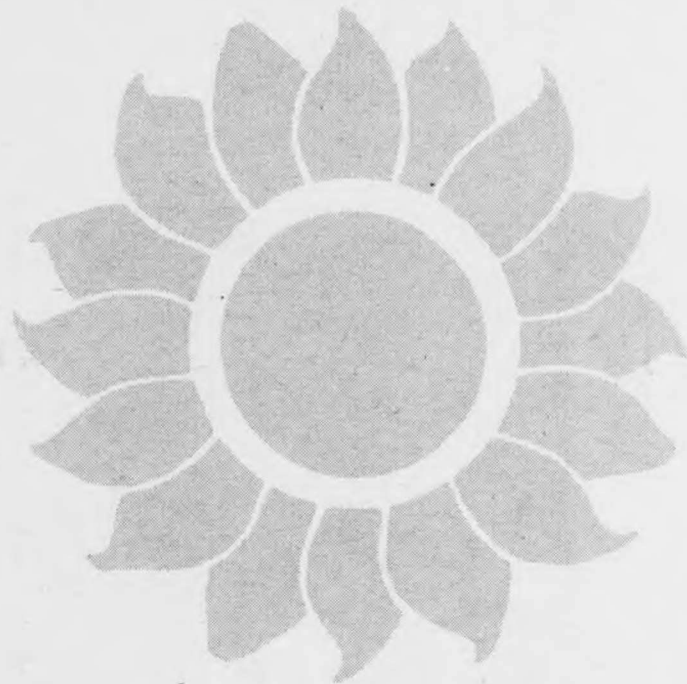


Green Politics



green party

"We are a response to a growing concern for the future of this planet among Canadians."

Trevor Hancock
Founding member, Green Party

By VALDEMIRO SILVA

Green is the color of the latest movement to hit Canadian politics. Taking its roots from the West German Green Party and the British Ecology Party, the Green Party of Canada was formed in 1983, registering at both the federal and provincial levels.

Proclaiming themselves to be "Green and Growing," the Green party has managed to pull together an impressive amount of support for such a young party. In Ontario alone there are 25 chapters incorporating some 1,200 to 1,500 members.

Canada-wide, Alberta and Saskatchewan have only one chapter apiece, and lack enough signatures to register the party provincially. With the exception of the maritime provinces, all other provinces have organized provincial wings.

Green politics are based on four basic principles: ecology, social responsibility, grass-roots democracy and non-violence. As the name itself suggests, the Green Party stresses the need for long-term solutions to ecological problems; problems it says are the result of society's constant abuse of the natural environment.

The Greens believe nuclear power plants should be phased out as dangerous and expensive energy sources.

The party advocates the need to protect our global environment through such steps as the elimination of acid rain, an end to the paving of irreplaceable farmland, the control of toxic chemical contamination and a reversal of deforestation and soil loss.

Dieter Heinrich, who ran as a Green candidate in the last federal election in his home riding of Parkdale-High Park, says ecological problems are the "most important crisis confronting us over the long term."

Incorporated in the Green Party's idea of sound ecological policies is the concept of conservation of both energy and resources. The Greens believe society is squandering both non-renewable resources and precious renewable resources such as electricity.

"The use of large amounts of electricity to heat homes is a good example of a terrible squandering of energy," says Heinrich.

In changing to a more conservation-oriented economy, the Greens believe in the need "to dispel the myth of permanent (economic) growth in a finite world." Other aims include the recycling of non-renewable resources, and a change from an emphasis on the production of quantity to that of quality. Heinrich says what's needed is a "change in the basic value structure of our society."

One of the most controversial ideas put forth by the Greens is the belief that nuclear power plants should be phased out as dangerous and expensive energy sources.

When asked if the alternatives were not even more expensive and just as dangerous (producing acid rain, for example), Heinrich replied, "The idea is not necessarily to replace them with alternatives but to redirect the money saved on building such future centralized mega-projects into conservation measures, and some local self-reliant energy systems where needed."

Heinrich points out that what Ontario Hydro has done is predict a doubling in energy demands every 10 years and built

huge capital-intensive projects to meet that demand. "Surely that kind of trend can't go on indefinitely," Heinrich says.

Saying we could halve our present energy demands if we implemented the right policies, Heinrich sees the need for nuclear power plants and other such plants disappearing.

"If Hydro spent the money it invested in these plants on developing and encouraging conservation measures and acceptable alternate energy sources, the need for these plants would sharply decline," says Heinrich.

The Greens believe they must convince people of a new ethics, a new lifestyle based on individual responsibility and awareness that we are part of a global community and ecology.

A slogan which surfaces time and time again in Green literature is "Think Globally, Act Locally," reiterating their fundamental belief that we should act within our community.

In response to the suggestion that local and global interests can conflict, Heinrich replied, "I disagree, I feel that the responsible alternative in terms of a global outlook tends to correspond with the local responsible solution."

One of the party's primary goals is to "Create a humane society." The Greens propose an attack on the causes of social problems, by promoting community-based services for the elderly and the disabled as opposed to institutionalization, promoting adequate daycare facilities, greater choice for women in their personal and work lives, and violations of civil rights are among their concerns.

Saying our political system has such flaws as an authoritarian nature of government, a low level of both popular participation and individual responsibility, and a lack of responsible political representatives, they want these problems redressed. That redress, the party says, should take the form of various changes to the political process itself.

As solutions, they put forth such reforms as an introduction of proportional representation and an increase in freedom of information as necessary political changes. Saying that parliament has lost much of its power to high-ranking civil servants, the party wants to restore real power where they feel it belongs—in parliament.

Furthermore, they argue that the political process must promote citizen involvement in real decision-making.

Dieter Heinrich proposes a system where "power would be held at its most basic level." He says that the lower branches such as the municipalities and ridings should be given more power and the federal and provincial governments would have to be more responsive to the consensus of these local governments—governments in which the people play a direct and active part. This concept that the nation be run by consensus is fundamental to Green politics. Their principal belief is that local communities and their citizens know what's best for themselves. When asked how the local governments would allow and encourage more participation by their residents, Heinrich replied, "By allowing citizen's action groups to play a greater part in government, and by having such things as public commissions and forums as a vital element in the decision process." In addition, he insists that the introduction of proportional representation would also contribute to greater public participation.

Green Party members feel they cannot be classified on the traditional political spectrum (as either right or left, i.e. Capitalist or Socialist). Because of some of their policies, they are often accused of being a socialist party in sheep's clothing. However, they see both the right and the left to have proven themselves unable to deal with today's problems. The Greens claim to offer an alternative to both.

Perhaps the single issue with which the Green Party is most connected in the public mind is the nuclear arms issue. The Greens are associated with the peace movement, more as a result of their namesake in West Germany than anything they've actually done. Heinrich describes the nuclear issue as "the most immediate threat" to this planet. Nevertheless, he insists that while they also desire world peace, they differ from the West German Greens in the means and methods necessary to achieve that peace.

In reference to the issue of nuclear weapons and militarism the Green Party of Canada takes a less radical approach than its German counterpart. The Green Party of Canada advocates the reform and strengthening of the UN and World Court, a multi-lateral weapons freeze, followed by phased global arms reductions, cancelling of military spending to meet important world development needs.

When asked whether the Green Party of Canada would use, as the German Green's have, civil disobedience as a tool of political reform, Trevor Hancock replied, "It would depend on the issue; for the nuclear issue—yes. But why would we register ourselves as a party if not to attempt solutions through the political process?"

The Green Party is seen by many as being among the so-called 'fringe' parties. About this, Hancock says, "The difference between ourselves and the fringe parties is that we are not a single-issue party, as some of our critics claim. We are concerned with society and its future as a whole and therefore deal with the whole spectrum of issues, presenting our own viable alternative." Pointing out parties like the Rhinos as fringe, Hancock insists the Greens are "a minor party, just as the Marxist-Leninists are a minor party."

Much of the Green Party's philosophy is rooted in the social revolution of the '60s. Says Dieter Heinrich, "While it may be true that we take some of the better elements of all its more radical ideas. In any case, I don't see the sixties in a negative light; I think they've done a lot to remove many of the problems, stale attitudes and prejudices of society." Heinrich claims the Green Party is not based on idealism but on necessity. "The present course is untenable, a dead end course," says Heinrich.

Much of the Green Party's philosophy is rooted in the social revolution of the '60s.

Allan Greenbaum, among the founding members of the York Chapter of the Green Party, points out "Green politics are a means, not an end. We are not a vehicle for candidates, but rather, a vehicle for change."

Although the York chapter was formed only last year, there are already difficulties surfacing in maintaining their membership level, mainly due to the unstable nature of the campus environment. Many of the previous members having graduated, are now in the business world, out of touch with both campus activities and party events. Those interested in joining or simply seeking further information can contact Chapter spokesperson Trish Butler at 425-3853.

While the Green Party of Canada might be criticized by some as a single-issue party and by others as too idealistic in a society that values pluralism they are providing an alternative. To many, as witnessed by their rapid growth, that alternative is a very real and plausible one.