking for a “renaissance” that, among young artists, “bioneers,” and radicals means social activism, a vibrant art community, and urban agriculture; but that for others has meant the tech start-up, restaurant row, shopping mall, casino, or stadium: the same urban conspicuous consumption zone and amusement park, reserved for those who have the money, that is overtaking cities everywhere. For now.

WELCOME TO THE ANTHROPOCENE

Stratigraphers have started to call our recent geological moment the Anthropocene. We now get almost weekly updates that the scientists’ previous warnings were too optimistic, and increasingly fevered talk about looming thresholds, precipices, tipping points, feedbacks, and domino effects. According to an almost total consensus of scientists, Earth life systems (and consequently human systems) are slipping into a “death spiral,” spinning out of control at a far greater scale and faster pace, and with more likelihood of irreversibility than previously calculated.

In our Great Lakes bioregion, at nearby Flint, the cupidity of Big Business and the blithe indifference of politicians, from local to national, led to a mass lead contamination of local residents, including thousands of children. Other chemical contaminants continue to plague the region and the country. In many places, decaying urban infrastructure, metal and chemical contamination, and the production system itself (the ubiquitous presence of fire retardants, plastics, medical products, fertilizers and biocides used in farming, etc.) have caused a constellation of health crises—industrial plagues. And in a region that makes up one fifth of the planet’s surface fresh water, we are now seeing massive, deadly algal blooms in the lakes, groundwater contamination, and struggles over the privatization of clean water.

I admire the resilience, bravery, strategic intelligence, and creative solidarity of Blockadia and all communities that come together to face our gravest problems.

Around the time I started thinking about this essay, that marvelous little Viking, the stern, brave young Greta Thunberg, arrived by sailboat in New York to participate in the youth-led climate strike and to address the United Nations. She and her impressive cohort haunt my thoughts. They speak with dignity, good sense, and deep feeling for their own future and for every generation present and future, human, animal, vegetal, delivering to us that old message of our terrible destructiveness, a warning that dates back at least to the conquest of this continent and the enclosures and empires of the Old World.

In Detroit last fall I went downtown to participate in this children's crusade to protest and survive. Upwards of a thousand of us marched from a park down to the river. We were a handful; there should have been a hundred thousand, a million. Gathering again in chilly December, as the city went about its anthropocentric business around us, we were at best a hundred. We marched to the local power company downtown, where the young organizers spoke, demanding an end to home heating shut-offs, a Green New Deal, and other reforms. As the western sky streaked pink with one of our memorable, industrially-enhanced winter sunsets, they announced their die-in on the damp grass in front of DTE Energy, and as we lay there, playing sedimentary fossils, I guess, I was gratified if not exactly happy to be there with them. A young woman's poetic visualization of a new social-ecological dispensation and renewed Earth by 2030 was touching and also disheartening. I spent most of my life teaching, mentoring, and learning from adolescents, and their indignation and hope sounded to me like life itself, in a wail of woe for now and for the future, probably too late, telling us that we have eaten our seed corn and are now eating our children, and that we shall see the apocalypse unfold.

BLOCKADIA AND BEYOND

"This changes everything," Naomi Klein has famously insisted. She points to the capitalist system itself as the greatest impediment to survival—a perspective more and more openly considered even in mainstream media. Her reporting on the network of communities fighting the extractivist behemoth, and starting to call themselves "Blockadia," is vivid and hopeful. Their witness, resistance, and ground-level, utopian problem-

solving are inspiring. Alas, her own documentation of capitalist resistance to change, the dramatic acceleration of destruction, and the acceleration of natural feedbacks, draws a dark lining across her siren call. Though the crisis presents an opportunity to change ecological habits, establish justice and a sustainable society, we are "locked in," she worries, not only to extractivist infrastructures, but to deeper cultural mindsets of possessive individualism and a quasi-religious belief that technology will save us. And she is calling for more profound, and more rapid, structural and even cultural transformations than anyone other than a radical fringe seems ready to contemplate.

In the midst of my reading, marching, and pretend-dying, I learned that during our Thanksgiving holiday last November thirty-one million Americans flew somewhere to celebrate. Many of those millions must have seen the writing on the wall, and surely worry about the future, and yet they were not ready to abandon old habits. It occurred to me that, whatever they profess to hold most precious, most of all a humane, livable future for their children, they (we) continue to live and participate in structures—physical, environmental, psychological—that Anthropocene capital has built. They are locked in, indeed *strapped in* to their seats. And, as with addiction, they are not likely to renounce this shadow life, continuing to eat the seed corn, until they face great, earth-shaking shocks.

A section of the population in many countries is now willing to nurture the social solidarity we require to deal humanely with climate-generated and other interrelated problems. More and more comprehend that we can't solve the ecological crisis without resolving our social contradictions. But bringing people together, creating social coherence, remains a complex and formidable challenge.

THE PLAGUE, THE LEAP

So, should we retire, like Boccaccio's handsome lads and lasses to a sylvan refuge, entertain ourselves contemplating the Human Comedy while the world burns? How could I turn away, when I have Greta and her comrades as my models, striking out on their own and crossing seas with courage, pragmatism, inclusivity, simple wisdom, and calm defiance? I admire the resilience, bravery, strategic intelligence, and creative solidarity of Blockadia and all communities that come together to face our gravest problems, especially (though not exclusively) the inspired indigenous and village peoples, frequently led by women, who have some generational memory and appreciation of what it is we have all lost and are continuing to lose. They are learning, and proving, that one of the best ways to deal with climate trauma is to become engaged, active, and to embrace their connection to the Earth. They are trying to save what can be saved from this burning, drifting, sinking ship; and perhaps because of them some of us, some record of our cultural triumphs, and some remnant of the green world that

birthed and nurtured us, too, will survive passage through this bottleneck we are entering. I also respect the pragmatism of those, like Klein and McKibben, who argue that all-or-nothing demands for immediate total change would be “reckless” (her word), given how dire prospects are—it’s one reason I marched with the young people.

I am drawn to Klein’s idea of a movement to establish social justice and renewal in this “climate moment.” When she and others created The Leap in 2015 in Canada (www.TheLeap.org), she declared: “Small steps won’t get us there. We have to move on multiple fronts at once. My crisis isn’t bigger than your crisis. They’re interconnected, they’re overlapping, and we can come up with solutions that solve multiple problems at once.” This suggests a social movement built like a wheel, a dharma wheel if you like, with a yin-yang sphere—the yang of ecological emergency joined to our yin of calm, our loyalty to life—as the hub; and our diverse communities as the spokes, which we intuitively and collectively must trust to become the radial supports of an authentic good life.

I also agree with Klein and other activists that people can build communities, perhaps Beloved Communities, learn to sort out their problems in those contexts, and have little option but to try. I sympathize with the people protesting all over the globe these days, from Hong Kong to Iraq to Chile. Perhaps given how and where we have all come to live, there is no solution other than a mass reorganization of space no one can presently imagine.

Our uncertainty—not only about what exactly is happening around us and what to do practically, but also how to act ethically, to live meaningfully—does not give us permission to give up. Even before COVID I had been re-contemplating one of the books that most formed me, during my early twenties, Camus’s *The Plague*; and I find myself agreeing once more with his protagonist, Dr. Rieux, facing the plague in Oran. I like that Rieux refuses to proffer the word “hope.” He stays lower to the ground, to the hard bone of reality. “It’s an absurd situation, but we’re all involved in it, and we’ve got to accept it as it is,” he tells Lambert, who is trying to escape the city. To Lambert’s objection that he’s merely talking in abstractions, he answers that he doesn’t know if that is true; later, acknowledging that “an element of abstraction, of a divorce from reality, entered

If there has ever been a moment when we might begin to heal the planet and our broken societies, this moment, approaching rock bottom on this wobbly stair, is the time and place to begin.

Even before COVID I had been re-contemplating one of the books that most formed me, during my early twenties, Camus’s *The Plague*.

into such calamities,” he concludes: “Still, when abstraction sets to killing you, you’ve got to get busy with it.” (In Klein’s work, this is called, simply, “starting anyway.”)

If “how soon and how badly” collapse arrives are still operational questions, we’re left where we always were, at a civilizational level as much as at the personal. Another character in *The Plague* who has joined Rieux and the fight, Tarrou, dies of the plague at the very end, absurdly, just as it is subsiding. He says, “I don’t want to die, and I shall put up a fight. But if I lose the match, I want to make a good end of it.” That, and Rieux’s idea “to be an honest witness,” is something. So, we proceed. We act. Perhaps: we leap!

Hic Rhodus! This is Rhodes, the place to dance. That is what my friend Fredy Perlman wrote in a book that had a notable effect on anarchist practitioners of the collapse koan, his eccentric saga of primordial rupture, leviathanic civilization, empire, inevitable catastrophe, and the uncertainty of next steps. This is the place for engagement, for defiance, the place to practice solidarity with all life forms and life webs. This is the place for dismantling the megamachine, for regeneration.

Reader, this is perhaps the time to find your way to Blockadia, before Collapse finds its way to you. Like Rieux’s Oran, the whole world is now running a temperature. Well, *hic salta!* This is the place to leap! That is what my personal collapsology would recommend as things fall apart, while reminding my brothers and sisters, and the children (who are all our children), that we have not yet hit bottom. But if there has ever been a moment when we might begin to heal the planet, our broken societies, and families, and broken selves, this moment, approaching rock bottom on this wobbly stair, is the time and place to begin.



DAVID WATSON

lives in the Detroit area and is the author of *Against the Megamachine*. This article is based on a longer essay, “Bientôt Tout Cela Ne Sera Plus Que Ruines Pittoresques,” for the French anarchist journal *Réfractations*, no. 44.

(see <http://refractions.plusloin.org/spip.php?article1348&lang=fr>)

Unpresidential

BOOK REVIEW BY STEVE WELZER

*Fake President: Decoding Trump's Gaslighting, Corruption, and General Bullsh*t*
By Ralph Nader and Mark Green
Skyhorse Publishing, New York. 2019. 304 pages.

Mark Green and
Ralph Nader have
been a terrific
team ever since the
“Nader’s Raiders”
days fifty years ago.

If you happen to pick up this issue of *Green Horizon* after November 3 . . . maybe he’ll be gone. If so, well . . . whatever will we talk about for the next four years?

He’s been a media-dominating narcissist who put the “boob” in boob-tube well before descending the golden escalator at Trump Tower in June 2015 to become a pol. Having previously been a TV personality (a very high form of celebrity in this country) the press gave him hundreds of millions of dollars worth of free publicity under the guise of candidate coverage. He blustered and tweeted and fabricated to gain the Republican nomination. Shockingly, he continued to bluster and tweet and fabricate from the Oval Office of the White House!

Unpresidential. A rogue. A phenomenon. But also: a danger to the republic.

Mark Green and Ralph Nader have been a terrific team ever since the “Nader’s Raiders” days fifty years ago. For decades they’ve worked together fruitfully on a dozen books and numerous causes. Like so many of us, they watched in distress and near-disbelief as the presidential demeanor and discourse descended to diabolical depths (!) over the past four years—so much so that they felt compelled to document the details. If, on November 3, the country heaves out its “unpresidential” donkey, their book, *Fake President*, will serve as a chronicle of all the “bragging, bullying, blaming, and bullshitting”—and as a cautionary tale for future generations. Based on extensive probing and research, this book presents one head-turning revelation after another.

For example, did you know that . . .

- * Trump personally signed at least six checks while in the Oval Office totaling over \$270K to Michael Cohen to pay off Stormy Daniels and others;
- * fully a third of Trump’s first two thousand presidential tweets disparaged one person or another; by the end of 2018 the list totaled a hard-to-believe 598 people;
- * as of May 2019 the Trump administration had lost 63 times in federal court; it had a 6% win rate as compared to 70% for prior presidents;
- * lobbyists representing the Saudi government reserved blocks of rooms at Trump’s Washington, DC hotel within a month of Trump’s 2016 election, paying for an estimated 500 rooms in just three months;

He's been a media-dominating narcissist since well before descending
the golden escalator at Trump Tower in June 2015.

* as of March 2019 turnover among the administration's senior staff was 66 percent, as compared to 24 percent under Obama after a comparable period in office; Trump set a record by being on his fourth national security adviser and sixth communications director less than three years into his presidency; meanwhile, only 61 percent of the 714 positions requiring Senate confirmation had been filled;

* Trump stated, on announcing an initiative to reduce kidney disease: "The kidney has a very special place in the heart."

Regarding that latter citation and many others like it, Green and Nader know that we just have to laugh a little to relieve the morosity of the situation. And it sure is easy enough to laugh at The Donald. (Though when he was annoyed by a satirical SNL sketch, Trump tweeted that they had "no right" to do that to him and threatened to expand federal libel laws to make it easier to sue.)

Fake President contains a plethora of particular disclosures, earfuls, and gaffes in a general exposé format, but the essence of the critique delineates what the authors assert to be Trump's core betrayal: "... how he weaves together *rhetorical populism for workers* with *policies for the corporate super-rich*." The rhetoric is, of course, fully dishonest. Nader and Green list no fewer than 21 "favorite tricks" in Trump's dissembling arsenal (count 'em):

informational cherry-picking, baseless assertions, performance art, insults, contradiction of evidence-based science, deflection, boosterism, inducement of fear, ignoring proportionality, repetition, hyperbole, vagueness, nicknaming, denying, micro-aggression, rhetoric, metaphor, conspiracy theorizing, about-facing, disparagement, and—of course—outright lying.

Here's another list: "We've had great presidents and awful ones. All had flaws. But never before has there been one so provably corrupt, impulsive, ignorant, incompetent, untruthful, work lazy, lacking empathy, antidemocratic, racist, sexist, ruthless, bullying, petty, arrogant, endlessly self-centered and self-enriching. It's not easy to meld all these different handicaps into one sentient human form!"

* * * * *

Not only do I hope he'll be gone shortly after this election issue of *Green Horizon* arrives in your mailbox, beyond that it would be a sweet comeuppance if he were all-but-forgotten ten years from now. If so, and if, by then, you want to recommend a book to familiarize your Zoomer with the bathetic and pathetic Trumpist interlude of our history, this astute Nader/Green book will provide an excellent and concise summing up of our Fake President's sorry legacy.

The essence of their critique delineates Trump's core betrayal:
"how he weaves together *rhetorical populism for workers*
with *policies for the corporate super-rich*."

that the USPS will get an enormous bailout (\$10 billion) to keep it running through 2022—but no story I've found mentions the fact that the USPS earlier had been compelled, by the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, to squirrel away 50 years of employee benefits. You'd be cash poor, too, if you had to save enough money to pay for 50 years of health insurance premiums and retirement benefits before you could buy groceries—hence the need for a \$10 billion loan. This new loan requires them to allow the Treasury Department total access to their books. Steve Mnuchin will get to poke his nose, if not his hand, in their till.

George W. Bush signed the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act into law in 2006 after it was proposed by Maine Senator Susan Collins.

When it comes to Susan Collins, the media has dropped the ball again. They've failed to recognize the fact that her re-election race this year might conceivably be the most important US Senate race in the nation. That's because Maine employs Ranked Choice Voting. RCV eliminates the "spoiler" problem, so Maine voters will be able to boldly vote their true preference.

Unfortunately, the corporate media rarely discusses this pioneering electoral method. So it's not surprising that news stories focusing on the Susan Collins re-election struggle often just mention the two mainstream candidates on the ballot. There are actually four viable candidates in the race. Lisa Savage, for example, one of the two independents running, has raised over

\$100,000. That's no small amount of money for a grassroots campaign. Additionally, the Maine Democratic Party platform did not endorse universal single payer healthcare—but Savage has. In a time of a world-wide pandemic, not reporting on her candidacy is just lazy-lousy journalism!

Pat LaMarche
Carlisle, PA

IN MEMORIAM

Activists David Graeber and Kevin Zeese were taken from us within days of each other in early September. Both were under 65. Both had been sparkplugs for transformational social change.

David was a leading figure in the Occupy Wall Street movement and author of *The Utopia of Rules*. Kevin helped organize the Occupy encampment at Freedom Plaza in Washington, D.C. and served as co-director of Popular Resistance. In addition, Kevin ran as the Maryland Green Party candidate for US Senate in 2006. He made history in that "Unity Campaign" when he was backed by three alternative parties (Green, Libertarian, and Populist). With that kind of support, he became the first third-party candidate included in a three-way Senatorial debate. In the debate he asserted: "Change has not come from status quo parties, it's always come from the outside."

Rest in power, David and Kevin.

Haikus written by Ted Becker have always been incisive, poignant, charming. We've run them occasionally in *Green Horizon* but now want to start a tradition of ending each issue with one or two.

The classic Japanese haiku is a three-line poem with seventeen syllables, written in a 5/7/5 syllable count. Haikus tend to emphasize simplicity, intensity, and directness of expression. Ted and Patricia Lantz have compiled over a hundred into "The Haiku Blues" (Wipf & Stock; Eugene, OR; 2017). They've graciously given us permission to share some with you.

MYTH AMERICA

*It's boasting we're just,
"democratic" and lawful
that makes our wars grate.*



GREEN HORIZON

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