

NewOptions

December 31, 1990

Issue No. Seventy-two

How Can a Good Person Be Effective in the World?

We suspected that you'd respond vigorously to our article on the national Green gathering ("You Don't Have to Be a Baby to Cry," #70). But we never imagined we'd get anything like the passionate outpouring that fills these pages.

Over 100 letters and phone calls came into our office. And what letters and calls! Some of you stomped on the Greens with big black boots . . . some of you stomped on us . . .

What made your comments especially interesting to us, though — what made us turn this whole issue into a forum for your replies — is that most of your letters were only superficially about "the Greens."

Read them closely and you'll see that most of the letter-writers are struggling with such larger questions as, How can a good person be effective in the world? What is effectiveness, anyway? What does it mean to be a healthy and socially conscious person in the 90s?

There can, of course, be no definitive answers to these questions. But we thought you'd enjoy watching some of your fellow readers take a crack at them.

We've arranged the letters in careful sequence. The last four — the "morning after" letters — are like four mountains all the other letters lead up to. Call them the "hopeful," "gritty," "spiritual" and "truly mature" mountains, respectively.

"It could become a classic"

First up are some snippets of letters from people who liked what we wrote.

At last!

At last! Somebody with some clout who has publicly told the Greens what ails them.

As one of your "vast cast of characters that have passed through the Greens over the

years, never to return," I celebrate the possibility that with your tough insights, and the storm of controversy this will bring, the Greens just might get their act together.

— **Richard Clark**
Berkeley CA, Shasta Bioregion

Your analysis/critique/explanation of the Green gathering was brilliant. Everyone here loved it, but I suppose I could appreciate it most [since I was there].

— **Lynette Lamb**
Utne Reader
Minneapolis MN, Heartland Bioregion

To your lead article on the Greens all I can say is, "Wow!" It could become a classic.

— **Bill Holden, Jr.**
Cypress CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion

Wow! That must have been hard to write.

At a much more local level, I went through some of the same things you did. And remembering how painful it was for me, I can easily imagine how you must feel.

This issue spoke for me. Keep the faith!

— **Ron Liskey**
Rohnert Park CA, Shasta Bioregion

Totally agreed with and appreciated your feelings re: Greens. I felt that way *last* year at the Eugene gathering.

— **Paul Cienfuegos**
Tofino, Canada, "Pacific Cascadia Bior'n"

I've had those same cold blues. I went to "Greening the West" [two years ago in California] and came away depressed: "These folks are so busy being hippies they forget our urgent problems."

— **Greg Norris**
Newmarket NH, Lower New Engl. Bior'n

Your last issue confirmed my gut level response to the Greens I've met here. I would

like to see this party viable, but I don't see it happening based on the people involved (the ones I've met, anyway).

— **Lark Carroll**
Oakland CA, Shasta Bioregion

I really agree with your assessment of the Greens. It is cause for despair. I felt the same way after a week at the North American Bioregional Congress in August.

So we beat on, boats against the current. . .
— **Steve Brown**
Dover MA, Lower New England Bior'n

Back to the establishment

I generally agree with your assessment of the Green movement and its misguided approach to becoming a significant political force.

Not only is it unlikely to become a significant political force, it is unlikely to become a significant social or intellectual force without more internal self-discipline.

After reading your accounts of previous meetings (#8, 40 and 60), I went to Estes Park to see for myself whether or not there was something I could sink my teeth into in an activist mode. I found that I was not able to be fully engaged. People were unable to see the incongruities between the magnitude of the problems we face and the perpetually protesting, outsider-type behaviors they would have us accept as the likely route to change.

For me the experience was something of a dénouement, because I realized I was better off staying in my quasi-establishment role here in Washington, and working both sides of the street as it were.

— **Paul Von Ward**
Chair, Delphi International Group
Washington DC, Potomac Valley Bior'n

I sat in my office less than 60 miles from the Green gathering in Estes Park wrestling

Analysis

with whether I should take the time to check out the Greens one more time. Your report confirms my suspicion that I was sparing myself a lot of frustration, rage, pain and — yes — tears by staying away.

Life is too short, our problems too serious and our individual responsibilities to our children too important to choose flight from the political trenches of reality for the onanistic pleasures of Utopian fantasy.

Better to remain an official burr under the saddle of conventional wisdom in our own communities until a thousand points of rebellion can become a tidal wave of reform.

— **Miller Hudson**

*Director, Small Business Coalition
Denver CO, Rocky Mountain Bioregion*

A bit of free advice

As a veteran of the 60s in Berkeley and over two decades of alternative political and communal groups, I share your observations of the Greens. In fact, I had a similar experience at the 1987 Green gathering in Amherst.

As much as I love Green people and Green environmental goals, I notice certain limitations that really hamper their effectiveness. I would encourage:

- *truly* going “beyond left and right,” as some of the literature proclaims, and incorporating the best of the right (I heard only leftist ideology);
- celebrating and honoring leadership, rather than fearing and denying it;
- overcoming victim/underdog consciousness and fear of success; and
- becoming comfortable communicating with those of non-alternative lifestyles.

— **Corinne McLaughlin**

Shutesbury MA, Pioneer Valley Bioregion

Your description of the national Green gathering was similar to much of what I have seen in my local Green group.

We may be less intense, but we put similar emphasis on process (facilitation, consensus, group discussion of how the group works, etc.), as opposed to practical results. Individuals frequently reflect on how to solve large problems, as opposed to focusing on how to find and register voters for the California Green party. And we have a constant turnover as members leave because they're not getting help with their work, or because the work they do isn't well thought out or supported, or because they want to do something useful rather than talk.

I'm not sure that there is any “solution.” Perhaps the issue is getting people to realize that:

- there is a tradeoff between “perfecting” the process and just letting the process occur

so that results emerge;

- a group that does not create paid, full-time positions, and give some power to those who occupy them, cannot possibly function effectively — particularly at a national level.

— **John Broughton**

Oakland CA, Shasta Bioregion

Psst! Way to go

I was the harried transportation organizer at the Green conference. It was certainly a pleasure meeting you, although I did recommend that you take some time off hiking around and not fuss so much on listening to boring speeches.

Matthew Gilbert circulated copies of your article, and I am sure you have gotten more hate mail than you care for. Between me and you, though, I thought it was a very honest and accurate article. And I loved the way you made it personal.

— **Nader Jalinoos**

Denver CO, Rocky Mountain Bioregion

“A very unconvincing analysis”

Here are some letters from Greens who did not like what we wrote.

Get that boy a drink

We should have bought Mark Satin an extra couple of drinks when we went out after the national Greens conference in Colorado. His report had its personal poetic moments, but as political analysis it was very unconvincing.

I'm sorry you feel depressed Mark, but do you think maybe your expectations are a little unrealistic? The U.S. Greens have *already begun* to “affect the political life of our time,” but it can best be seen at the local level and in subtle ways, not by airily scanning the early national conferences.

Your depression seems a natural companion to the naiveté of those who dream of grand electoral success by an American Green party over the next decade. The best the Greens can do is bring a new understanding and sensibility to political things, strengthen community activism at the local level, forge linkages between social and ecological issues and constituencies — and when engaged in electoral work, help to broaden the scope of political dialogue, and catalyze changes in the Democratic party.

Perhaps more ambitious opportunities will present themselves at some time. But this is enough.

Your reading of the national conference was so self-reflective and between-the-lines that it left all the lines out. One of the most significant events, for example, was the Economics II section of the platform, which represented the best mediation/synthesis to date of “new” and “left” branches of the Green movement.

I do not know what the future holds. But for right now the Greens are to me one of the most promising shows in town. They have a self-awareness, an inner spirit, a depth and comprehensiveness of vision that no other group I work with offers.

So take a vacation, get some exercise, and come back next year, Mark. Even though many of your views are idiosyncratic, you have very valuable ideas that we need to hear. And please try to overcome your blues — they might rub off on your readers.

— **Jeff Ringold**

Santa Cruz CA, Shasta Bioregion

I was saddened by your sentence, “But it's more important to be effective in the world.” That's a sign of deep burnout!

— **Al Andersen**

Tucson AZ, Sonora Bioregion

Mark Satin looked so sad and out-of-sorts at the national Green gathering. And his article really reflects that.

But his perspective as an observer, rather than a participant, is why he came away so depressed. Nearly everyone I talked to came away energized! We all went home really ready to do the real work of the Greens, which is organizing at home.

We felt that the gathering accomplished what it set out to do, and that there was less turmoil than many of us expected. It all depends on your perspective.

I think Mark Satin is suffering from burnout. His expectations of Green political

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Groups

activity and behavior are totally unrealistic. How long did it take the Republican party to get organized? It took 30 years before the abolition movement achieved real success, and then it took a war. We are only just realizing what the struggle is about, and what it will take to achieve our goals.

Our interpersonal behavior at Green meetings leaves much to be desired. Over the last 20 years we have all learned about the behavior we would like to see. But the types of interpersonal changes we want take at least three generations to become established in a population.

You also make the point that all sorts of scholars and experts have proposed Greenish policies for years. My feeling is that if these experts had the courage of their convictions, they would have started organizing their local groups years ago, and then they would have been at the Green gathering representing their local groups. I consider this a failing of your so-called experts, not of the Greens.

— Greg Gerritt

Industry ME, "Western Mountains Bior'n"

It's happening!

Your article on the national Green conference did make me cry. I wasn't there but have had enough first-hand experience with the movement to know the pain you describe.

But please don't lose hope. The Green movement is alive and well at the local level.

Here in Chapel Hill, our position at the solid waste hearing (that waste policy should encourage social responsibility) was front page news. Our position on an expanded library facility (that decentralized services would better promote community, ecology and literacy) also made headlines.

Our member Joyce Brown, who sits on the town council, keeps the Green perspective in the public eye.

We have not solved the race issue but do not feel guilty about it. We organize events together with leaders of the black community; we support each other's issues. We are organized separately but are building the relationships on which new organizational forms can be built.

— Dan Coleman

Chapel Hill NC, Piedmont Bioregion

The community-builders

This is from a public reply to our article by a founder of the Wisconsin Greens:

A few Green activists in Wisconsin were troubled to read Mark Satin's critique of the U.S. Greens in his personal forum, NEW OPTIONS. Some characterized it as a "manifesto of giving up." Others were more troubled by

Satin's dismissal of Chippewa activist and Lake Superior Green Walt Bresette's keynote address.

Because of Satin's following in trendy political circles, it is appropriate to critique his critique. I will start mine with recognition of three elements.

First, I recognize the validity of many of his criticisms. Chiefly, the Green phobia about leadership/structure/hierarchy/success.

Second, I recognize the deep confessional nature of his article and his profound horror at finding the Greens to be the mirror image of his life. The rest of us recognize this as mid-life crisis and fortunately do not have the ability to spread it out for the whole nation to read.

Third, I recognize that his observations focus on the national level. If his contacts are with intellectuals on the coasts it is easy to see how Green politics becomes the equivalent of the parlor socialism of writers and academics in the 1930s.

But I also feel that his criticisms are flawed in many respects.

Satin seems to assume that the U.S. Greens are blind to their own difficulties. The Winter 1990 issue of *Green Letter* (P.O. Box 14141, San Francisco 94114, \$2.50) has many articles and letters about the dysfunctional aspects of the Estes Park gathering, along with corrective suggestions.

He sees the platform process as too democratic. I agree that we need not fear the input of Green-leaning experts and technicians. But he misses the root of the problem: insufficient development of a local base to involve in a democratic platform process.

U.S. Greens are stuck with their strange developmental history. As much as Mr. Satin or I would like, we cannot go back and start over. We can try to learn, we can try to solve conflicts. But to imply that political disagreement is out of place, or the result of egos too large or too fragile, is to characterize the Greens as an umbrella group for character disorders.

I can assure Satin that if he employs the same intimate journalism with his "effective real-world organizations," he will find similar difficulties or suppressions of same.

Finally, I must take exception with Satin's use of Walt Bresette to re-ignite his fears of militant Blacks manipulating foolish and guilty whites.

Walt is an idea-person and storyteller [who] uses his stories to empower and to build the community he talks about. If Satin couldn't hear Walt, then for me it calls into question other people observations made by Satin.

— Dennis Boyer

Cobb WI, Heartland Bioregion

My friend Dennis Boyer, whom I referred to in my starry-eyed speech, sent along your article. What to do with Boyer's note and your article is now taking up my lunch hour.

While I don't remember having a "long taped interview" with you, if you say so I suppose it happened. My prefatory comments where I explained how I needed to protect myself from "such powerful people" were in part directed at you — even though I don't remember you. (Perhaps it is a reflection of the success of the protection I felt needed to be invoked.)

While you found the talk less than "inspiring," why do you find it *important* even for commentary? Especially as you now have re-found yourself, albeit after seven years' hoping that the Greens were a "credible, competent vehicle for change"? Your personal ramblings have undercut your "professional level" of dealing with things.

"NEW OPTIONS will not devote long stories to the U.S. Greens again until they begin to affect the American political dialogue." What power. What nonsense. "If the game can't be played by *my* rules then I'm taking my ball home," cried the tearful child.

A word of caution: please don't overestimate the power and the influence that you so blatantly wield. Like most "oppressed minorities," intellectual rags and wogs are often invisible to real people in the real world.

Old 60s nostalgia, or worse, childhood unhappiness, is indeed a bitter pill to swallow when the Jolly Green Giant had promised you nirvana. But, my stranger-friend, you are the Jolly Green Giant; and self-emasculation will only result as you strike out, whine and charge that others haven't made the world happy for Mr. Satin.

"We are not all disaffected Republicans, or Democrats, or Sierra Club members," remembered Bresette as he wasted his lunch hour over the homeless plight of an intellectual wog.

Lunch is over and so is this short-lived friendship (a prelude to community). If I had a newsletter I'd have had this note typeset — sorry.

Please throw this in the trash when finished. I accept your resignation from the Green movement so there is no sense wasting more time, thought or trees on continued whining.

— Walter A. Bresette

Bayfield WI, North Woods Bioregion

Racism, sexism, etc.

While your article was one of the better attempts to clarify what happened with Christa Slaton early in the Green gathering, I thought it was quite unfair to Walt Bresette and Kwazi

Nkrumah. In fact, you didn't seem to devote the kind of follow-up time to Kwazi and, especially, Walt that you did to the European-American folks involved in the earlier dispute. From my work with Walt in Wisconsin, it's clear that he is far beyond the typical militant 60s radical making white folks feel guilty.

The failure of the Green gathering around racism came from the failure of the planners to follow through on their commitment to get many more people of color there, and from our generally underdeveloped national coalition-building. All this reinforced some of the dynamics you allude to:

- It set up the few people of color there to take on all the frustrations around race and multiculturalism — for example, Kwazi was told that Thomas Jefferson was a great American hero, despite the fact he owned slaves.

- It meant that paternalism toward people of color and their opinions often went unchallenged. (This is our European-American problem, not theirs, by the way.)

- It unveiled some of the volcanic contradictions within the relationship of racism and sexism that any truly multi-racial movement must deal with. For example, when four days worth of process and political frustration lead Kwazi to lay it out for us in an angry voice, do we really want to tell him (and other men of color) not to be angry, it's not the post-liberal way? Do we really want to tell him that Black macho (?) isn't the way to relate to our Green (i.e., white, educated) movement?

I would also question how some feminists responded to Kwazi's anger. Anger from an African-American man is not the feminist way — but from working-class or middle-class European-American women, it is? (I would say it's legitimate from both African-Americans and women, given the politics of it.)

Incidentally, where are all those great luminaries, mentioned in NEW OPTIONS #1-71, when it comes to these tough questions?

— Rick Whaley

Milwaukee WI, "Milwaukee River Bior'n"

I'm pissed off at the Greens too, but for exactly the opposite reasons you are! Too many Greens in my area haven't wrestled enough with issues of domination, and so the men and domineering women tend to run things while the less adamant people float away unheard and unutilized.

You act as if this isn't a problem, or as if the solution is obvious. Do you really think that?

— Tom Atlee

Oakland CA, Shasta Bioregion

Misrepresentation?

You have me "leaving the organization"! I was shocked when I read those words. From

my mail and phone, you have given confusing signals to a lot of people (and complicated my Green work considerably!).

So please let me correct that: in no way have I left the organization. I did announce that I would no longer continue in my three-year role as leader of the program/platform development process.

You are right that I am turning my energies into multicultural work and Green electoral politics. But you seem to project onto me your apparent belief that the latter is totally separate from the core Green organization. I don't see it that way at all.

We have one Green movement at the core of which are the Green Committees of Correspondence. Green electoral bodies, no matter how autonomous their evolution will be, will remain connected with the core Green bodies. In any event, I certainly intend to remain a participating member of those core bodies, at local, regional, national, and eventually international levels.

— John Rensenbrink

Cambridge MA, Lower New Engl. Bior'n

Dear John: I'm sorry, but you have got to take responsibility for the way you presented your intentions at the gathering.

If you suddenly and unexpectedly take center stage at an organization's national meeting; go on and on denouncing that organization for its hypocrisy and cruelty; announce to shocked silence that you're withdrawing from your role in the platform process (a process you'd not only fathered, but been the public spokesperson for); further announce that you're about to launch two Green initiatives that would have no formal, structural accountability to the Green organization; stand silently by while people weep over your words; and give your consent to a long mourning ritual (complete with drumbeats) — then folks who aren't privy to your innermost thoughts are going to conclude that you're outta there.

Even Brian Tokar, who tries very hard to be kind to the Greens, felt obliged to report that you and Christa Slaton "both threw extended public temper tantrums and walked out" (Z Magazine, Nov. 1990).

"I did not raise my voice"

I am the "young Green" who, you claim, "yelled at Christa Slaton" to not "get so violently emotional."

I was disappointed and hurt that you so grossly misrepresented what happened, and I hope you will find room to print this letter and set the record straight.

I did not yell, nor even raise my voice. I simply acknowledged that a small group had obviously put a lot of effort into making the

platform process work, and therefore had strong emotional investments. I suggested that "this kind of violent emotion isn't going to help us."

I would have liked to yell. I felt angry and frustrated by our "leadership" and its orchestration of the gathering. Concerns expressed by our local group were being railroaded. But I restrained myself, largely because I believe in "treating people as Human Beings," as you put it. I also realized that being a leader without a clear mandate or guidance can be a great strain.

I am sorry that Christa and others misunderstood me. I tried to make peace with people who came to me later with criticisms. Unfortunately, some were not interested in understanding — like one of our "leaders" who berated me for several minutes because I "didn't know a fucking thing."

— Jeff Allen

Washington DC, Potomac Valley Bior'n

Dear Jeff: I stood two chairs away from you during your outburst, and it was exactly as I reported it.

In the heat of passion, it's hard for people to know exactly what they're saying or how they're saying it. Haven't you wondered why so many delegates "misunderstood" you?

"If I learned anything . . ."

The letters in this section — many by activists — all urge the Greens to change their ways. Of course, their words don't just apply to Greens, or activists. . . .

Under Western eyes

I write a weekly column addressing environmental issues, run a recycling center, and do a lot of public speaking in the schools around here, trying to get people to, at the least, make educated choices every day.

I very much enjoyed your commentary on the Green gathering and thought I'd send you my version (published 9/27/90 in the *Douglas Co. News-Press*, the *Highlands Ranch Register*, and the *Vail Trail* — all Colorado papers):

"It is my belief that one must treat other people with respect and dignity until they prove they are unworthy of it, regardless of any differences in their backgrounds or experiences. This is what the Greens profess, but this is not the spirit I observed in Estes Park.

"On the contrary, what I saw was a group of people, the majority of whom preached peace, environmental protection, and commu-

nity-based values, but who could not abide by their own ethics. There were bitter arguments in the plenary sessions, abusive verbal fights in some of the workshops, and a general disrespect for most of the key workers. . . .

"If I were to offer advice to the Greens, it would be to work on some sensitivity training before they meet again on a national level."

— **Debi Kimball**

Parker CO, Rocky Mountain Bioregion

The party's over

Even if the U.S. Greens could somehow overcome their intramural sniping, I doubt they could become much of a political force in this country.

The Green party became viable in Europe because European nations have had long traditions of entertaining many political parties. In the U.S. creating a new party is simply too radical a step to inspire the public.

The solution for the U.S. is found in the martial art of aikido: work with what is given. What is given to Green-thinking Americans is the Democratic party. Working to steer the Democrats toward greener horizons is a far more realistic enterprise than attempting to re-make the U.S. with strategies that don't reflect its unique nature.

— **Brad Lemley**

Bath ME, Lower New England Bior'n

I am more convinced than ever of the need for a third party. I just think it was incredibly naive to think that the Greens would be the ones to found a serious one.

I cling to the hope that Tony Mazzocchi or Molly Yard or someone else nearer the mainstream than the Greens will publicly begin the impetus for a serious third party in the next few years, and we Greens, having squandered our claim to moral leadership, can bring in our issues and take our proper place among the "followership" in the ranks.

— **Vincent Stankiewicz**

Amherst MA, Pioneer Valley Bioregion

If I learned anything networking the "appropriate technology" movement years ago, it was this: the anarchists can't be organized.

— **Byron Kennard**

Vice Chair, Sun Day 1978

Washington DC, Potomac Valley Bior'n

The party's not begun

I read your report on the Green gathering with an increasingly icy feeling in my heart.

As you have discovered the hard way, the bottom line is that if you ignore power, it doesn't go away — it simply falls into other hands.

I've never believed that power corrupts *inevitably*. I reckon the real weakness lies in ourselves in that we are too frightened to handle power — in the outside world and in our own organizations.

This is an odd fear for a movement that claims it wants to redistribute wealth not only between continents but also between generations! Just how we plan to do this without getting involved in the dynamics of power I do not know.

If Greens can take power out of the woodshed of nameless horrors and spotlight it, they'll be much better able to build lines of accountability and responsibility into their organizations. Then the abuser(s) of power can be swiftly removed before the integrity of the whole is imperilled. If you think about it, this is actually a very ecological way of doing things!

In a nutshell, the U.S. Greens should elect/choose/appoint their office holders, tattoo on their foreheads "the buck stops here," write down clearly the job-description and report-back mechanisms — and trust the person(s) to get on with the job.

If they do good they should be rewarded; if not they should be fired. To give people a lot of responsibility but no authority and then trash them is psychologically vicious, as your report made abundantly clear.

Of course we want a Green society where leaders are selected for their wisdom and trustworthiness. The key is to develop a culture of civic participation and make sure everyone is plugged into what is going on.

But we also need a Green political force that is going to go in there in the very un-Green world of the 1990s and put up a good show of getting power for our ideas. Because that is what we want, power for our ideas.

Perhaps that will mean power for ourselves. And if it does we must be ready to take it — and take it responsibly. No Green who really understands the state of our environment, and the threat this poses to human existence, can seriously do anything but want power for Green ideas.

Green parties are not mirror-images of the society we seek. Green parties are not encounter groups for lost souls. Green parties are not pressure groups, lobbying for single issues. Green parties are political parties!

Marrying efficiency with a green style will always be difficult. But our job — our top priority — must be to get the Green choice onto every ballot we can and explain as clearly as we can why it is vital people vote Green.

A related point: All over the world, Greens have been developing political programs for years. There is no need for anyone to do as we had to do at the beginning of the 1970s and invent the wheel!

A lot of the early inspiration for European Greens came from U.S. writers and activists. Let us return the favor. Trawl the world to get the best available Green policy options. Take what you want, junk the rest. Agree upon the broad outlines nationally and leave the details to local groups. Then *get on* with getting onto state ballots and putting your program to the electorate.

Dear American Greens, please start to do something — fast! How will you feel if your time comes to win power for your ideas and you are not ready?

— **Sara Parkin**

Speaker, British Green party

Co-secretary, European Greens, 1985-90

Lyons, France

Thanx for the memories

I found myself reading aloud your account of the Green gathering to [my wife,] Nancy, over breakfast this morning — a slow-starting Saturday morning.

Your Green meeting reminded me of various peace movement gatherings I have been part of over the years, though very few were equally difficult: leaders resigning, new organizations being launched, rage and grief in many faces, etc.

Still more I was reminded of the Left, into which I was born as a card-carrying red diaper baby but which I never took to largely because of a tendency to get seasick in situations in which correct ideology is all-important.

Reading your piece, I realized that somewhere along the line I made my peace with being marginal. This may have had something to do with having become a religious person and being influenced by the monastic side of religious life: real marginality.

Being marginal doesn't mean that I don't care what happens and don't want to have some influence. But I suspect the best bet in influencing politics for people like me (maybe you too) is through responses and activities that stand outside structures which are self-consciously political.

— **Jim Forest**

Peace Media Service

Alkmaar, Holland

The author was a prominent pacifist activist in the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s.

In their squabbling and closet Europhilia, the U.S. Greens remind me of the Marxist students I met on campus in the mid-1970s. They seemed to be doing nothing that had any hope of making a difference in even the small society of the campus. Their main activity, so far as I could tell, was trashing other

radicals over insignificant issues.

And don't you think there's something odd in the constant work on structure in an organization so small that a telephone tree and mailing list are all that's really needed? One might conclude that the real purpose of working on the structure is not to make the organization more effective but to make it more virtuous, like a group of perfectionistic Buddhists seeking to make every detail of life in their ashram conform to their religious principles.

And, hey, blacks are not the only ones who practice the form of dominance called mau-mauing. I'd bet that a fair number of whites at the gathering have done it themselves, standing in all their scruffiness to lay down guilt trips among the neckties and pantyhose.

It's not that we shouldn't have national Green gatherings. Let's just quit pretending to be building a political party, and instead use the gatherings as chances to get together with each other and have free-form shop talks that last into the wee hours. The cross-pollination of ideas from these conversations might be invaluable. Let the good times roll!

— Joan Howe

Boston MA, Lower New England Bior'n

Déjà vu all over again

I have a pile of unread books and magazines in my room, but I read with rivetted attention your account of the Green gathering with the rest of my new mail still sitting on my lap.

It gave me the feeling of "déjà vu all over again," to quote one of our most fundamental cultural philosophers, Yogi Berra. How many times have we seen this phenomenon of self-destructive infighting in minority and counter-cultural organizations?

I am a refugee from one of those fights — in the alternative education movement. I was the first executive director of an international alternative school organization. I built it up from 50 to 500 schools and was on the verge of getting the ear of the mainstream [see NEW OPTIONS #36 — ed.]. Then the attacks came from within.

I won't bore you with the gory details, but the upshot was that I resigned from that position and am now working independently.

Sitting, stunned, after reading your piece, I asked myself, "What is going on here?" Finally the answer became clear. These commonality of all these conflicts is that most of the participants grew up in authoritarian and anger-producing environments, without freedom.

In the alternative school that I founded in 1968, we found it was counter-productive to admit new students after the age of 13. By

that time the backlog of anger was too deep. It would take too much time to work it out in the thoroughgoing way that our process encouraged. But students who started at a younger age fared very well indeed.

So — I suggest that the basic common problem in all these warring counter-culture organizations is that the participants do not understand freedom and are not free people. And I suggest that the answer to our organizational problems and, ultimately, the world's problems, lies in the creation of a generation of children who can grow up with freedom.

That is not an easy solution, and it may not even be possible within the time constraints that have been created by those in power who have grown up with such anger in their beings. But it is the only solution I know of. So I will continue to work on it alone, while I hope to unite and inspire people by what I write and how I network.

In a sense, I guess that's what you've chosen to do too, isn't it?

— Jerry Mintz

Roslyn Heights NY, Hudson Valley Bior'n

Into the mainstream

You state that you are going to devote "more coverage to Greenish trends in effective real-world organizations like NOW, the Sierra Club and the NAACP."

I personally believe that the real possibilities are emerging in *even more* mainstream organizations across the country. I see the schools and colleges, the social service agencies and the chambers of commerce becoming aware of the need for fundamental change.

I hope you will begin to look at the extraordinary things that are happening in *these* institutions across the country.

— Robert Theobald

New Orleans LA, Delta Bioregion

I was very moved by the honesty and anguish in your story on the Greens. It's really about the human condition. The gay community — which I have been politically active in for 12 years — creeps along at a snail's pace because ineffective and dysfunctional modes of behavior and interpersonal interaction retard forward progress.

I am a yuppie who still feels poor relative to the great wealth on display in Manhattan. Health crises in the 1980s created something of a spiritual awakening, but I still believe that human nature is human nature, and societies are organized around that bedrock reality. There will be specialization and hierarchy.

The genius of the American ideal is that it recognizes reality, and uses human nature as a check and balance on itself. This is the best

mankind has been able to do so far, and although our system falls far below the mark set by the founding fathers, no utopian system based on utopian fantasies has ever surpassed it.

The kind of shenanigans you described in your essay are just so uninteresting to a bottom-line, results-oriented personality. The end doesn't justify the means, but the goal must be paramount in the organization. The Greens worship process as an end, so that is what they produce — more and more process.

So many alternative types are really seeking personal happiness and fulfillment from the political process, when they really need years of therapy, and perhaps a kick in the butt.

Politics in a "multi-cultural," pluralistic society has to be about the distribution and production of goods and services. If someone wants appreciation, let them volunteer for a service organization or get involved with a church of some kind.

Anything we want and need can be obtained from our system *as it is presently organized*. Alternative organizers should spend more time learning how to pull the levers of our present system, and less time trying to change the system.

What works works, what doesn't work doesn't work. The operative word is WORK, which most of us loathe, if we're really honest with ourselves. It's easier to join a clique, preach to the converted, and live out a mutual fantasy.

— Champion Read, M.D.

New York NY, Hudson Valley Bioregion

"After the disillusionment"

If the letters above urge the Greens to act differently, these final letters urge them — and of course the rest of us, too — to think and feel differently. We find it interesting that all these letters are from women.

To be an adult

Thank you for your critical analysis of the Greens. Crying *is* appropriate when good intentions and psychological/emotional confusions get tangled up and stall a potentially fruitful movement.

Trying hard to not be: racist, fascist, sexist, etc., is not the same as joyously connecting with different races, humbly accepting that one's contribution to a dialogue is inherently biased and incomplete, or yearning to reconcile with those on the other side of the war between the sexes. Constant censoring and

criticizing is inexorably geared toward immobilization.

An experimental, forgiving and ambitious approach makes things happen — including embarrassing errors and oversights. The seeking of purity and innocence is antithetical to such energy.

By definition, I believe, to take responsibility — to act — to be an adult in the world, is to lose the option of innocence. Only then can we move on to take our best shot and suffer the judgment of our progeny.

Somehow, in my middle age, this option now appeals to me.

— **Mallory Crawford**

W. Hartford CT, Lower New Engl. Bior'n

Like you, I was a lonely and unhappy child. At age 50, in retrospect, I see that the experience of not-belonging prepared me well for being out of the mainstream ideologically.

Anyone who has the courage to ask questions for which there are no ready answers has to be prepared for loneliness.

— **Barbara Richardson**

Rutland MA, Pioneer Valley Bioregion

Your Green gathering article was fascinating, and you exposed many of "our" weaknesses. What most interested me was the sensibility of the participants.

Many co-dependent and dysfunctional characteristics showed up in their conversations. Hopefully they are working on their issues re: family of origin, so that they themselves can be healed as they are working to heal the Earth!

We who are emotionally injured are often the ones who turn to heal the outside world, instead and in place of healing our lives and emotions. But we cannot hide our injuries. They show themselves in our beliefs, our attitudes, and our defenses.

— **Tally Chilvers**

San Juan Capistrano CA, Pacific Rim Bior'n

Martyrdom doesn't work

I was also at the Green gathering in September. I was invited to present a workshop on intentional communities, drawing from my experience of living at Sunrise Ranch. But I was interested in the Gathering process so I attended a session after my workshop. It happened to be the session where Christa Slaton broke down and cried.

I remember being uncomfortable with her emotionalism — smart facilitators who want to get things done usually have a better grip on themselves — but I recognized her frustration with wanting to make something work and not quite knowing how. I remember it well from trying to get an Earth Community

going in New York City — eternal gatherings and conversations which never got past arguing over the process of the process.

But what really concerns me is to see someone like Christa who is willing to work but clearly doesn't know how things *do* work. Your description of her feeling that "if she really worked extra hard, just like she'd always done, and sent out lots of mailings, and answered every letter and phone call . . ." pointed to successful and deadly brainwashing.

She has evidently accepted the principle that quicker (bigger, more) is better, and that if we just keep plugging away hard enough at something we can make it happen. But when you stop and think, this is the same un-Green, unnatural, manipulative and unsustainable attitude that has built a world that few of us want to be part of.

No wonder she's frustrated! Grinding self-sacrifice and martyrdom has never held people's attention for very long, and for good reason — it doesn't work!

What about operating from the premise that things work (in families, in companies, in communities, in organizations) because people are *inspired* into participating fully? What about a leader knowing that her most important asset is a personal atmosphere that says, "What I'm doing is meaningful *and* fun, and you can be part of it too!"

These are the individuals and groups I'm interested in and would like to read about in NEW OPTIONS, because they are the ones really making a difference.

— **Charlene Church**

Loveland CO, Rocky Mountain Bior'n

It seems very clear to me as a psychotherapist that political leadership today needs to begin at home with saving ourselves while we try to save the world.

You show Christa Slaton doing her therapy before a couple of hundred people. If she had done it quietly, with her therapist, she would have learned to recognize her own pattern — that she is a compulsive worker needing desperately to meet the expectations of mommy and daddy and achieve what they never achieved — instead of having 200 other people learn it while she herself learned only that people are unappreciative.

— **Barbara C. Loy**

Claremont CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion

Moving on

The Greens have not crossed my mind very much until I received your NEW OPTIONS article on the Colorado gathering. When I first read it, I churned inside. When I read it the second time, I felt immense relief. I applaud your honesty and empathize with

your sadness.

The issue for me was *never* how hard I had to work. I expect that; it's how I've lived my entire life. The issue was how each step of progress constantly made had to be retraced as new people got involved and folks participated haphazardly at their own convenience. Time after time, decisions that were made through open group process were altered at the next meeting by a different group of decision-makers.

When I read your article on the Greens two years ago ("Last Chance Saloon," #60), I thought that is *exactly* how I feel. The Greens are our last and only hope. Then in October, 1989, I heard fund-raiser Sue Conti's tearful farewell to the Greens and her comparison of life in the Greens with being in an abusive marital relationship.

Her speech was given on the very first day I took on the role of coordinator of the platform ratification process. It hit me [then] like a ton of bricks, [and now captures] how I feel about my own separation from the Greens.

The Greens seemed to have all the important ingredients to fulfill my desires and needs, but they caused more pain than I wish to endure.

The Greens are driven by the desperate view that they are the "Last Chance Saloon." They act frantically, illogically and chaotically. They've had many experiences telling them it is foolhardy to trust, and, by George, they aren't trusting anybody.

Once Sue Conti clarified the issue for me, I realized that the Greens were not my (our) last hope. I was going to give them my very best, to trust them, and to allow myself to be vulnerable because I was also giving them my heart. But I understood the entire time that my relationship with the Greens would have to end if the negative energy, the lack of trust and support, and the abuse of persons and process continued. I felt confident that there were other paths and other persons.

Today I feel that deep in my soul, and it comforts me. I gave it the very best I could, but once I concluded it was more destructive than positive, I was ready to let go without regret (not without some pain, however). I have not had any second thoughts and I feel free and hopeful again.

All of this is a lengthy way of trying to assure you that all is not lost and your time over the last two decades has not been wasted. What you have learned, through your struggles with folks you respect and love, makes you wiser and stronger.

I sense you still hold on to your earlier hopes for the Greens in your heart, while your head tells you to move on. Well, when you let your heart quit pulling you back to the "what ifs," your wisdom will open doors and

let you see new avenues that are not apparent now.

Those of us who hold Green values are out there whether we are in the Green movement or not. We strive on a daily basis for a better world and to become better people. That is going to be important groundwork at some point for an alternative to the Greens.

— **Christa Slaton**

*Dept. Poli. Sci., Georgia Southern Univ.
Statesboro GA, Dixie Bioregion*

The morning after (I)

I can't tell whether you are writing an epitaph for the U.S. Green movement or issuing it a challenge with your conclusion that "the U.S. Greens would never affect the political life of our time." I prefer the latter, and hope that in some way your criticisms will wake up many Greens to some of the dark truths that have made the movement largely invisible and ineffective — so far.

You're right: this bunch of visionaries better get themselves grounded, and fast. But I don't believe that the hatefulness and pettiness of some Green insiders at one national conference, nor the disarray of the "structure," nor the alienation of one generation of leadership, will keep the Greens from their *raison d'être*: to effect social and political change in this country.

I attended the Estes Park gathering as an observer, volunteer and closet sympathizer. After the gathering, I came out of my closet and got involved with the Greens largely *because* of what I saw there, and what was largely not dealt with in your postmortem. That is: an eloquent series of progressive public policy visions describing a society, culture and environment in which I would like to live. Change *begins* with vision, and with a union of dynamic, if sometimes disparate, elements.

The Greens are an amazing, if somewhat unruly, assortment of people — youthful and old, shaggy-haired and clean-cut, passionate and soft-spoken, male and female (albeit mostly white) — and perspectives. They are on the leading edge of their own as well as our society's growth, so things are bound to be somewhat messy.

The jury is still out on the Greens. It is an organic, a human, unfolding; not just a political movement.

— **Karen R. Kos**

Boulder CO, Rocky Mountain Bioregion

The morning after (II)

I came to the same conclusions you did about the Greens — some time ago, however — which is why I did not attend the Colorado gathering or any of the Interregional Commit-

tee meetings after the one in D.C.

Somewhat lamely, I am musing that perhaps the time isn't ripe for the Greens — although with a quarter of a million poor kids in the Saudi desert, I don't know what else we need to bring forth real leadership in this country.

I am sorry you feel empty. What can we learn from all this? We are still alive. I have been around a couple of decades longer than you. Unless we commit *hari-kari*, we gotta go on. I'm still Green despite it all.

— **Ingrid Komar**

Washington DC, Potomac Valley Bior'n

The morning after (III)

Each time I read in NEW OPTIONS about this or that group and what "they" do, I am struck by something you leave unsaid, which is, "They are me."

Each of these groups about which you write are like different versions of the same game. Since we can't play with everyone in the world, we pick particular groups in which to grapple. But each group poses essentially the same challenges and offers essentially the same understandings.

So when you are disappointed in "the Greens," it might be useful to draw a distinction. The particular people who chose to act out caring for the Earth in that configuration were not a good team. They need to get better at cooperating. The Greens as an ideology of cooperation and healing is something else again.

Becoming good in teams is what we are all doing . . . whichever ones we happen to be on. We who live on Earth must take care of her, and as we support this cause or that, unavoidably we are doing the "inner work" of aligning ourselves with her, and with each other, and with the peace and harmony in

which creative energy flows.

— **Suzanne Taylor**

Los Angeles CA, Pacific Rim Bioregion

The morning after (IV)

I was putting off responding to your Green report until I could find just the right words — but of course delaying action until one's thoughts are correct is exactly part of the problem. It was Carlyle who said we must not fail to do a good thing simply because we cannot do the best thing.

I have learned, working at a community college, that we are all blind men confronting whatever is the elephant of the moment. Which is by way of saying you're in good company.

Now that you're middle-aged — and I think that Green conference was your rite of passage — you will find on this side people just as earnest, informed, committed, but perhaps less heard from, more apt to be camouflaged by respectability, as likely to be Armand Hammer as a rural high school teacher.

NEW OPTIONS is one of the journals we read and understand. We don't have to agree with what you say to find it valuable, to find the questions worth sharing, to gain a sense that we are not the only ones thinking about these issues.

The next couple of months are going to be tough; a reawakening-and-transcending always is, especially one that says "I will do the best I can, as I can, without knowing exactly where I'm going or how to get there."

I don't mean to sound motherly: I had to spend five months in a wheelchair to learn *my* lessons (and learn how common the exercise is). It's what we do after the disillusionment that matters.

— **Susan Griswold Blandy**

Troy NY, Hudson Valley Bioregion

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