

Building the Green Party into a Mass-Membership Party

The Problem: Green Party is underfunded and weakly organized at the grassroots.

- Green Party is too weak to compete for power with corporate parties.
- Green Party is too weak to be a credible alternative that can attract a mass base of progressive refugees from Democrats, progressive independents, people of color voting Democrat defensively, or downwardly mobile working class whites ignored by the Democrats and courted by white nationalist Republicans.
- Green Party cannot afford the staff to support organizing and administering a mass party.

The Solution: Restructure as a mass-membership party of dues-paying members organized into local affiliates.

- Dues give us the **financial resources** we need. Sanders campaign proves the money is there.
- Locals enable **mass participation**, where grassroots people can be active in the party.
- Locals give us the grassroots organization for **grassroots democracy and accountability** of state and national representatives, candidates, and elected officials.
- Locals are where we can **unify the working class** by building relationships and solidarity across lines of race, geography (race and class segregation), and occupational divisions within the working class (union vs. non-union, big vs. small business, private vs. public workers, workers in the welfare and prisons systems vs. workers working for the welfare and prison systems).
- Locals are where we can **build social movements**. Before the 1960s and the rise of the nonprofit-industrial complex, social movements weren't built by single-issue organizations competing for grants. They were built by self-funding, dues-paying parties, labor unions, and farmers alliances. In latter half of the 19th century, the labor unions and farmers alliances organized the parties. In the first half of the 20th century the left parties organized unions and consumer, peace, and civil rights campaigns.
- Locals are where we can conduct **political education** in study groups and forums about social problems, the system, and the power structure, about what our policy platform and social vision should be, and about how to organize and maintain party organizations, issue campaigns, and electoral campaigns.

History of Political Parties – Summary

- Parties arose out of legislative caucuses for top-down mobilization of voters.
- Left parties arose as mass-membership structures in response, as bottom-up democratic organizations to advance reform platforms and hold leaders accountable.
- The mass-membership party was an invention of the left in the late nineteenth century.
- The mass-membership grew out of working people's movements fighting for the franchise and labor rights and protections in Europe.
- The mass-membership party was how working people organized themselves into effective national parties based on grassroots local organizations and self-funding with membership dues.
- The mass-membership party was how working people were able to compete for power with the old top-down elitists parties of the landed and later business elites.
- The mass-membership party won the franchise for the unpropertied and labor and social reforms for the common people.
- The mass-membership party was still-born in the United States during the abolitionist, populist, and socialist phases of left third party politics because they never consolidated a structure of dues-paying members organized into active local branches.

- US left third parties (abolitionist, populist, green) organized on top-down model of Democrats and Republicans.
- Socialist Party (1900-1936) did set up a small mass-membership party (120,000 at 1912 peak), but was undermined by internal sectarianism (expelling the IWW in 1912), government repression around World War I, and eventually fusion with Democrats (a process that ran from the 1936 American Labor Party to the 1958 victory of “realignment” proponents – entering the Democratic Party)

History of Political Parties – Details

- Parties arose historically in concert with the rise of representative assemblies as parts of the state.
- The Roman Senate had them (Patricians representing aristocratic landed nobles and Plebians representing wealthy middle-class merchants).
- Modern parties began in England during the English Civil War (1642-1651) (Parliamentarians or "Roundheads" vs. Royalists or "Cavaliers") and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (pro-parliament Whigs vs. pro-monarch Tories).

US two-party system developed on the model of the Mother Country British 2-party system:

1st Party System (1787-1824):

- Federalists (Hamiltonians, aristocratic, pro England, pro commercial elites) vs.
- Democratic Republicans (Jeffersonians, democratic, pro Revolutionary France [but not Haiti!], pro democratic mass of middle class farmers and artisans)

2nd Party System (1824-1854):

- The aristocratic Federalists died as democratic ideals prevailed
- Property qualifications on franchise were eliminated
- Democratic Republicans split into Democrats and National Republicans, or Whigs.
- Democrats support strong President and minimal federal government (free trade, no nationally-chartered banks).
- Whigs support strong Congress and federal action (tariffs, public investment, nationally-chartered banks) for economic modernization.

3rd Party System (1854-1896):

- Whigs divide and die over slavery.
- Republicans, growing out of third party movement (Liberty, Free Soil), becomes second party in Congress in 1856 and 1858 and captures Presidency in 1860 in four-way race.
- After Civil War, Republicans represent protectionist big and small business
- After Civil War, Democrats represent free trade big business, southern planters and white supremacy, and northern ethnic working class urban machines.
- Both major parties agree on tight money deflationary policies against challenges of populist third parties – Greenback Labor, Anti-Monopoly, Union Labor, People's – who elected thousands to local, state and federal office.

4th Party System (1896-1932):

- Democrats vs. Republicans.
- Democrats: southern planters, pro free trade business, urban ethnic machines, pro-regulation

progressive wing.

- Republicans: northern big and small business, pro tariffs, pro-regulation progressive wing.
- The direct primary system is introduced by progressives, ostensibly to end undemocratic party boss-ruled conventions, but also to disorganize democratic membership convention system of the Socialists who are taking over city governments.
- Primaries atomize votes and give power to candidate organizations and their rich investors.
- Socialist Party and state- and local-based Farmer-Labor, Progressive, and Labor parties elect thousands to local, state, and federal office on platforms of labor rights, social insurance, and public ownership of utilities and – in some cases – big businesses.

5th Party System (1932-1976):

- Democrats vs. Republicans.
- Democrats' liberal New Deal Coalition dominates.
- Bases of parties remain the largely the same except that most blacks and some northern farmers move into Democratic Party.
- Liberal and conservative wings in both parties
- Democrats enact watered-down versions of Socialists' social insurance programs.
- Labor and the Left enter the Democrats in 1936 (led by Communists' Popular Front policy, followed over the next two decades by Socialists and Farmer-Labor parties).
- Left third parties tiny and have no influence on national policy debate.

6th Party System (1976-2016):

- Democrats vs. Republicans.
- Both parties move right with roll-back of New Deal/Great Society reforms and continued growth of militarism and imperialism.
- Professional middle-class moves from Republicans to Democrats.
- Southern white Democrats and northern ethnic white Democrats move into Republican Party. Republican ideology of deregulation, law and order, and social program retrenchment dominate national politics even when Democrats (Carter, Clinton, Obama) hold the presidency.
- While the Democrats and Republicans disagree on social issues (abortion, guns, god, gays), they agree on an ideology of meritocratic competition where well-rewarded professionals and owners and downwardly mobile workers all get their just deserts.
- Both corporate parties have no real plans or intention to reduce economic inequality.
- Democrats with corporate funders setting the agenda rely on a mass voter base of social liberals – the professional-managerial class plus people of color voting defensively against Republican social conservatism.
- Consequently, working class voters of all colors increasingly abstain.
- Third parties have no influence on national party debate.
- Of many post-60s New Left third party initiatives (Peace and Freedom, People's, La Raza Unida, Citizens, National Black Independent Political Party, New Party, Labor Party, Working Families Party), only Green Party survives as a national independent party and elects a few hundred to local – and a few to state – office between 1986 and 2016.

7th Party System? (2016-?):

- The two-party system may be disintegrating opening up big opportunity for the Greens.
- A three-, four-, or five-party system may be emerging:
 - Corporate/militarist Democrats

- Progressive/populist/socialist Greens
- Breakup of the Republican coalition: three factions on the right fighting for the Republican brand or forming new parties:
 - Establishment Republicans: socially conservative corporate militarists
 - Trumpist White Nationalists: socially conservative, anti-immigrant, racist, anti trade, isolationist
 - Libertarians: socially moderate to liberal, free market, anti social programs, anti-war
- Trump and Sanders lead revolts of the popular bases of the corporate-led Republican and Democratic parties.
- Will Republicans divide between pro-corporate militarists and Trumpist white nationalists?
- Will Democrats divide between pro-corporate militarists represented by Clinton and progressive populists and democratic socialists represented by Sanders?
- Will the Republican corporate militarists merge with the corporate militarists in the Clinton-led Democratic Party?
- Will the Green Party incorporate the disaffected Sandernistas?
- Will Green Party win over working class people of color who now vote defensively for socially liberal but economically conservative Democrats?
- Will the Green Party win over pissed-off working class whites from reactionary white nationalist appeal of Trumpism?

History of U.S Party Structures:

Top-Down Electoral Mobilization Structures Funded by the Rich vs.

Bottom-Up Mass-Membership Structures Funded by the Members

- Democrats, Republicans, and Greens now conform to state election laws designed primarily to determine who can vote in primaries.
- The Green Party in the United States is structured like the Democrats and Republicans, where their party enrollment bases are organizationally detached from formal party committees.
- The candidate organizations and their funders are the real party power structures and run the parties from the top down.
- State election laws vary by state but have these common characteristics:
 - Foremost concern of state election laws: who votes in primaries
 - Whether closed based on party enrollment, or open based on choosing ballot at primary election, or hybrid semi-closed or semi-open systems
 - “Members” just tell the state what party they are in, no matter what their politics.
 - No requirement to agree with party principles.
 - “Members” have the right as atomized, unorganized individuals to vote in state-run party primaries and caucuses, but only from among candidates pre-selected by candidates organizations and their funders.
 - Secondary concern of state election laws: Party committee structures
 - Whether members elected at primaries, caucuses, or conventions or appointed by existing officials, committees dominated by self-selected insiders.
 - Insiders know the rules. Grassroots have no ongoing organization through which to participate.
 - Committee members are not accountable to organized members. No organized local base of members to which they must answer.
 - Party committee functions:
 - Primarily for electoral mobilization.

- Not the site of policy development or planning campaigns around issues.
- Most people join for career and business reasons: to get rewarded with government or campaign jobs and contracts.
- Real Party Power Structure: Candidate organizations and their rich investors.
 - Party committees and platforms are trumped by candidate organizations.
 - Example 1:
 - Vermont Rainbow Coalition captured the state Democratic executive committee and wrote the state platform.
 - Gov. Madeline Kunin, Sen. Pat Leahy, and other Democrats ignored party organization. Their base was their own campaign organizations and the banks, utilities, and real estate interests that funded them.
 - VT Rainbow Coalition then joined with Burlington Progressives who had elected Sanders mayor, several city council members, and a couple of state legislators to form the Vermont Progressive Party (which has since co-opted itself by doing fusion or cross-endorsements with the Democratic Party).
 - Example 2:
 - Green campaign organizations such as Nader in 2000 and Stein in 2016 have far more funding, staff, and supporters than formal party structures.
 - Same situation in most local and statewide Green campaigns.

Legislative Caucus System (1780s to 1830s)

- Until 1831, before there were conventions, party caucuses in legislative bodies selected party nominees.
- Legislative caucus nominations were increasingly considered by the people a violation of the republican ideal.
- Legislative caucuses were increasingly regarded as elitist, undemocratic, and not representative of the entire party by increasingly assertive electorate.

The Open Convention System (1830s to 1890s)

- Party conventions were an American invention in the era of Jacksonian Democracy, which also removed property qualification on the franchise.
- In 1830, the Anti-Masons, an anti-elitist third party which would provide some of the initial leaders of the Liberty and Free Soil parties, held the first national convention.
- The first national convention of a major party was held in 1832, when the Democrats nominated Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren as his running mate.
- The open convention process that developed was to call party members to precinct caucuses that elected delegates to county conventions, which in turn elected delegates to state conventions, which in turn elected delegates to national conventions.
- The adoption of party platforms moved from legislative caucuses to party conventions, starting with third parties, the Anti-Masons in 1830, the National Democrats or Whigs in 1832, and the Equal Rights Party (Loco-Focos) in 1836.
- The Democrats were the first major party to adopt a platform in 1840.
- While more democratic than nomination by party legislative caucuses, the problem was that anyone could participate no matter what their political principles.
- The open convention system became undemocratic:
 - Boss-led political patronage machines came to dominate the Democrats and Republicans.
 - Opportunists in the minority major party (Republicans in the South, Democrats in the

- North) who were not committed to the populist reform program flooded the farmer-labor populist party conventions to promote fusion campaigns.
- The farmer-labor populist movement threw up a series of national parties: Greenback Labor, Anti-Monopoly, Union Labor, and People's between 1878 and 1896.
 - But fusion at the state and local level repeatedly created problems: when fusion slates won, the major party coalition partners tended to drop the populist program in office.
 - The People's Party gets co-opted by the Democrats in 1896 under the open convention system:
 - The People's Party base was millions organized into hundreds of dues-paying county Farmers Alliances: the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union (Southern Alliance), the Colored Farmers' National Alliance and Cooperative Union, and the National Farmers' Alliance (Northern Alliance).
 - But using the open convention system, major party politicians in the minority party of their region (Republicans in the South, Democrats in the North) packed People's Party conventions where the Farmers' Alliances were not well-organized.
 - The result was fusion campaigns in many states and ultimately the cross-endorsement of Democrat William Jennings Bryan in 1896, which killed the People's Party.
 - As Lawrence Goodwyn noted in *The Populist Moment*,

In democratic terms, the structural weakness of the People's Party evolved from the failure of its organizers, in the founding convention of 1892, to understand that the third party, to be authentically democratic, had to be organized as a mass party with a mass membership. It was organized instead, like all large American parties before and after, as a representative party, with elite cadres of party regulars dominating the organizational machinery from precinct to national convention. The People's Party spoke, rather more tellingly than most American parties have ever done, in the name of the people. But in structural terms the People's Party was not made up of the people; it was comprised of party elites. Its ultimate failure, therefore, was conceptual – a failure on a theoretical level of democratic analysis.

The Primary System (1900 to the present)

- Although the open convention system survives as a caucus system in some states alongside primaries, the direct primary was promulgated by the progressive movement and spread to almost all the states between 1899 and 1920.
- Progressives were trying to get nominations out of the “smoke-filled rooms” of party bosses, but also trying to prevent the success of the democratic convention system of their Socialist Party rivals who were taking over many city governments.
- The result was that party nominations were handed from party bosses to capitalist bosses who could pre-select the options voters had in primaries in the preceding “money primary” where the rich invested in the candidates they preferred.
- The voters were atomized and unorganized with no grassroots structures through which to discuss issues, plan campaigns, agree on platforms, nominate candidates, elect party leaders, and hold candidates and leaders accountable.
- Primaries retained the problem of open conventions: anybody could participate in the party primary no matter what their politics or participation in the party.

The Membership Convention System (Early 20th Century Socialist, Progressive, and Farmer-Labor Parties)

- The Socialist Party developed a different structure: the democratic membership convention.
- They drew two lessons from the end of the People's Party, which many of the founders had

been members of:

- First: Independent politics. Party constitution required no electoral coalitions with Democrats or Republicans.
- Second: Only members who pay dues can vote on party decisions.
- The Socialists didn't want their conventions flooded by progressive Democrats and Republicans with different agendas.
- The national party was a federation of state parties, but state parties had to meet minimum requirements (e.g., at least 10 locals of at least 5 members or 200 members in total in the 1917 party constitution) and pay dues on a per capita basis to support the national party (e.g., about \$10 per member in 1917 in inflation-adjusted dollars).
- Socialists maintained their membership convention system alongside the primary system: Socialists nominated by convention and then campaigned for their nominees in primaries if necessary and almost always winning those primaries.
- The Socialists argued against the primary system as less democratic than their membership conventions.
- In a discussion of the spread of primary elections, the Socialist Call in 1914 denounced the progressives' push for direct primaries:
- In their eagerness to get the reputation for being democrats, those pseudo-democrats who are running things just now want to break up political parties. If they really wanted to have real democracy, they would pattern parties after our party.
- The Socialists realized that the primary system atomized and disorganized the people.
- So did the elites in the 2-party system: Example of NY Socialists in 1920:
 - 10 Socialists were elected and seated in NY state Assembly after the 1918 election
 - In the climate of the Red Scare and Palmer Raids against the anti-war Socialists following World War I, the New York State Assembly expelled the five socialists elected in 1920.
 - A special election was called to replace them, but their districts re-elected all of them.
 - They were not seated by the Assembly again.
 - In order to help justify its actions, the Assembly's Judiciary Committee wrote a massive 4,428 page report on “Revolutionary and Subversive Movements Abroad and at Home.” The section on the Socialist Party of America is revealing:

The expression 'Socialist Party of America' is really a misnomer for the group operating under this name is not in a party....The Socialist Party is in reality a membership organization....A distinction must be drawn at this time between the members of the Socialist Party of America and the enrolled Socialists....A person enrolling under the Socialist Party emblem on registration day in this state does not thereby become a member of the Socialist Party of America.
 - In other words, the last thing the power structure wanted was for the unorganized working class to become well-organized politically.
- The Wisconsin Progressive Party, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, the North Dakota Non-Partisan League, and several local Labor and Farmer-Labor parties around the country used the Membership Convention System.
- As the 1936 presidential election approached, the Wisconsin Progressives and Minnesota Farmer-Laborites had elected 2 governors, 4 U.S. Senators, and 13 members of the U.S. House.
- Major unions such as the UAW and many local labor councils passed resolutions in favor of an independent Labor party campaign in 1936.
- The Democratic National Committee polled and found a FDR would lose if a three-way race with a progressive third party.

- Floyd Olson, the Farmer-Labor Governor of Minnesota and leading contender to lead a third party run, died of stomach cancer in 1936.
- Huey Long of Louisiana, another possible candidate, was assassinated in 1935 a month after announcing his candidacy.
- The Democrats went all out to co-opt the third party movement.
- FDR and labor Democrats created a fusion-oriented American Labor Party in New York with FDR at the top of the ticket.
- The FDR Democrats made deals with Farmer-Laborites, Progressives, and Non-Partisans, and that cut off the third party option in 1936 and eventually led to their merger into the Democratic Party in the 1944, 1946, and 1956 respectively.
- The labor movement and the Communists (about 40,000 members in 1936) led much of the left into the Democrats' New Deal coalition in the 1936 election.

The Green Party as a Mass-Membership Party

Dues

- If someone isn't committed enough to contribute a modest amount to support the party, why should we give them the right to participate in decision making?
- Without clear membership standards, party organizations are subject to the problem of people flooding in when the party is ebbing (e.g., the Nader campaign), making decisions without the experience of committed members, and then flooding out when the party is waning (e.g., post-Nader backlash), leaving the committed party members to live with the consequences.
- This is how the Green Party structure was changed from the original mass-membership structure of dues-paying membership organized into locals into the top-down mobilization model of the Democrats and Republicans.
- Without clear membership standards and leadership bodies accountable directly to organized grassroots members, it is impossible to have a principled party where leaders, candidates, and elected officials are directly accountable to the grassroots membership.
- The switch by the Greens to the top-down mobilization structure of the Democrats and Republicans largely defunded the national party and disorganized the base of the party.
- Dues could be submitted to the national with a significant percentage rebated to organized state party organizations, which in turn could rebate half of that to local parties.
- Or states could collect dues and provide a per capita to the national (say \$10 per member like the Socialist Party did) and share the rest between the state and locals.
- Dues could be sliding scale, with a low-income level starting at what the populists in the Farmers Alliances paid, \$30 a year in today's inflation-adjusted dollars, with \$10 dollars going to the national and \$20 to the state and its locals.
- What kind of money could this amount raise?
 - Assuming everyone is poor and pays to minimum of \$30 a year:
 - 10,000 members would raise \$300,000. That's almost three times the 2016 GP-US net operating budget of about \$115,000, which it takes \$80,000 spent on fundraising to raise.
 - 100,000 members would raise \$3 million. At this point we would have nearly matched the Socialist Party peak of 120,000 members in 1912. We could support paid organizers in every state.
 - 1 million members would raise \$30 million. At this point we are approaching the scale of the Knights of Labor (700,000 members at its 1886 peak) and the three Farmers

Alliances (7.2 million at their 1890 peak) of the populist era.

- \$30 is low. ACORN and the National Welfare Rights Organization required \$5 a month or \$60 a year.
- Assume median income gives \$10 a month, \$120 a year, and median is average of all dues payers.
- How much money would this raise?
 - 10,000 members would raise \$1.2 million.
 - 100,000 members would raise \$12 million
 - 1 million members would raise \$120 million.
 - The Sanders campaign had 2.5 million donors. This is doable.

Locals

- There is no necessary conflict between encouraging locals and state parties.
- The national party could require require a signed membership form for all individual members so there is one membership standard for all Greens and an equal basis for representation based on one member, one vote.
- The membership form should have pledge the member agrees to by signing that affirms their agreement with basic party principles, such as political independence from the corporate parties and money and the four pillars of Green politics: Ecology, Nonviolence, Social Justice, Democracy
- The current representation formulas for the national committee and national convention are a complex mix of proxies for living, breathing members, including campaign strength, in-state voting strength, Presidential voting strength, and number of members (defined as enrollees in close primary states, internal membership role in open primary states, or signatures on state party ballot access petitions).
- Under this formula, the national committee representatives and national convention delegates are detached from any grassroots body of members who can instruct them and hold them accountable.
- The members themselves (however defined) are not organized into party organizations that directly elect their convention and national committee representatives.
- The national should require state parties to meet a minimum level of local organization to be affiliated because we have too many virtual state parties with a leadership body and no ongoing local organizing.
- Locals should have regular meetings and activities.
- The national and state parties should have paid organizers who can make sure the party is responsive to member needs and can teach basic organizing skills, such as:
 - how to structure a local that is functional and democratic
 - how to conduct business meetings
 - how to recruit new members one on one
 - how to hold public forums
 - how to conduct political education in study groups and discussions after topical presentations
 - how to participate in or initiate issue-based campaigns
 - how to actively (not passively) leaflet and table at public events and on the street
 - how to run write election or issue-based campaign plans
 - how to raise money
 - how to petition

- how to canvass by phone and door-to-door
- how to keep databases of members and supporters
- how to communicate regularly with members and supporters
- how to build relationships and solidarity with communities and constituencies under-represented in the local

Green objections to membership dues.

Dues in political parties are illegal.

- Not true. See *March Fong Eu v. San Francisco County Democratic Central Committee* 489 U.S. 214 (1989)
- In the U.S. Supreme Court case of *March Fong Eu v. San Francisco County Democratic Central Committee*, various Democratic, Republican, and Libertarian party committees sued the California Attorney General saying that various provision of state election law, including prescriptions for the dues county committee members must pay and the right of party committees to campaign for their endorsed candidates in primaries, violated their party rights of free association and free speech under the 1st and 14th Amendments.
- The U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the election laws AG Eu was trying to enforce were unconstitutional “since they burden the First Amendment rights of political parties and their members without serving a compelling state interest.”
- While the ruling said the state election law cannot prescribe the dues members must pay, it certainly did not prohibit dues. It said parties have the right to determine dues for themselves.
- The only decision-making right state election laws confer non-dues paying “members” – i.e., registrants or enrollees in close primary states, those who ask for Libertarain ballots in open primary states – is the right to vote in primaries for nominations to public and, in many states, party office.
- All other decisions can be made by dues-paying membership bodies.
- The Libertarian Party has long apportioned state delegations to their national convention based on the paid members in each state. It has had no legal challenges.

Dues are a poll tax. Dues will discourage poor and working class people from participating.

- A political party is a voluntary private association, not a public accommodation.
- In fact, poor and working class people contribute a far higher proportion of their income to charitable (church, etc.) and dues-paying civic and labor (NAACP, unions, etc.) organizations than do middle class professionals and business owners and the corporate elite.

Next steps

- If the national is not ready to get serious and state organizing a dues-paying mass-membership structure, we can do it in our states and create an organized base to transform the national party in the future.
- Green Party of New York adopted a hybrid membership model, representing organized counties (meeting a minimum level of organization and members) based on both party enrollment and paid members.