

# **Green Politics at an Impasse**

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# Introduction

On December 1-2, 1995, the German Greens' annual congress in Bremen split over the question of sending German troops as part of imperialism's "peace-keeping" force in Bosnia. Led by Joschka Fischer, a leader of the right-wing realo current in the Greens, 38% of the delegates and most of the parliamentarians supported the sending of troops. Just two years earlier, only 10% of delegates at an extraordinary party meeting voted for the same motion.

In an open letter to delegates in the lead up to the 1995 congress, Fischer accused party members of "fleeing from reality" in opposing troop deployment. In the end, more than 40 of the Green deputies defied the conference decision and voted with the conservative Kohl government to send the troops.

How did this sorry state of affairs in the German Greens — a party founded just 16 years ago on the four principles of environmental sustainability, peace and disarmament, social justice and grassroots democracy — come about so rapidly and so completely?

Answering this question requires an understanding of the basic content and trajectory of Green politics as it has developed in the world to date. Such an assessment must also be the starting point for any discussion about how to advance the red-green political project on the eve of the 21st century. ■

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# A Middle-Class Political Phenomenon

There are currently around 65 Green parties in the world. Almost all were established after 1975. While these parties now cover all continents, it is generally only in the advanced capitalist countries that the Greens have developed into anything resembling a significant factor in national politics. Where Greens do exist in the Third World, they have become a noteworthy force only in more industrialised countries such as Brazil.

This pattern of development is not simply the consequence of less democratic space for such formations in the Third World. Rather, Green parties internationally are distinguishable by their urban middle-class base and outlook. In countries where the layer of affluent middle-class professionals is relatively small and underdeveloped, the Greens have failed to get even a toehold in national politics.

In both Germany and Britain, surveys of Green party voters confirm this. In Germany, a number of studies conducted between 1980 and 1984 found that Green party supporters were, in relation to society as a whole, under-represented among blue-collar workers, lower and middle-income white-collar workers, and in the rural areas; and over-represented among professionals, younger age groups, and those with higher education. In 1983, an ideological self-assessment of German Greens' supporters found that only 47% identified as "left" or "centre-left" (9% of these identified as "left"), while 53% identified as "centre" or right of centre (including 4% who explicitly identified as "right" wing).

In Britain, in 1989, Green party voters were overwhelmingly well-educated, salaried or self-employed professionals according to research conducted by the Department of Government at the University of Strathclyde ["Flash in the pan? The rise and (apparent) fall of the British Green Party." Glasgow, 1989]. On average, Green voters in Britain identified themselves as just to the right of centre on the political spectrum. Of those who voted Green in the 1989 European Parliament elections, more had previously voted for the Liberal Democratic Party (which locates itself somewhere

between the Tories and the British Labour Party) than any other party.

In the advanced capitalist countries, the Green parties grew out of the environment and anti-nuclear movements that developed from the end of the 1960s. These were significant movements uniting students, workers, the New Left intellectuals and activists, Third World solidarity campaigns, and an emerging women's liberation movement. They engaged in diverse protest activity and organising, and were the main radical forces in motion in those countries at the time.

By the early 1980s, however, these were mass movements on the wain. They had failed to rid the world, or even their own countries of nuclear weapons, the bourgeois parties had learned to talk peace and environment and the capitalist economic crisis and government austerity drives had shifted the focus of public concern from environmental and foreign policy issues to jobs and the economy. Some of the leaders of these movements turned to political solutions and formed Green electoral parties.

To some extent this move into the electoral arena reflected a demoralisation, a giving up on the mass action perspective which holds that masses of people can change government policy and practice through taking independent, extra-parliamentary action. It also flowed from the sense of frustration in the movements and an impatience in the face of failure.

While many of the early leaders of the Greens were former socialists and left activists on a rightward trajectory into parliamentary politics, the Green parties they set in motion appealed to and attracted many people who were increasingly disillusioned with mainstream politics and parties. As the capitalist economic crisis after 1975 pushed governments to the right throughout the advanced capitalist world, growing numbers of people, rebelling against capitalism's austerity drive which was being carried out by conservative and social-democratic parties alike, looked to the Greens as an alternative. The Greens' initial membership base was therefore pushing to the left. In Germany the Greens estimated that, between 1983-87, around 80% of their votes and almost half their members were coming from former Social Democratic Party voters. In Australia, the US and many West European countries the pattern was the same. ■

# An Opportunity for the Left

Politically, the emergence of the Greens was a big advance over the environmentalism of the 1970s. The formation of parties and the need to engage with bourgeois parliamentary politics challenged many of the simplistic solutions to the escalating environmental crisis being advocated by the ecology movement until that time, and broadened the discussion beyond local conservation issues to encompass the linkages between environmental and social problems on an international level.

The formation of Green parties created more space for the left. Their electoral challenge created a real potential for opening up a complete restructuring of the political scene which could end the automatic dominance of the ruling-class parties. And this could spur the growth of all progressive movements, inside and outside the electoral arena.

In this context, it would have been as a serious mistake on the part of revolutionary socialists not to orient to and help build the Green parties as they emerged. In Australia and around the advanced capitalist world, many socialists abstained from participation in Green party projects, pointing to the incompleteness of the Greens' programs for social change, their largely middle-class membership and their electoral focus. What these socialists failed to acknowledge was that in the process of their formation, the Greens were attracting new forces, leftward moving people from the social-democratic parties and the mass movements. A left dynamic developed around the Greens.

Because the Greens were attracting the votes of and even organising a large proportion of their society's critical potential at the time, they were playing a positive function in the class struggle. Abstaining from the Greens was especially absurd in cases where Green parties allowed freedom of organisation for socialist parties participating in them. Unlike the British Greens, who proscribed members of other tendencies from their membership in their founding constitution, the German Greens did not proscribe organised tendencies, allowing factions and independence of political position, finances and propaganda work.

In this country, where the Australian Greens originated from a network of local

Green parties established since the mid-1980s, the Democratic Socialist Party was the only left political organisation to seriously participate in the Greens until proscription of members of other parties was introduced in August 1991. Had the Australian Greens been moving in a progressive direction in terms of party policy and structure, and had it been attracting new forces and large numbers of people into political activity, the DSP may have decided at that point to accept the proscription clause and dissolve itself into the Greens. But these were not the conditions at the time. On the contrary, by the time the Australian Greens was formally announced as a federal party in 1992, its base was narrowing, the movements were in decline, and the Greens' political trajectory was clearly to the right. ■

# Influence of the Progressive Movements

The structure, platform and practices of each Green party reflects the particular national social, economic and political conditions in which it arose and developed. However, a couple of key factors influenced the development of all Green parties' program and policies, their size and influence on politics over time, and their electoral success.

The first was the particular state of the social movements in each country, and their influence in the Green parties that emerged. In general, in those countries where the traditional party system was in crisis, but where the social movements grew little or unevenly and were not strong or independent enough to meet the challenge, more right-wing, ecologically focussed parties developed. This was the case in Belgium where the Greens stood for upholding traditional values, and in France where the peace movement hardly existed and the Green party, the first in Western Europe, formed to the right on the political spectrum.

Green parties were the strongest and most radical where they arose from and managed to incorporate stronger social movements. In Germany, for example, with approximately 7000 nuclear weapons stored by the Western powers on German soil, the peace movement was very strong. By 1977 there were over 1500 anti-nuclear groups in Germany which organised occupations of proposed nuclear sites of between 20-70,000 people several times a year between the late 1970s and early '80s. In 1982, 300,000 people demonstrated against the NATO summit in Bonn, and in Autumn of 1983 over one million people went onto the streets for disarmament. In these conditions, the Greens' membership grew from 18,000 in 1980 to 30,000 in 1983, and by 1985 it had 40,000 members.

The German movement was relatively independent of the bourgeois political parties, all of which held explicitly pro-armament positions. The trade union leaderships, tied into the Social Democratic Party (SPD), opposed the movement and this pushed it in the direction of an ecological formulation of the problems of war and imperialism.



Due to the influence of independent, anti-capitalist currents which were able to lead the movement in a context of rapid growth and radicalisation, however, this formulation was a progressive one.

So the left was strong in the German Greens from the outset. It brought considerable campaigning experience and resources, and a perspective in which ecology and economy were not counter-posed into the formation of the new party.

The breadth of the German Greens was its strength. In addition to a large proportion of the anti-nuclear movement activists, the participation of significant sections of the feminist movement, independent socialists and ex-SPD members resulted in the very progressive political program of the German Greens which consciously linked environmental sustainability and disarmament to social justice and democracy.

In Britain, the situation was quite different. Many years of Conservative Party government gave left cover to the Labour Party, limiting the space for independent critical politics to develop. The Labour Party had a strong grip on the social movements and while the development of the British Greens, which formed as the Ecology Party in 1975, did draw from the anti-nuclear/peace movement during the 1980s, it was nevertheless weaker than in Germany from the outset. Its membership has never exceeded 20,000 and has averaged more like 10,000. In addition, the existence of a combative left minority in the British labour movement and a sharper left-right confrontation in national politics also reduced the space for a left or socially progressive Green party.

In Australia, the Green parties around the country grew out of a peace movement which was strong enough by the early 1980s to generate the Nuclear Disarmament Party which got Western Australian peace activist Jo Vallentine elected to the Senate in 1984, and out of mass campaigns around environmental issues such as stopping the Franklin Dam in Tasmania in the early '80s and later against logging in native forests. These movements formed the basis for the emerging Greens with the first significant electoral victory in Tasmania where five Green Independents were elected to state parliament in May 1989.

But these were also movements which were increasingly controlled and coopted by the Australian Labor Party, both in opposition and in office. By the time the national Green party project was being seriously discussed in the early 1990s, the movements had been thoroughly demobilised — either incorporated into Labor's political framework or demoralised in the face of defeat. Inside the emerging Green parties these conditions made it much easier for the right wing to establish control.

In the final analysis, while in almost all cases the Green parties were thrown up by

the only forces in motion in 1980s politics in the West (the trade union movement being under the political hegemony of the social-democrats), and while these movements were their source of strength, the rapid move to the right of the Greens was very much a consequence of the actual thinness of this base.

Not only were these movements in decline, but, being led by middle-class forces, and with limited trade union participation, they were also relatively small and weak — inexperienced in struggle and relatively divorced from an understanding of the major class forces and structures of capitalist society. In this sense the origins of the Greens is very different from that of the Labour parties that formed at the end of the 19th century and which had the whole weight of the organised working class behind them. ■

# State of the Organised Left

Within these objective conditions, the most significant factor determining the political development of the Green parties was the state of the organised left in each country.

The leaders of most Green parties in their formative days varied in specifics but generally came out of and reflected a fragmented and disillusioned left milieu at the time. The exception here is the British Greens which formed out of the conservation movement with virtually no left in the leadership.

The radical left that had emerged out the student radicalisation of the late 1960s had experienced a crisis of perspective and organisation in the mid '70s. Most leftists either veered into Euro-communism or into a pluralist movementism. In both cases, equating socialism with Stalinism, they rejected outright the basic precepts of Marxism, either capitulating totally to social-democratic politics or placing their hopes instead in the new cross-class social movements of the '70s as the force that would, they argued, through struggle around single issues, spontaneously develop a revolutionary consciousness and bring about the fundamental social change that Stalinism had failed to deliver.

Among the most influential founders of the German Greens, for example, were “eco-socialists” like Thomas Ebermann and Rainer Trampert who brought with them a large layer of former members of Marxist parties and independent leftists from the movements. In the US, anarchist Murray Bookchin and former New Leftist Howard Hawkins had a significant theoretical influence in the formation of the Greens. And in Australia, some of the New Leftists, later grouped in the Rainbow Alliance, along with Drew Hutton and others from the anarchist tradition, former Trotskyists like Hall Greenland, and libertarian socialists like Tony Harris, all participated in different ways during the early '80s to influence the initial development of Green politics here. Later, environmental activists like Bob Brown and peace movement activists like Jo Vallentine and others who formed the WA Greens, played a decisive role.

In general, where organised socialists were particularly weak or had collapsed, and no new anti-Stalinist socialist forces were able to fill the vacuum, more space was

available for the emergence of Green parties.

In post-World War II Germany, for example, the Marxist left led a shadow existence. The strategic alliance with the US and the consequent integration of Germany into NATO turned anti-communism into the official state ideology. This anti-communism was a direct continuation of the anti-Bolshevism of German fascism, strengthened by the immediate presence of the “Soviet threat” in East Germany. The German Communist Party was banned in 1956, as was extra-parliamentary activity which “put direct and ongoing pressure on parliament.” The false alternative posed by this propaganda — capitalism or Stalinism — excluded any real discussion of social alternatives, and the revolutionary workers’ movement was silenced and persecuted.

This ideological assault on socialism, combined with a long-term upswing in the economy which allowed the German ruling class to throw many crumbs to the labour aristocracy, saw the West German working class, lead by the trade union bureaucracy and the SPD, thoroughly integrated into capitalist politics and lose what little strength and ability to fight back that remained after fascism’s decimation of the labour movement in the 1940s.

In these conditions — a severely weakened Marxist left and labour movement, and the SPD discredited as a radical alternative — the forces of social dissent which developed in the 1960s and ’70s gathered in new organisations and movements, eventually resulting in the formation of the German Greens.

In Australia, a combination of factors including the successful cooption of almost the entire trade union movement, led by ALP union bureaucrats, through the ALP-ACTU Prices and Incomes Accord; the hegemony of the Labor Party in all the social movements; the dissolution of the Communist Party of Australia during the late 1980s after decades of tail-ending the ALP; the failure of all broad left regroupment projects in the 1980s; and the fact that the only red-green tendency in the country, the DSP, was still too small to fill the vacuum, meant there was considerable space for the Greens to emerge as the alternative pole of attraction.

While a certain political space existed in Australia, however, like in Britain, most leftists and socialist organisations continued to either operate inside or orient to the Labor Party. The almost non-existence of an organised socialist left willing to orient to the newly emerging Greens in both countries meant that those few socialists who did were relatively easily excluded by a stronger right wing.

In Britain, the Green Socialist Forum — an alliance of anarchists, libertarians and eco-socialists who supported decentralism in the party and more social justice content in Green policy — never comprised more than 10% of the membership of the Greens.

On the flip side of this coin, in those countries where there already existed alternative

parties to the left of the major parties, and where those alternatives participated in the ecological movement, there emerged much weaker Green parties. This was the case in Denmark with the Socialist People's Party and the Left Socialists; in the Netherlands with the Pacifist Socialist Party, the Radical Party and the Communist Party (which united in 1989 to form the Green Left); and in Norway.

The persistence of stronger Communist parties, as in Italy, France, Greece and Spain, for example, also limited the space for Green parties to emerge and where they did, they tended to be more right-wing.

One subsidiary but not insignificant factor to note here is the impact of the different electoral systems on Green parties' development. In many West European countries the electoral success of the Greens was made possible, if not guaranteed, by the system of proportional representation in which just 5% of the vote would get you elected.

In Australia, Britain and the US, which have first-past-the-post systems or electoral laws that make it extremely difficult for small parties to register for and contest elections, the development of Green parties was weakened and delayed because many progressive activists lower their sights to what seems more attainable — working within and attempting to “green” the big parties which control electoral politics rather than try to build serious, independent electoral vehicles. ■

## Exclusion of the Socialists

In both Britain and Australia in the early days of those Greens parties' formation, and in Germany at a more developed stage, the left that did participate in the Greens had to be actively excluded. In the British Greens the fight was relatively brief since they had excluded many interested leftists in their first constitution. In Australia and much more so in Germany, the exclusion of the left involved a considerable, sometimes bitter struggle within the parties.

On a speaking tour of Australia in April 1990, Sarah Parkin, at the time a leader of the British Greens and secretary of the European Greens, told public meetings that Greens "had a new ecological analysis ... which demanded a new political program ... and must distance themselves from left and right." In other words, to succeed, Green parties must rid themselves of the left "liability." These statements hinted at the impending campaign by the right wing in the British Greens to rid that party of the few remaining left influences in it.

At their conference in September 1991, the right wing, led by Sarah Parkin, Sandy Irvine and Jonathan Porritt, launched an offensive against the Green Socialist Forum. They pushed through a range of organisational changes under the name "Green 2000" which included sacking the media and campaign workers in the Greens, keeping only the administrative and electoral support staff; establishing an executive council with considerable decision-making powers and two principal spokespeople and replacing the party newsletter *Econews* with a public magazine no longer open for internal discussion. Parkin was elected co-chair of the party, declaring that these changes would "professionalise" the party and orient it back to ecological politics. While the conference adopted these changes, a survey of the membership afterwards showed that the minority opposition to Green 2000 came mainly from the most active members of the party.

Just a year later, and six months after a federal election result in which the Greens scored only 1.3% of the vote, Parkin resigned her position and was joined by Irvine and Porritt in a public attack on the Greens, blaming the "radicals" in the party for the poor

election results. Of course, as good opportunists they kept their options open by formally remaining voting members of the party.

Irvine moved on to work in Green Realignment, a group “looking for more genuinely ecological policies, combined with a recognition of the need for professional organisation, recognised leaders and a willingness to manoeuvre strategically and tactically.” Parkin and Porritt joined forces in the search for “a common sustainability program among green pressure groups.” Since then, Sir Jonathan Porritt’s career as an agent for the ruling class on ecological questions has progressed in leaps and bounds, culminating in 1992 with his appointment as an adviser to Prince Charles!

In Germany, there were many attempts at an organisational level to exclude the left wing. These efforts were largely unsuccessful not only because of the strength of the left in the party from the outset, but also because of the German Greens early and significant electoral success; that is, because of the strong tendency to opportunism. In the words of Joschka Fischer again, the party’s union of “student missionaries of world proletarian revolution and nature lovers in their knee-socks [was] made possible by the recognition that by working together they could make it into parliament” (emphasis added). As it turned out, it was the very electoral success of the German Greens, the fact they had to engage in and take positions on real politics — on the class struggle — which led to the principle battle between the left and right within the party, a battle around questions of political program rather than party structure and membership. I will return to this later.

In Australia, the exclusion of the socialist left — the DSP and those individuals politically allied with us — took longer and involved more struggle, although the battle here also took place around organisational rather than programmatic questions. Between the DSP’s decision in 1989 to accept the invitation of the Sydney Greens (the first electorally registered Green party at the federal level) to participate in building a network of electorally registered Green parties around the country, and the adoption of proscription by a greatly diminished Greens formation in August 1991, the DSP played an important role in resourcing, building and influencing the politics of local Green parties in all states except Tasmania (where the Greens had formed earlier and already proscribed members of other parties from participating as full voting members), the Northern Territory (where the Greens did not form as an organised force until after 1991), and Western Australia (where the Greens had adopted proscription in their founding constitution).

During the late 1980s, the membership of the DSP had engaged in an intense discussion of world politics and the future of socialism which resulted in the adoption of a new programmatic statement on the centrality of the environment question to

any analysis of advanced capitalism and any strategy for achieving socialism. This resolution was published as the book *Socialism and Human Survival* in 1990.

In the same year, the DSP folded its party newspaper *Direct Action* and shifted its resources into underwriting the production of a new broad left newspaper, *Green Left Weekly*, which brought together sponsors and contributors from a wide range of social movements and organisations, including activists from the newly emerging Green parties. The aim of *Green Left* was to provide a forum for discussion, debate, networking and organisation of all of the critical forces in Australian society, but left environmental theory and practice was the central theme.

It was in this context that the DSP argued, alone among socialist parties in Australia at the time, that the formation of Green parties and alliances had the potential to organise and transform the broad pro-environment sentiment in the population, and the growing disillusionment with the ALP as it carried out its austerity program on behalf of Australian big business, into a powerful red-green alternative to the major parties.

The environment movement peak bodies had by then been thoroughly bureaucratised and incorporated into the ALP framework. The Australian Conservation Foundation and, increasingly, the Tasmanian Wilderness Society were actively demobilising activists, directing the movement's energies and critical potential into the lobbying of parliamentarians and the major parties. The need for an alternative, left-green vehicle for the organisation of politically independent, grassroots activity was clearer than it had ever been.

The DSP threw its resources and energies into building the local Green parties, played a key role in the formation of the Victorian Green Alliance, the South Australian Green Alliance, the Queensland Green Alliance, the ACT Green Democratic Alliance, the NSW Green Alliance and around half a dozen local Green parties in NSW, including in the working-class areas of western Sydney where the Greens' base was weakest. All of these groups, registered as separate parties with the federal and/or state electoral commissions (some in the name of DSP members), and operating with total autonomy in policy and campaigns, were united simply by an explicit commitment to the four principles of the German Greens.

The Green parties' initial commitment to grassroots democracy translated into open structures of membership and participation, and a general perspective of bringing together in united activity any and every individual and organisation that wanted to build the Green alternative.

The initial meetings of these Green parties attracted activists not only from the environment movement, but also from the Aboriginal land rights movement, the



peace movement, the women's liberation movement, some trade union activists, prisoners' rights campaigners and animal liberationists. The Greens parties were joined by members of not only the DSP, but also of the Australian Democrats, the Socialist Party of Australia (mainly in Queensland), the Indigenous People's Party and even a few from the ALP "left."

The initial diversity of the participants, in particular in NSW where 13 local Green parties had been established by 1991, resulted in a rich discussion of politics and policy, and the adoption of very progressive positions on a wide range of issues from women's right to abortion, to land rights, to jobs and the economy. The policy platform adopted by the NSW Green Alliance at its conference on March 3-4, 1990, for example, was one of the most comprehensive and progressive platforms for action for fundamental social change ever adopted by the Australian left.

During these early years, the Green parties also engaged in some of the most successful electoral work carried out by the Greens to date. On numerous occasions, DSP members were preselected as Green candidates, for both lower and upper house seats and at both the state and federal levels. The development of electoral alliances as a means of broadening and strengthening progressive forces and campaigns was especially effective. In Queensland, for example, a Green Alliance campaign in the Brisbane Council elections in March 1991 brought together on one ticket candidates identified as members of the DSP, the Australian Democrats and the Socialist Party of Australia, along with candidates from the Wilderness Society, local issue campaigns, the Rainbow Alliance and independent environmentalists. This alliance won between 9 and 27% of the vote and no attempt at a progressive electoral alliance in Australia since has been so successful — either in terms of the vote received or the development of ideas, trust, campaigning skills and membership base of the many organisations involved in the process.

The significant electoral potential of the Greens as more and more parties were established and successfully contested state and federal elections in the first years of 1990s inevitably raised the debate inside the Greens around the question of the relationship between electoral work and ongoing campaigning and movement building work. The presence of the DSP as an organised and active advocate of strengthening the grassroots activist base by maintaining a radical social justice perspective alongside the environmental demands, and by maintaining the local parties' organisational autonomy, was seen by the more conservative forces in the Greens as blocking the development of the Greens as a "real" political party which could, if it won the support of "middle Australia", win more parliamentary power and begin to implement a program of radical reform of the system.

By 1991, key figures in the environment bureaucracy, the Australian Democrats (who at that point were suffering a membership decline and had high hopes for a merger with the Greens to form a larger third force in parliamentary politics in Australia), the Rainbow Alliance and some MPs from those Green parties which had already adopted proscription (Jo Vallentine from the WA Greens and Bob Brown from the Tasmanian Greens), began to meet secretly to plan the expulsion of the socialist left and a relaunching of the Greens as a more “respectable,” nationally centralised vehicle for their electoral goals.

By the beginning of 1992, a year of behind-closed-doors manoeuvring, stacked meetings, secret correspondence, anti-socialist witch-hunts and much bitter debate around the country had both paralysed any active campaigning and outreach by local Green parties and driven out almost every independent activist in the Greens. In this setting, the right-wing Greens were quickly able to ensure that proscription clauses were passed in every Green party except the Victorian, South Australian and ACT Green Alliances.

The Australian Greens, officially launched by Bob Brown in Sydney on August 30, 1992, united all those Green parties which wanted to be part of a national organisation and would agree to adopt proscription. With this move, made just before the March 1993 federal election, the last vestiges of resistance to the right wing of the Greens was defeated and the bulk of Green parties were harnessed into a closed, centralised structure. The significant exception here was the WA Greens whose membership have, to date, resisted incorporation into the national party on the grounds of preserving local autonomy and grassroots democracy.

From this point it was clear that there was no space, not only for members of left parties, but even for the development of a socialist or left perspective inside the Greens. In 1995, in the lead up to the 1996 federal election, the Australian Greens moved to have those few remaining Green parties which had not adopted proscription deregistered by the electoral commission, and to set up its own “branches” in those regions. Given the continuing decline of the mass movements and the unwillingness of other socialists to join us in the struggle to re-establish the breadth and openness of the original project and to maintain a left pole of attraction in the Australian Greens, the DSP withdrew from the Greens and in 1996 voluntarily relinquished those electoral registrations still held by its members.

The rapidity with which the Australian Greens have moved to the right since the expulsion of the DSP — both in their party structure and political platform — is indicative of the inherent conservative tendencies in Green politics which come to the fore clearly and quickly in the absence of counter-pressure from a left wing.

In contrast to the positions adopted in most local Green parties pre-1992, the Australian Greens have dropped the idea of rotation of office bearers and elected representatives (except in Victoria), do not have a clear policy on the allocation of Green MPs' salaries, and allow a conscience vote for Green MPs on all issues (except in NSW).

At the level of policy, despite their anti-capitalist rhetoric, the goal of "green capitalism" is now explicitly enshrined in the Australian Greens' platform. Within the principles of "ecological integrity, equity, empowerment and choice, caring and cooperation," the Australian Greens' policy goals are: "better distribution of work and income, a more equitable taxation system and an improved social safety net." The Greens' proposals for achieving these goals, however, all depend on using and reforming, not challenging and dismantling, capitalist structures, generally through legislative change or lobbying decision-makers.

In this general framework, the Greens' economic policies are argued within framework of capitalist markets, and commit them, for example, to "balancing the recurrent budget over the business cycle" and "assisting business to become more competitive." They also include a range of "eco-taxes" which target the mass of ordinary consumers as much, if not more, than big business.

In what would amount to a massive public subsidisation of private industry, the Greens say they will "offer positive incentives like tax deductions, rebates and enhanced depreciation allowances to businesses investing in technology or capital expenditure which reduces resource use, waste and pollution." They also argue for 5% of capital from superannuation funds to be used in projects which "enhance Australia's export capacity, international responsibilities, environmental sustainability and social infrastructure." Like the major capitalist parties, the Australian Greens are happy to make workers' money available to industry to fix up the mess that it, not workers, created in the first place. ■

## ‘Third Way’ Politics

Although eventual control of most Green parties by the right-wing forces was only achieved after real struggle and was not, in that sense, inevitable, one of the main conclusions to be drawn from examining the development of Green parties world-wide is that the balance of forces in these parties always favored the right precisely because the Green parties were founded on the basis of rejecting class politics and class struggle.

The theoretical foundation of Green politics was the idea that the Greens represented a new political perspective, one that was “neither left nor right but out in front” as the saying went. Green ideologues, many of them influenced by or coming out of the New Left, formulated a socio-political perspective which explicitly rejected class as the determining force in making history. As the press officer for the British Greens put it in an interview with *Direct Action* at the end of 1989: “We’re not a class party. Other parties, especially the Labour Party are in the trajectory of modernism ... the trajectory of progress through industrialism and the formation of classes. We are a post-modernist party.”

One of the most left-wing Greens in Germany, former International Marxist Group member Werner Hulsberg, argued: “The Greens are the organisers of opposition to bourgeois society ... They represent the politically dynamic sections of society ... They are also the beginning of the construction of a socialist alternative. For the socialist model requires to be defined in a profoundly new way ... without falling into the old scheme of ‘principle and subordinate contradictions’.” [*The German Greens: A social and political profile*. Verso, 1988.]

One of the most articulate and published advocates of “third way” politics is Howard Hawkins, a leading activist and Green theorist in the US. In one of a number of articles printed up as pamphlets and distributed by the Left Green Network in the US Greens, he puts the case that: “The need for a new politics is clear. International socialism’s humanistic ideals are completely contradicted by experience... the electoral reformism of social democracy and Euro-communism are at an impasse ☹ the old left insurrectionary theories of anarcho-syndicalism, council communism and Leninism

are kept alive by small sects but have no connection to popular movements ... there is a vacuum on the left.

"This crisis is beginning to be resolved by a new left already stepping into the vacuum . . . a populist alliance of co-equal social forces, rather than the old left's hegemonic working class with 'its allies' tagging along. Invoking the connotations of the interconnectedness and life-affirmation associated with an ecological perspective, Green is becoming its integrative banner." ["The Potential of the Green Movement" in *New Politics*, 2, 1, 1988.]

Generalising from the fact that, in the 1970s and '80s the most dynamic social movements formed mostly around cross-class issues (peace, the environment, feminism, ethnic autonomy, gay liberation, etc.), Hawkins and most other former Marxists, now Green theorists, argue that "capitalism has not rendered the working class a class-for-itself, let alone a class that tends to mobilise itself on behalf of universal human interests." Instead, he says, "working people are mobilising around other identities in the new social movements" which tend to challenge capitalism in "universal democratic terms" rather than the "simplistic two-class struggle of old left theory."

Closer to home, in the 1987 book *Green Politics in Australia*, Drew Hutton says: "Green politics does not accept the philosophical dualism which underpins modern industrial society (mind/body, humanity/nature, boss/worker, male/female) nor that of the traditional left (class struggle and class war leading to a classless society). Instead it presents the goal of a society where people live in harmony with each other, and where oppression and destructiveness exist, they are resisted by the Green movement with non-violent means. In this dialectical process the humanity of one's opponents is respected, conflictual situations are humanised as much as possible and the possibilities for principled compromises are left open."

By emphasising "harmony with nature," "universal interests" and "a sense of wholeness and oneness," while simultaneously caricaturing Marxism, the Greens attempt to render class divisions and class struggle irrelevant. No amount of philosophical rejection of the "old dualisms" or the culture of violence in capitalist society, however, will make them any less real.

More recently, in the first attempt to systematically document the ideas, aspirations, history and approach of the Greens in Australia, Australian Greens' leaders Bob Brown and Peter Singer argue in *The Greens* (Text Publishing, 1996) that Green parties represent "the most profound worldwide transformation of politics since the rise of socialism more than a century ago." The Greens' approach to ethics, they say, "based on our ability to think rationally and critically about our values, combined with empathy and concern for others, could become the most powerful force for change that the

world has yet seen.”

This ”third way” theorising, while cloaked in radical sounding rhetoric, inevitably capitulates to the ruling ideology in capitalist society precisely because, in capitalist society, ideology expresses the interests and aspirations of the major classes, i.e., of the capitalist class or of the working class. Having rejected Marxism, the ideology of the working class, the Green theorists inevitably adopt the assumptions of bourgeois ideology. Their own history shows that no Green party anywhere can play an independent role in, stand apart from, or above class politics as the “third way” rhetoric implies. Its attempts to do so reflect the middle-class or petty-bourgeois nature of their politics. The middle classes, by their very nature, always vacillate in the class struggle, pulled this way or that depending on the balance of forces between the capitalists and the working class.

It is true that the Greens began as a coming together of different elements of social resistance, that they were a product of the differentiation and radicalisation within the class struggle. But as that struggle escalates, as the capitalist system’s economic crisis deepens and the ruling class goes further and further on the offensive, a party that does not orient to and have firm roots in the working class, and that does not have a scientific understanding of class society — the sources and structure of class power and how to change them — will, sooner or later, either follow ruling-class ideology and go to the right or, following the lead of the working class in struggle, go to the left.

Of course, the Green party phenomena developed precisely in a period of relative confusion, misleadership and acquiescence of the working class, so this is not immediately clear. But the reality that there can be no Green strategy which is independent of class analysis and class politics is a little clearer in countries where the social crisis is deep enough that the escalated class conflict has impacted inside the Greens more forcefully, causing a sharper, faster left/right split.

Despite the “third way” rhetoric we saw this in the British Greens where they made their choices early, deciding in the context of Thatcherism, to go with the right-wing current. The question of strategic perspective was never even really debated; the British Greens was from the beginning an electoralist outfit, a party whose strategic perspective was to reform capitalism via the ballot box. As it says in its founding constitution, the British Greens aim “to develop and implement ecological policies consistent with the Philosophical Basis of the Party ... to that end to win seats in parliament ... and to organise any non-violent activity which will publicise and further the first two aims.” There is not even a token mention of the role of the Greens in relation to extra-parliamentary activity, let alone of fundamentally changing society and the role of mass movements in this regard. ■

# Parliamentary & Extra-Parliamentary Activity

In the more left-influenced Greens like the German Greens, the fundamentally middle-class nature of these parties and their inability to develop a strategy independent of class politics has been manifested in the constant struggle within the party over the relationship between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activity, and over how the Greens should relate to the major capitalist parties.

Throughout the 1980s the German Greens' program attempted to compromise between four forces in the party. On the conservative side of politics inside the party were the proponents of Realpolitik or the "realos." The realos argue for a green radical reformism, an ecological transformation of capitalism. They are supported by the old movementists and a large number of former SPD members. The realos argue that the basic development of politics is towards parliament, alliance and compromise. Their task, they say, is to mediate at the level of parliament on behalf of the new minority social movements to defend their interests and security institutionally by means of political compromise.

A sub-group of the realos, the eco-libertarians are the most right-wing ideologically of the German Greens. They want to promote ecological change through market mechanisms, their guiding principle being laissez faire or greater freedom of choice.

The eco-libertarians advocate the parliamentary road because, to quote their Manifesto, "It is only by means of reformist trial and error that the contours of another society can be developed." The links between Green parties and the new social movements are considered irrelevant since "only the reformists can achieve anything for the anarchists."

On the radical side of German Greens politics, the fundamentalists or fundis, epitomised by Rudolph Bahro wanted a qualitative change in society via a widespread "opting out" of present society. They argued that the practical efforts of the exploited and marginalised to create for themselves "a different life" would have such a drawing

power for the rest of society that “the oligarchy and the state” would be forced to subsidise “socio-economic reconstruction.”

In practice, the fundis attempted to prolong artificially the conditions which gave rise to the radicalisation of the 1960s and '70s and were therefore prone to “infantile disorders.” They replaced the slogan “reform or revolution” with “reform or opt out” and all alliances with bourgeois parties were rejected on principle.

Also on the radical side of the internal line-up were the eco-socialists like Thomas Ebermann and Rainer Trampert. The eco-socialists started from a principled opposition to the capitalist system, a critique of reformism and an objective of gathering the political forces for a break with the system. They placed their emphasis on extra-parliamentary activity in the social movements and trade unions, and advocated a policy of “toleration” rather than coalition with the SPD as a means to “get rid of the illusions [in social-democracy] among Green voters.”

The eco-socialists appear to have been united on the final goal and the issues, but they were divided on just about every aspect of strategy and tactics. They tended to be comprised of former Marxists who still advocated a socialist society but, having rejected the Marxist conclusion of the need for a working-class revolution, led by a cadre force, which would overthrow the capitalist state, they had no coherent alternative scheme for how socialism was to be achieved.

The numerical and organisational strength of the eco-socialist current within the German Greens' leadership meant that the early program went far beyond ecological questions to reject totally an economic system based on private profit. The program stated: “The destruction of the foundations of life and work and the undermining of democratic rights have reached such proportions that there is a need for a fundamental alternative in the economy, politics and society.” The German Greens also adopted many pro-working class policies and demands, (e.g., for a 35-hour week, a living wage for all young people, unlimited right to strike, lock-outs to be declared illegal, etc.).

But the political compromises, the fake unity achieved between the left and right forces in the name of electoral success, reflected and reinforced the failure to deal with the fundamental questions about how the Greens were going to get power in society, how their wonderful policies were to be put into practice; that is, the questions about reform or revolution.

In fact, the German Greens did not even see the need to have a common strategic conception of how their radical demands could be implemented. In the words of party leader Petra Kelly: “The variety of currents enriches our party, even in the absence of a common consensus in the analysis of society. One current learns from the other. There is no mutual destruction but a convergence of views. That's what's new about



our movement.” This position of “no strategy” proved, in practice, to be a capitulation to the strategy of class collaboration, even if that was never explicitly acknowledged.

The end result of avoiding the question of strategic perspective was that, until the mid-1980s, because of the strength of the left within it, backed by still strong protest movements, the German Greens did usually stand on the side of the working class. They had a clear policy and practice in solidarity with trade union and Third World liberation struggles; against the rearmament of Europe; in defence of democratic rights and the rights of minorities; and so on. With the defeat and decline of the social movements and growing electoral success in the later 1980s and early '90s, however, the policy and practice of the German Greens moved rapidly to the right under the ever-strengthening leadership-by-default of the realos and their parliamentarist perspective.

By 1990 nearly half of the fundis and eco-socialists, many of them founding members, had left or been thrown out (the party's left leadership bureau was ousted in December 1988), and the party was taking positions of support for the annexation of East Germany, for NATO, for almost unqualified coalition with the SPD in government, and was much less clear about its opposition to nuclear armament. Pushing the trajectory of the realos even further to the right, eco-libertarians in the New Direction 1988 group inside the Greens began to speak about a united Germany “superpower” and its “global responsibilities” such as policing the Persian Gulf. And during the 1990 federal election campaign, the Bonn Greens openly discussed what “Green borders” could be set to limit immigration to Germany.

The victory of the pragmatic politics of the realos was, predictably, reported by the big business media as a step forward. *The Economist* called it a “professionalisation” of the party, resulting in a “more plausible party of government” and noted that when they talk about jobs or new energy taxes, for example, the Greens now sound like the Social Democrats.

The realos have controlled both the parliamentary caucus and the National Executive of the German Greens for more than six years now. After a much longer and more intense struggle between left and right than in any other Green party, the German party has clearly been reintegrated into the system and adopted the ruling ideas in the form of the “green capitalism alternative.”

Why was the question of strategy never dealt with? Hulsberg argues that “as long as they [the ecologists and the revolutionary socialists — LM] were united in their hostility to the established parties, this relationship ran smoothly. Strategic and tactical questions were put to one side as insignificant. Differences in political outlook were ignored.”

As soon as the Greens were sitting on the opposition benches with the SPD, however, the long overdue strategic debate raised its head. By then, due to the lack of clarity and leadership on class struggle politics among the left (the ex-Marxists in the Greens), combined with the party's growing parliamentary success, the right wing had already won the debate. Compromise and reformism were the names of the game.

Exactly how the evolving orientation to parliament in the German and other Green parties operated to conservatise these formations is worth studying in detail. It is a history overflowing with proof of the correctness of the Marxist analysis of the role of parliaments in capitalist society and is full of lessons, some positive but usually negative, about how Marxists should do electoral work — the potential gains and perils, and the need for a tactical approach informed by a fundamental commitment to extra-parliamentary mass action and organisation which aims to eradicate, not take over, bourgeois parliaments. ■

# Parliamentarism

It was the Greens' rapid slide into parliamentarism which has been the key mechanism for drawing them to the right. In most cases, Green parties formed both to better organise mass action and to represent in parliament a green-thinking constituency, a constituency disillusioned with "politics as usual" in the advanced capitalist countries and which saw the need for a political expression for the movements they were active in or supported.

As the Greens won electoral success, and simultaneously the social movements declined, the balance between these two aims shifted in favor of the electoralists. The parties became increasingly separated from their extra-parliamentary campaigning base and, today, the majority of Green parties are purely parliamentarist in perspective.

From their formation, the right-wing currents in Green parties were theorising that the "movement phase of politics is over"; now the struggle had to take place in parliaments. They argued that parliament was where the decisions are made, where the power is, and that the Greens, if they were serious about changing the world, had to be included in the decision-making process so that the decisions about society's resources, direction, and so on would have rational, environmentally conscious input. In the words of Sarah Parkin during her visit to Australia where she actively encouraged the formation of a national parliamentary Green party: "The only pressure that is really respected by governments is the ballot box." The thinking here is that as the ecological and social crises deepened, support for environmental and social justice parties would grow exponentially until eventually the Greens would win majority support at the polls, take government and be able to implement their Green policies.

This is precisely the view advanced by the leadership of the Australian Greens today which, by their own criteria of success, is on the verge of coming into its own. The Australian Greens now has a national structure, the attention of the establishment media and a representative in the Senate.

In the more "developed" Green parties around the world, however, this belief has proved an utter illusion, never even getting to the stage of being able to be tested.

Despite escalating ecological and social crises over the past decade, nowhere in the world have Green voting patterns at the federal level (which is where the main governmental power resides) increased significantly. In Germany, the Greens won 1.5% of the vote in 1980, 5.6% in 1983, 8.3% in 1987, 4.7% in 1990. In 1994 they won back more than 50 seats in parliament but at the cost of giving up on every one of the four Green principles. In Britain, the Greens won 1.5% in 1979, 1% in 1983, 1.4% in 1987 and 1.3% in 1992.

For almost all the Green parties the pattern has been the same over time — up and down depending on the developments in the class struggle in the country concerned but rarely making it into double figures at the federal level. Some of the most recent federal election results for other Green parties include in 1994 in Italy 2.7%, in the Netherlands 3.5% and in Sweden 5%. The French Greens won 3.4% in 1995 and the Australian Green won an average of 4.6% in 1996.

Only in the European Parliament have Greens won a proportionally greater number of seats, but this parliament has no real decision-making power in national or international politics.

While the developing parliamentarist perspective in Green parties tended to be rationalised by the more consciously right-wing forces in terms of the old social-democratic and Stalinist formula that parliamentary struggle is the “non-violent” path to social change, the hopes and illusions in bourgeois parliament and coalitions that the majority of Greens held were in large part a reaction to defeats of the mass movements. The decline of the movements while environmental destruction continued rampant, the nuclear threat remained, unemployment grew, etc., propelled many Greens into a sort of wishful thinking arising from despair — the hope that capitalism might be reformed from within its own structures.

Once again however there was, in all Green parties, some degree of struggle over exactly how much weight to give parliamentary work vis-a-vis building the movements and grassroots activism, over the exact nature of the relationship between the two, and over how to use parliamentary seats once they were won.

In Germany, the transition from movement to party was a relatively smooth one. The majority left-wing in the new party recognised and discussed at length the apparent contradiction between the movement and the party. During the first six years, the party repeatedly adopted the position that the parliamentary party was the extended arm of the mass movements outside parliament. Because of the considerable cross-membership between the movements and the party (in 1981 surveys indicated that around 70% of peace and environment movement activists were Green supporters), and a relatively active party membership, the German Greens maintained close links

with the movements in the early years. They tried to institutionalise this relationship by developing a form of party organisation and rank and file democracy in which the fundamental idea was “continuous control over all officials and elected representatives in parliament and their recallability at any time.” In addition to allowing different political currents to organise inside it:

- Meetings of all party bodies were open to all members.
- All elected members were rotated after two terms or six years.
- No MP could hold an office in the party.
- No person could hold a political office and be a party functionary at the same time.
- MPs only received the average pay of a factory worker, the remainder of their salary being returned to the party.
- There was equal representation of men and women in election candidates, party conference speakers and key decision-making bodies.
- Party election slates were open to non-party members from the social movements.
- Non-members of other groups had the right to speak at party meetings.

The 1980 program of the German Greens argued that these measures would help create “a party which is half movement and half party.”

Once formed, however, the objective conditions meant that the Greens were going to get an electoral response. In a society in which the overwhelming majority of the population see the ballot box as the way to have their say, the Greens provided an opportunity for a growing number of people to express their disgust with the state of the world.

As their parliamentary aspirations and representation increased, the Greens attention to the extra-parliamentary mobilisation of people declined. In the words of Jutta Ditzfurth, a fundi who contested the 1990 federal elections for the Greens and then led a walkout from the party’s April 1991 congress: “We once said that the Green party had a ‘standing leg’ — its centre of gravity — outside parliament, and that this leg was more important than the ‘play leg’ inside parliament. But then the leg in parliament became the ‘standing leg’ and the movement leg was being cut off.”

To the extent that there are still some, if limited, movements in action in Australia and certainly no shortage of issues around which progressive people need to be campaigning, we are seeing much the same pattern here. To date, the Australian Greens, except in Tasmania, have had only limited grassroots involvement in major national campaigns — for example against woodchipping in old growth forests and the French nuclear tests in the Pacific in 1995, or for East Timorese independence and against uranium mining and public service job in 1996.

Just as significantly, as Green parties have found themselves holding, or with the

prospect of holding the balance of power in parliaments and consequently being wooed by the major parties to form minority governments, there has been a shift from seeing themselves as independent of the major bourgeois parties to being a pressure group on those parties, whether or not they actually form coalitions with them.

Ever since 1983 when the German Greens were first elected to the Bundestag, the question of coalition with the SPD has been the key struggle between the left and right forces in the party. Conference after conference debated it, with the fundis and eco-socialists on one side, united in their opposition to cooperative coalitions with the Social Democrats, and the realos and eco-libertarians on the other, arguing for a “responsible” and “realistic” — that is, unprincipled opportunist — perspective on the question.

Over time, in the context of increasing government attacks on the majority of people, the German Greens’ electoral representation grew. As Thomas Ebermann commented after leaving the party, “In the Greens it became so important to us to look at concrete electoral results, to win a certain number of votes ... that an absolutely overwhelming proportion of the left flipped out over ‘red’-green coalitions. Those who did not want to participate in those coalitions found themselves in a socially isolated situation.”

In all Green parties that have achieved some electoral success at a federal level, it has not taken long for the decision-making weight to shift in favor of the parliamentary group, leading to priority increasingly being given to the (illusory) attainment of reforms within the system at the expense of mass action, participation and rank and file control.

The parliamentarians and their staff are, by virtue of their positions, usually better organised and resourced, and more in the public limelight than the rest of the party membership. Because they engage on a daily basis in political discussion and decisions, parliamentarians also inevitably end up making party policy on the run. As leading members of the WA Greens have argued, the process of democratic policy making at the grassroots would take far more time than the structures and rhythm of parliament allows.

In Germany, although a process was already well under way in the Greens whereby the MPs had made use of their resources, media access and legal powers to promote their own positions in the party as a whole and take control of the making of party policy, after 1990 the separation of the parliamentary caucus from the party membership was completed.

By the time they went into the 1990 federal elections, the German Greens had, in addition to over 1500 local and regional councillors, some 48 MPs organised in a

parliamentary caucus and 250 paid functionaries in the Bonn offices alone. Many of these elected positions, at all but the federal level, were in coalition governments with the SPD which was implementing capitalism's austerity drive.

In those elections the Greens' vote dropped by 3.6% to 4.7% and, failing to reach the 5% mark, they lost all 48 parliamentary positions. The realos seized the opportunity, blamed the diminishing left in the party for the loss and moved quickly on a project of "reform." There was to be no more collective structure or responsibility, the "obstacle" of rotation (already half dismantled) was abolished, the party was to have only one party president, and the rule preventing Green MPs from being on the party executive was abolished.

"The Greens must accept the structures of a normal party," Fischer told a media conference two days after the 1990 elections. "If the Greens does not become a professional party and renounce all forms of fundamentalism it will perish," he said, adding that one of the things Greens must accept is that "politics is impossible without prominent personalities."

The dominance of personality politics in parliamentarist parties is inevitable. Bourgeois politics is after all a show for the masses, a circus to divert attention from where the real decisions are being made — in the back rooms and boardrooms of the big corporations. Obviously the best show-men and women will win the prizes (the seats in parliament) and are therefore judged as the best contenders. This feature of bourgeois politics is absolutely clear in the ruling class parties, but so-called "alternative" parties are not immune if their primary goal too is to win the prize.

In Britain, the Greens' capitulation to circus politics has been even more stark, to the point of being absurd. For example, in July 1994, (Sir) Jonathan Porritt was suspended from the Green party for publicly stating, at the request of a liberal politician, that a Green vote was a wasted vote. Desperate to retain the man so loved by the British establishment — the media as well as Prince Charles — the Greens' conference later that year voted to reinstate his membership, some even suggesting that he could be persuaded to stand as a high-profile Green candidate in the 1996 elections. The fact that they were embracing a man who had publicly ridiculed the Green party project did not seem to worry them. This level of electoralist cretinism is staggering.

From the beginning of the Greens' growth as an electoral force in Australia we have observed all of the problems and betrayals that accompany a parliamentarist perspective.

In the 1989 state election, five Green independents were elected to state parliament in Tasmania on the back of the successful Franklin "no dams" campaign. They held the balance of power. Literally within 48 hours of being elected, the Green MPs broke with

their ranks and decided to enter into an accord with the ALP which specified that Labor would protect the forests and the Greens would support the government's budget. Tasmanian Greens' leader at the time, Bob Brown, later admitted that a majority of party supporters and movement activists had advised against signing the accord, and justifies ignoring them on the grounds of an overriding need for "stable government."

The outcome of the accord was that Labor was able to present a green image as it increased protection for national parks, while at the same time passing a horrendous budget which slashed jobs, cut back on public transport and attacked education. The Greens did not stand in their way. Eventually, in mid-1990, the accord was broken by the ALP when it crossed the floor to pass legislation which allowed increased logging in the state.

Three years later, under the slogan "Go Go Go Green Government!", the five Greens were re-elected but with a 5% drop in their vote. They had alienated their base, the movements had won virtually none of their demands, and an opportunity to both block the major parties' immediate attacks on ordinary people and strengthen the extra-parliamentary movements which could have continued to block, even turn back these attacks, had been utterly wasted.

Most recently, in March 1996, the Tasmanian Greens were again punished at the polls, suffering another 3% drop in their vote and losing one of their five state MPs. Despite this, and because they still held the balance of power in that state, the Greens once again invited both the major capitalist parties, Labor and the Liberals, in the interests of "stable government," to enter into a new accord with them. Leaders of the Australian Greens have also expressed a willingness to enter into coalitions with either of the two capitalist major parties at the federal level should they ever hold the balance of power.

Then there is the example of the Greens in the Australian Capital Territory. After just one year in parliament, the ACT Greens' record was littered with electoralist vacillations, from voting in February 1995 to enable an economic rationalist minority Liberal government to take power in the first place (once again rationalised in terms of "stable government"), to abstaining from active participation in the wide range of anti-austerity campaigns organised by progressive community organisations and trade unions in response to the Liberal government's attacks. ■



## ‘Doing Politics Differently’

Despite even the attempts of the most progressive of the Greens to maximise democracy in the party and “do parliamentary politics differently,” the politics of reforming the system, of humanising and greening capitalism, that underlie the parliamentarist perspective mean that respect for and accommodation to capitalist parliamentary procedures, expectations and other parties is inevitable.

Even more of a waste of time if approached from an electoralist perspective is participation in local government. Yet this is what all Green parties have done. In the context of their parliamentarist framework, the Green ideas of “grassroots democracy”, and community control and participation, have eventually been translated in practice into a narrow localism.

Setting their sights on seats in local government, Greens have argued that such positions allow them to initiate and support local campaigns, be more in touch with the grassroots of society and involve increasingly wider networks of people in struggle. Some Green theorists, like Hawkins, have even elevated it into a strategy. In an attempt to identify what he calls the “revolutionary institutions,” Hawkins says: “The state has not proved itself an effective instrument for the left ... As for the point of production, in the era of the global factory, strike action has less social leverage than ever before ... on the other hand, the community — and its political form, the municipality — linked up with others horizontally, may offer institutional terrain where The People can constitute themselves as a counter-power to The Establishment and ultimately advance to the point where they can transform capitalism.”

Because local government seats are much more attainable than those at the centre of governmental power, Green parties have had more success electorally at this level. In Australia there are now more than 20 Green local councillors. In the US today, where the Greens are only registered at the federal level in half a dozen states, there are some 70 local elected officials. Even the British Greens, averaging just over 1% in federal elections, have over 100 local councillors.

While they do indicate a certain degree of resonance for Green politics in the

population of the advanced capitalist countries, however, these local positions have proven not just ineffective but a real hindrance to the Green parties as they develop.

Many an “alternative” councillor has been driven to despair by the extent of bureaucracy and pettiness in the “roads, rats and rates” politics of local government, not to mention the inability to achieve anything remotely resembling real change. But for the most developed Green parties, the problems of localism are far more severe. By the mid-1980s, for example, the German Greens had between 5000-7000 members elected onto local government bodies. As Hulsberg points out, this meant that almost every active member was some kind of local official with the result that a huge proportion of the energy of the party was being consumed in the insignificant, day-to-day affairs of local councils.

In effect, what lapsing into localism, placing an overriding emphasis on community level organising, reflects is defeatism, giving up on the problem of trying to win real power. It concedes the struggle in advance. But then that is exactly what liberal reformists do.

Participation in capitalist parliaments does offer possibilities for the radical left to intervene in politics, to exert more influence on the conditions in which social struggles occur. To adopt a “principled opposition” to electoral work is foolishness. But electoral work must be approached in the framework of understanding that parliaments are not useful for changing the relations of power in capitalist society. On the contrary, the parliamentary system is a form of domination, the entire purpose of which is to prevent a radical overturning of the relations of power.

The conditions of parliamentary cooperation have always served to tame and integrate once rebellious politicians. In the words of Ebermann: “One special task of the parliamentary state consists, not in stopping class conflicts, but in rendering them planned and thereby controllable. In capitalist society, to be able to maintain political control during various crises and breakdown situations means that the state must channel the liberation movements’ expressions into certain institutionally foreseen channels so that their manifestations can be brought under control.” Arguing that the left has much to learn from the electoralism of the German Greens, Ebermann argues that rather than using this institution of “integration, moderation and assimilation” to achieve our goals, we must learn how to “misuse it.”

The German Greens have now adopted an almost in principle position of coalition with the SPD at various levels of government. It is this which explains their recent policy decisions. Commenting on the December ’95 congress of the German Greens, the December 4 issue of the *Financial Times* described the positions being taken by the Green MPs with the usual clarity of the ruling class’s business media as “an effort

to update the party's policies in preparation for a possible coalition federal government with the SPD in 1998." One Green parliamentarian told the *Times*: "[Joschka] Fischer wants to try to shape policies which he can live with were he to become a future foreign minister in a coalition government."

While the rightward trajectory of Green parties has been accelerated by their separation from their original base in the radicalising movements, it has also been a logical consequent of their tendency to accommodate to the "lowest common denominator" in bourgeois politics in order to win the vote of the largest number of people possible. Since the consciousness of the majority of people in normal times will be reformist rather than revolutionary, this results in a conservatism of the parliamentary Green parties' positions, an adaptation to the status quo.

In Germany in 1983, for example, 84% of Green voters supported an alliance with the SPD, 93% thinking such an alliance would lead to a strengthening of democracy. The strength of the realos in the German Greens was therefore not only a result of the electoral success, the decline of the movements and the confusion of the ex-Marxist left inside the Greens, but also a direct reflection of the average political level of the Greens' electoral constituency.

From their formation, none of the Green parties, not even the most progressive parties in terms of policy, structure and leadership composition, had a perspective of politically leading (rather than reflecting or representing) the masses and movements in a radical direction. Such a perspective on party building could only have been brought into these parties by the former Marxists in the Greens, but in junking Marxism, these activists had rejected the idea that a revolutionary party is necessary to introduce revolutionary consciousness into the movements. Even these Greens, therefore, while they did not have illusions in parliament as the primary path to social change and placed their confidence in extra-parliamentary mass action, did not see a leadership role for the Green party. Rather, they hoped for a spontaneous development of revolutionary consciousness in the masses in the process of struggle which would somehow lead to revolutionary change in society.

What these former Marxists in the Greens never worked out or explained was how the progressive social forces would take power in society (that is, overthrow the capitalist state) spontaneously. In the end it is these questions — of state power and the vehicles necessary to take it — that are the key programmatic questions for any party which aims to change society. ■

# Prospects for the Greens

In light of this general trajectory of Green parties, it is not surprising that the name “Green” is losing its sheen. As capitalism is less and less able to assure the majority of people a decent living standard and a clean environment, and as Stalinism loses its grip on working-class forces and its horror value in the advanced capitalist countries, class politics and class struggle are beginning to come to the fore again.

What this means is less space for “middle of the road” or class-neutral formations like the Greens. If they remain trapped in their middle-class, liberal-reformist perspective and their parliamentarist strategy, the Green parties will, in refusing to ally with the working class and its interests, be pushed towards targeting a more and more right-wing electoral base.

By 1994 in Germany, according to the *Economist*, the typical Green voter had shifted from being a former SPD supporter to being a deserter from the centre-right Free Democrats. The earlier arguments in the Greens for “a regroupment of forces beyond the left-right schema” have paved the way for some realos and eco-libertarians to argue that today the German Greens should try to capture the growing number of youth attracted to the far-right through an “attractivity that encourages identification” by organising an enthusiastic “we-feeling” around the Greens. The rise of the far right, they argue, is after all proof of the Greens’ success in “liberalising” and “democratising” society. New ultra-right nationalist parties, such as the Republicans, led by a former SS officer, they say, are only the protest against these progressive changes and are therefore perfectly normal and OK.

While not as advanced in Australia, there are some emerging parallels here. We see more clearly with each election the preparedness of the Greens to take a so-called “neutral” (therefore actually right-wing) position on a whole range of issues around which working people are being attacked. Australian Greens’ leaders argue, for example, that “As long as Labor parties believe that they will always get Green preferences, they have no incentive to get serious about dealing with environmental and social problems” and therefore that “no party can take Green preferences for granted” (Brown and

Singer, 1996). But making a pragmatic "tactical" decision to direct preferences to the more right-wing of the major parties (as the Queensland Greens did in the July 1995 state election), or making a deal with the Liberals so that they can take power (as in the ACT in February 1995), is not good enough for a party that purports to put social justice and the environment before the profits of big business.

Fortunately, Green parties are not equivalent to green politics, or to environmental consciousness. There are many environmentalists out there who do not and will not relate to the liberal-capitalist politics of the Greens simply because, regardless of the Greens' performance in capitalist parliaments, the ecological crisis will remain and will worsen. It will continue to generate a desire among masses of people to take action for change and it will continue to propel some of those people in an anti-capitalist direction. To that extent the environment issue will remain a battleground on which the reform or revolution debate will be played.

The right-wing Greens who currently control most Green parties offer the promise that capitalism can be redesigned in an environmentally sounder, more socially secure, more peaceful and more feminist manner. But this promise is, and will increasingly be seen to be, an illusion. Unemployment and impoverishment will continue to grow; ecological crises and catastrophes will increase in number; over-armament and the danger of war will continue; a reformed sexual division of labour with a few career spots for middle-class professional women will not have changed the social structure of violence and exploitation against the great majority of women; and so on. Given this, the development of red-green political analyses and organisations is an urgent necessity; that is, it is as necessary as ever to overthrow the very structures of this society, capitalist society, if we are going to achieve the four principles of the Greens.

There is no short cut to a post-capitalist society. There is no way around the need to build a mass revolutionary party, lead by activists with a scientific understanding of class society, who are trained and experienced in class struggle, and who have won the respect and political authority of the masses to lead. This is a long, slow process and, in the objective conditions of today, a revolutionary program will only have the support of a tiny minority of the population. And there is no way around the objective conditions which create pre-revolutionary situations, which pull the masses of people into anti-capitalist action and provide the conditions for the creation of a mass revolutionary party.

We know that mass struggles can arise and the balance of class forces can change very rapidly, but such conditions cannot be willed into existence by the social movements or impatient revolutionaries (whether green or red) clutching at straws. In the context of a relatively low level of class struggle, the search for short cuts has led many former

socialists to elevate single-issue movements and formations such as the Greens into the vehicle for abolishing capitalism. Unfortunately this search for ways around class struggle and Marxist leadership has always led, sooner or later, to opportunism and defeat.

In this sense it is correct to describe the Green parties phenomena as the “biggest organised hesitation before socialism.” We cannot, however, allow this hesitation to continue unchallenged. Humanity is running out of time. It is therefore a matter of utmost urgency to build revolutionary organisations, Marxist parties, in all countries and by combining principled politics with flexible tactics in the course of exploding mass struggles, transform them from groups of propagandists for socialism into mass parties capable of leading successful struggles to establish working-class power and begin constructing socialism. Any other perspective either amounts to an accommodation to capitalism or utopianism, or both. ■

