



The Green Party of Virginia



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The Greens and the Presidency

by Ralph Nader

The two-party duopoly -- essentially one corporate party with two heads called Republican and Democratic, each wearing different makeup -- presents the citizenry every four years with a choice between the Bad and the Worse. And every four years, both the Bad and the Worse get worse because there is no counterpull to the corporate, right-wing pull

Raising expectation levels to get political parties moving away from a competition between the Bad versus the Worse toward the Good versus the Better requires a civic dynamic that is incompatible with accepting the status quo. External competition is necessary to break up the two-party duopoly, either to produce really different political parties or lead to political realignments toward multiparty evolutions.

Last fall, several leading California environmentalists asked if I would agree to their placing my name on the Green Party ballot for President. Reflecting on how corporatized government is rapidly shutting out civic participation, I agreed, but said I would not accept any campaign contributions or run in a traditional manner. I've been criticized by some for choosing to go about matters in this way, but my goal is to encourage a campaign dependent on self-reliant citizen muscle at the grass roots, not some guy on a horse. This is one test, certainly for people in the Green Party and other progressives, of whether they are going to step up their mobilization. In some states, the Greens are already forming parties as a result, and they are taking a long-range view of their initiatives.

In the near term there is a need for a modest-sized party that is rooted in progressive communities, agendas and energies, and that (1) focuses on new and stronger tools of democracy for voters, workers, consumers and taxpayers; (2) breaks through the DemRep taboos against debating the supremacy of global corporations over our political, economic, educational, media and cultural institutions; and (3) brings into progressive politics a young generation of Americans.

There is no patent on these agendas; they are available to all candidates for their campaigns. Instead of telling progressives they have nowhere to go, Clinton could reduce the numbers who stay home on Election Day and open up a corporate critique of Dole. This he is unlikely to do. It is up to him. Nobody but Clinton can beat Clinton. He is too unprincipled to lose to Dole, who anyway cannot reinvent himself.

Many Americans who call themselves liberals have so lowered their expectations about what politics can mean to this nation's future that they are settling for diminishing returns. Politics has been corrupted not just by money but by being trivialized out of addressing the great, enduring issues of who controls, who decides, who owns, who pays, who has a voice and access, and why solutions available on the shelf are not applied to the existing and looming crises of our society, both local and global.

One thing politicians do understand is rejection. When voters are deciding how they wish to use their vote, they should ask themselves how best to send a clear message. The Greens and other progressives are in the early building stages of a people-first, democratic political movement for future years. They deserve our attention because they are centering on the basic issues of representative government, one of whose purposes is to strengthen the usable tools of democracy; the other, in Thomas Jefferson's prophetic words, is "to curb the excesses of the monied interests."

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Holes in the Safety Net

"We gotta help our own." That was the feeling shared by panelists and attenders alike at a recent public forum, "Holes in the Safety Net:Rockbridge Responds." Sponsored by the Rockbridge Greens as a community service, the forum was held May 28 at the Regional Library in Lexington.

"With recent changes in Virginia's welfare system, communities across the Commonwealth have been asked to take a more active role in helping those in need," explained Sheri Grace, one of the Green organizers. "The forum was a chance for citizens and community leaders to get together and see what these changes may mean for Rockbridge." Sheri also noted that the forum, while non-partisan, was a way for Greens to express their commitment to economic and social justice -- one of the Ten Key Values.

The forum opened with presentations by three panelists well-known for their work in Rockbridge. Ray Blouin, of the Rockbridge Area Department of Social Services, gave an overview of welfare reform during the Allen administration and outlined the impact of the reforms locally. Warette Hunt of Total Action Against Poverty (TAP) and Ellen McCoy of Rockbridge Area Relief Association (RARA) added their perspectives on related issues.

Family Workfare According to Blouin, the Commonwealth has recently adopted a number of changes to how welfare is administered in the state that will have a dramatic impact on local families. Last year the General Assembly passed laws which require all AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) recipients to work for their benefits. Basically, families will be eligible for welfare for only two years. After a third year of some transition support (child care, medical, etc.), all support will cease. By year three, all families (except the certified disabled) are expected to be on their own.

Pulling the Rug? The intended goal of the legislation is to return families to fiscal independence, a goal which panelists agreed was good. Panelists, however, expressed reservations about implementing such legislation in the face of economic realities. Noting the local economy does not yield the number of well-paying jobs it used to, Blouin particularly wondered how a single parent (usually a mother) will be able to support her children on \$5.50 an hour without medical benefits.

Although Rockbridge Social Services already enrolls its clients in job training or continued education, Blouin is also concerned that two years is often insufficient for clients to get the education they need to break out of the cycle of poverty. While noting the vast majority of clients he works with sincerely want to become financially independent, Blouin has also concern for others with chronic problems. When the state pulls the rug, will the community be there to catch those who fall?

Hunt and McCoy echoed similar concerns in their presentations. Both noted a significant drop in state funding for their programs which focus more on the working poor and the elderly poor respectively. All three panelists wondered whether the local community can mend the "holes" created by the unraveling of state commitments.

A Call to Action

The forum was about more than information sharing, however. To begin a local call to action, participants identified the top three unmet needs facing the Rockbridge area and brain-stormed possible responses:

Need #1: Affordable child care

Lack of reliable daycare is a major stumbling block for single parents (usually mothers) trying to regain financial independence. No childcare. No job. While Social Services has some funds for this purpose, it is not nearly enough.

Possible responses:

Daycare co-ops sponsored by businesses and/or churches, "adopt-a-child" daycare scholarships, training more childcare workers for family daycare.

Need #2: Reliable transportation

Many mothers making the transition back to work can't afford to own and operate an automobile. In a city, they could take a bus. But in rural areas?

Possible responses:

Share-a-ride programs, intra-county van services.

Need #3: Weatherized homes

This is an especially critical need among elderly people with limited resources. Poorly insulated homes result in huge utility bills during the heating

season -- a catastrophe for our neighbors on tiny fixed incomes.

Possible responses:
fix-up teams, work weekends, material drives.

In a lively discussion period, forum attenders (who included representatives of churches, civic groups as well as current clients of Social Service) also identified a number of other measures to support those in need. The partial list included a family-to-family mentoring program, volunteer financial advisors for young households, scholarships for short-term training programs and teenage pregnancy prevention programs.

Good Press

The forum received excellent in-depth, first-page coverage in the local newspaper. Through the paper, the content of the forum really went out to many, many people. "It's too early to tell what will happen now that the ideas are out there," notes Elise Sheffield, co-convenor of the event, "but I'm really glad the Rockbridge Greens were able to be the catalyst for beginning the conversation. The panelists welcomed this opportunity to share this important information with the community."

Elise also noted that two of the unmet needs (providing reliable transportation and weatherizing homes) might be of particular interest to Greens looking for projects related to both social justice and the environment. Greens interested in hosting a similar event in their own communities are welcome to call Elise (540-261-4306) for more info and organizing tips.

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VA Independents REFORM Their Party

by Eric Sheffield

On June 8 about 75 members and curious onlookers, like myself, gathered at the Lexington Howard Johnsons for the state convention of the Virginia Independent Party/Reform Party.

The VIP is the only third party in Virginia that has achieved ballot status and can thus nominate candidates for office and bypass the petitioning process. VIP's ballot status came thanks to the generosity of disaffected Republican Marshall Coleman who gained 10% in his '94 Senate race against Chuck Robb and Ollie North. Subsequently, Coleman allowed the VIP to claim his votes.

A Policy Statement dated 5/1/96 states that "The purpose of the VIP is to offer the citizens of Virginia an organization through which they can support a more centrist political program than is now provided by the Democratic and Republican Parties." In other words, the VIP has staked out that slim (many Greens would say microscopic) territory which separates the Dems from the Repubs.

The VIP has a Platform of Principles which includes:

- Encourage economic competitiveness and promote the cause of a sustainable society and environment in the U.S.;
- Eliminate the conflict of interest brought about by the current approach to campaign practices, finances and contributions;
- Return Congress to a body of Citizen Legislators whose activities focus on representing constituents rather than accumulating money and power;
- Reform the fiscal policies of the federal government;
- Reform entitlement programs in conjunction with developing a long term strategy for repaying the National Debt.

As for the convention itself, things went rather smoothly until the question of whether or not to nominate a candidate for the US Senate race. The only person seeking the nomination was longtime independent activist and Green Party member Tex Wood. Many spoke passionately in favor of Tex. Others voiced familiar arguments against his nomination: "Now is not the time, we're not ready for this"; "We could be embarrassed by a poor showing"; "Let's concentrate on the Presidential race."

Even though Tex seemed to have the support of a majority of those present, those opposing him ended up having control of more than two thirds of the votes. Some left after the vote, apparently disgusted with the party's reluctance to engage in this year's only state-wide campaign.

The convention also decided not to nominate a presidential candidate at that time, in favor of waiting until after the national Reform Party convention where many pundits expect Perot to claim the party's nomination. The convention did decide to officially add "Reform Party" to their name, thus acknowledging their affiliation with the national Reform Party.

I wasn't able to stay for the whole convention, which was just as well. Things started to unravel after the Tex Wood vote. As for process, the VIP definitely does not use consensus. I left them struggling with a motion to overrule the decision of the parliamentarian. -- Eric Sheffield

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The Two-Party Trap

by Ronnie Dugger

Which way? Nader's candidacy has already stirred up a hornet's nest of debate among progressives about how to cast their votes in November. Journalist Ronnie Dugger, a well-known figure in progressive politics, and founding editor of the Texas Observer, recently offered this account of his own voting booth struggle. The following article is an excerpt adapted from a talk he made in Los Angeles May 22 during a forum on the 1996 presidential election organized by the Council on the Americas. Our thanks for his permission to reprint. -- Eric Sheffield

"... So, speaking for myself only, I would take my stand on the question at hand. The two-party trap presents us with an ethical problem. The prevailing interpretation of this trap is the idea that if progressives vote for a third-party or independent candidate whom we believe in, but who as a practical matter has little or no chance of winning, we are helping to elect the candidate we most dislike--this year Dole--by withholding our vote from his only opponent with a chance to win--this year Clinton. By doing that, the argument runs, we are giving ourselves the satisfaction of voting for the candidate we believe in, but only at the real expense of regular people, the poor, working families, who will have to pay the costs of our smug self-indulgence as the Gingrich Republicans continue their class war against the people in order to further enrich their masters, the already very rich.

This is a powerful argument. I have conformed my voting behavior to it since I was 21, supporting every Democratic nominee for President since Adlai Stevenson. But with rising disgust. Now for me, this year, the trap is sprung.

"... The two-party trap is an ethical problem but our ethical responsibilities as citizens do not end with guesses about the short-term consequences of any one election. They do not end at what happens to the American political system. They do not end at the sufferings of the marginalized populations in this relatively well-off country. We had here the largest Western democracy and a model for the world. People seeking liberty still flock here from everywhere. Unless we start all over again together, and build a new society, a new system, a new country, in this one, what we are letting go is the best chance for a democratic world in the Twenty-First Century. Gingrich is not the subject. The human race is the subject. Because we are charged, by our times, by history, to re-implant democracy in the flagship Western democracy, our ethical responsibilities reach to the future of the human race--all billions of us--into posterity.

We may be deciding in this country whether the human race will evolve into a democracy or a totalitarian world of consumers and victims.

The presidential election of 1996 is not the main thing. It is a diversion. But it is here, and it's my best guess that we can best start to build a long-term populist/progressive people's movement, in this election, by voting for Nader.

Certainly he would make a great President. He has the integrity of Thoreau and the conscience of Assisi. He knows how the government works. As Martin Luther King achieved more social reform, Nader has achieved more governmental reform than any one person in his generation. Nader would govern for the people, and he would reject, oppose, and subordinate to democratic governance, the huge corporations that now rule us callously and arrogantly.

Beyond that, after the election, and--if one must so assume--Nader has lost, we will have a new candidate-sized figure on the scene, who is not Ross Perot, and who is not Pat Buchanan. Voting for Nader, I feel, I will be voting for a future for the people. The two-party system of the United States is a farce, a lie, a cheat, a fraud. We should make a break and start out toward a system of proportional representation and a new democracy. I am going to vote for the candidate for President I genuinely believe in as one more step toward a new national long-term people's movement in the United States.

I must admit, there is one more thing. Voting for Ralph Nader I am going to be proud of my vote. It is going to be, I guess, the way it would be, waking up one morning to realize that really, truly, you have broken free from the drug, or the booze, or the cigarette habit. By voting for Nader, I break my lifelong addiction to accepting being sold out by the Democratic Party. Not again. Never again. No. On that new basis I can fight happily for a better world until I die and fight with pride in the fight. That, for sure, will make me a better fighter.

Far more important than this question, though, is the underlying amity and trust among the legions, the millions, of decent, humanist, democratic, spiritual, compassionate, each-other-loving people and forces and organizations, who are going to make a new country in this one, if we can do that.

I respect as honorable, and ethical, a conscientious progressive decision to vote for Clinton. And you who will vote for Clinton should, I believe, respect as honorable and ethical a conscientious progressive's or a conscientious populist's decision to vote for Nader. The first decision is sincerely focused on the short-term consequences for the millions of victims of mean Republicanism, as ever-more-slightly tempered by corporation-bound Democrats. The second decision is focused sincerely on intermediate and long-term consequences for regular people of continuing indefinitely the rule of the United States by irresponsible, illegitimate, anti-democratic corporate power. The decisions arise from different intuitions; perhaps from different world views; certainly from different assays of the democratic crisis. But we must stay close together, however we vote, because the 1996 election is not the point. The point is reclaiming our country, seizing it back from the runaway corporate system and its baronial CEOs who have seized it away from us. That showdown campaign begins the day after the November election."

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Thanks to Contributors

By Eric Sheffield

Thank You to these recent contributors --

Rockbridge Greens: Mel Leasure, Charlotte & John Morgan, Cathryn & David Harbor, Tim Welsh, Adrienne Hall Bodie, Arvid Christiansen, Daniel Metraux, Elizabeth Trail, Collette & Michael Barry-Rec, Elizabeth & David Daystar, Beth Pearse

Charlottesville Greens: Heather Gay and Kierk Sorensen, Elizabeth Thompson.

Tidewater Greens: Ira Goldreyer.

Northern Virginia Greens: David Eisen, Maria Mazzenga & Stephen Kane, Amy Southwick.

Blue Mt. Greens: John Achin

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Welcome to New Members

By Eric Sheffield

Rockbridge Greens: Tim Welsh, Daniel Metraux, Collette & Michael Barry-Rec, Beth Pearse, Carol Hurst

Greens of Virginia: Peter Fosl, John Gallini, Lella Russell Smith, Tian Harter, Dana Craster, Ted & Barbara DuPuy, Nancy Amdur, Elena Day

Blue Mt. Greens: Jerilynn Merritt, Catherine Hilz

Tidewater Greens: Ira M. Goldreyer.

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Pay Taxes for Peace, Not War

by Ed Pearson

Most U.S. taxpayers, including members of the Greens of Virginia, are probably not aware that they are war taxpayers. We have all heard that there are two things for sure, death and taxes. What is not necessarily true is taxes for death.

It has been reported that throughout recorded history there have been only two weeks when there wasn't a war being fought somewhere on our planet. War is not peace. War does not bring peace -- never has, never will. Then why not consider doing something else? Insanity has been defined as doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. If you want something different, you must do something different.

Tax money must be used for peace if we are to achieve peace. I invite Greens to consider making a choice between the history of death and war tax and the possibility of peace. As a peaceworker, it makes sense for me to put my money in the service of my beliefs. Tax money must be used for peace if we are to achieve peace. What are the obstacles and how can someone begin the process?

Ignorance and fear are the two main factors that stand in the way of peace taxpaying. As a pacifist and conscientious person who wishes to live in accord with my highest religious beliefs, I am protected by the U.S. Constitution. Regretably, that protection has eroded over the years and now the public and political perception is that I no longer have the moral and legal right to choose to pay my full share of taxes toward peace. Most taxpayers are afraid to stand up to the IRS and tell them that they want their taxes used for peace.

By inserting a peace taxpaying plank in the Greens platform to reaffirm that right, the Greens could play a pivotal role in the peace process. I invite the Greens to consider making a choice between the history of death and war tax and the possibility of peace in the future through peace taxpaying. For more information contact me, Ed Pearson, at:

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