

Building Green Party Power for 2018 and Beyond

The political culture in the United States is shifting. The majority of registered voters are neither Democrats nor Republicans and 57% of people in the US say that a third party is needed, an 11% increase from 2012 [Gallup, Sept.30, 2016]. This creates an opportunity for the Green Party to become a more powerful political force in 2018 and beyond.

In order to build Green power, it will be necessary to learn from past mistakes and to be proactive in preparation for not only the next elections but also the continuation, and even the worsening, of crises in wages and working conditions, education, health care, racialized state violence, assaults on civil liberties and more.

In order to become the independent, radical alternative that is necessary to confront issues that the capitalist parties ignore, we urge the Green Party to debate and take action on the proposals below.

Be Clear about Green Independence

The defining political issue of our era is the influence of wealth over policy. Both capitalist major parties service the rich and Big Business to the detriment of the working class and poor. The Green Party is distinct from the two capitalist parties in that it does not accept donations from political action committees (PACs) funded by the wealthy or Big Business. The four pillars and **ten key values** of the Green Party are other distinguishing factors that differentiate it from the capitalist parties.

These distinctions draw people who are searching for a party that represents their interests to the Green Party. In addition to not accepting donations from Big Business, being clearly independent of the capitalist parties is critical in order to challenge the agendas of both parties.

In the past, the Green Party has not been clear about its independence. Problems have occurred at the local, state and federal levels; however, a major turning point was the presidential election of 2004. Ralph Nader, the Green Party presidential candidate in 2000,

was incorrectly demonized as the reason for George W. Bush's election. Rather than embracing the power to impact elections, Greens ran on a 'safe-states' strategy, later called a 'smart state' strategy, in order to help the Democrats attempt to defeat Bush. This caused division within the party and the loss of Greens who opposed the party's support for 'lesser-evilism', i.e. picking Kerry over Bush.

A similar situation may present itself in 2020 if Donald Trump seeks re-election. Although we can anticipate fear-mongering by the Democrats and accusations of 'spoiling' elections, Greens must be clear that neither capitalist party will solve the crises we face and that the need for a party that represents people is more important than ever.

Actions:

- We urge the Green Party US to debate its stance on political independence now and to make that stance clear through a formal statement.
- We also encourage this debate at the local and state levels and the consideration of a resolution to address issues of requirements for membership in the party, fusion and endorsement of candidates from the capitalist parties.

Pursue Electoral Reforms that Build Green Power

The electoral system in the US was created by and for the capitalist parties. Therefore, there are obstacles to alternative parties at every level of the process that, as a consequence, necessitate a wide range of reforms in order to have a more effective and fair democratic process. The Green Party should be the party to champion those efforts with a specific focus on blocking states from enacting voter suppression laws or policies. It is important when promoting changes to the electoral system that reforms are pursued in ways that enhance party-building and grow the power of the Green Party to challenge the capitalist parties.

We recommend that the Green Party prioritize gaining ballot access and ending both voter disenfranchisement and voter suppression. States should be encouraged to build the skills of local party members to do what is necessary to gain ballot access. Green Party local organizers should be prioritized when hiring people to petition for ballot access. And Green Party locals should be encouraged to organize with and in marginalized communities that are experiencing disenfranchisement and suppression. Leadership should be recognized and cultivated in working class and front line communities.

We support Ranked Choice Voting (RCV or Instant-Runoff Voting) but it needs to be part of a series of reforms. Without also addressing obstacles to Green Party candidates such as ballot access, voter registration for marginalized communities, fair media exposure, campaign financing and inclusion in debates, RCV serves to remove the power of Green Party candidates to impact elections and hands Green votes to one of the major parties.

Actions:

- We urge the Green Party US to invest in efforts to support local and state organizing around ballot access and ending voter disenfranchisement and suppression.
- If funds are left over from the Stein-Cobb recount effort, we encourage them to be used specifically for electoral reform efforts that build and empower party grassroots infrastructure.

Strengthen Relationships with the Popular Movement

Social transformation in the US has always required both a social movement and a political party that reflects the agenda of the social movement. As the crises in the US continue and grow, the Green Party must prioritize building relationships with people engaged in struggles in order to serve as a vehicle for transformation.

The Green Party must continue to develop a more comprehensive organizing and recruitment strategy with a clear eye towards growing the party in a new, more politically-defined, and diverse and inclusive direction. It must continue to make the necessary investments to broaden party-building efforts with a new commitment to bottom-up movement building and solidarity by working directly with front line and working class communities and their struggles.

As a political party this will clearly include running candidates, but as a relatively small and growing party, the Green Party's power also resides in building and strengthening its relationship to the popular movement. This means showing up in solidarity with communities that are in struggle. And it means recognizing or developing leadership within working class and front line communities so that candidates arise from those communities.

Actions:

- We urge the Green Party US to actively address issues within the party that perpetuate racial and class dominance, sexism, cis-heterosexism, ableism, and all manifestations of oppressive and White supremacist culture.
- We also urge the Green Party US to encourage members to support working class and front line struggles, to prioritize the voices of those engaged in struggle and to run candidates from communities in struggle.

Ensure Democracy within and Accountability to the Party

As the Green Party grows, there will be challenges to sustain the party, maintain unity and ensure the party members and its candidates are accountable to the pillars and values of the party. It is necessary to put structures in place now that address these challenges.

One of the key strengths of the Green Party is that it does not accept donations from the wealthy and Big Business so that it represents the interests of the people. This is also a weakness because the Green Party does not have adequate resources, and when an individual or group does have resources, they can control what is done without accountability to the party.

A solution is to develop a dues-paying (or other form of support for those who cannot afford dues) membership structure for the party based on a simple national standard. Along with a membership structure, the Green Party can also develop a mechanism by which decisions are made in a democratic way so that members have an equal voice.

In the past, there has been little coordination between candidates and the party, especially at the presidential level. Candidates have acted in ways that are not consistent with the interests or majority support of the party members. While political parties and candidates have different needs, a structure can be put in place so that the party is more supportive of candidates at all levels and so that candidates, particularly those running at the national level, more accurately represent the priorities of the party members.

Actions:

- We urge the Green Party US to develop a national standard for a dues-paying (or non-monetary contribution for some) membership structure and mechanism for democratic decision-making by members.

- We also urge the Green Party US to develop a structure that strengthens the relationship between the party and candidates.
- We urge the creation of a comprehensive political education program that provides information and analysis of the issues and concepts outlined in this letter.