

Thinking Green!

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." —Margaret Mead

When we founded the West German Green Party, we used the term "anti-party party" to describe our approach to politics based on a new understanding of power, a "counter-power" that is natural and common to all, to be shared by all, and used by all for all. This is the power of transformation, rooted in the discovery of our own strength and ability to be active participants in society. This kind of power stands in stark contrast to the power of domination, terror, and oppression, and is the best remedy for powerlessness.

Using power to dominate humans and nature has brought us to an impasse and can never take us beyond it. We must learn to think and act from our hearts, to recognize the interconnectedness of all living creatures, and to respect the value of each thread in the vast web of life. This is a spiritual perspective, and it is the foundation of all Green politics. It entails the radical, nonviolent transformation of the structures of society and of our way of thinking, so that domination is no longer the primary *modus operandi*. At the root of all Green political action is nonviolence, starting with how we live our lives, taking small, unilateral steps towards peace in everything we do. Green politics requires us to be both tender and subversive. Affirming tenderness as a political value is already

subversive. In Green politics, we practice tenderness in relations with others; in caring for ideas, art, language, and culture; and in cherishing and protecting the Earth.

To think Green is to build solidarity with those working for social justice and human rights everywhere, not bound by ideologies. The problems that threaten life on Earth were produced collectively, they affect us collectively, and we must act collectively to change them. We cannot retreat into isolation. The Green vision of a just society is one in which economic, social, and individual rights are guaranteed and protected, and everyone is free from exploitation, violence, and oppression.

Politicians give speeches about these values while working to undermine them. The benefits of the current political and economic systems are reserved for the privileged; therefore, any meaningful movement for social justice must focus on systemic change, on transforming both the oppressive state and economic structures that concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few. The Green methodology is not to work from the top down, but to begin at the grassroots, empowering ourselves to direct our own destinies through the cultivation of civil space and democratic social forms.

First and foremost, Green politics is grassroots politics. Politics from the top is almost always corrupt and compromised. To bring about change from below is to challenge the moral authority of those who make decisions on our behalf. Through grassroots organization, education, and empowerment, we work to reverse the state-orientation of politics and instead open up a civil space in which we are active subjects, not passive objects of those in power. Substantive change in politics at the top will come only when there is enough pressure from below. The

essence of Green politics is to live our values. We in the West German Green Party hurt ourselves over and over again by failing to maintain tenderness with each other as we gained power. We need to rededicate ourselves to our values, respect each other, be tolerant of differences, and stop trying to coerce and control one another.

Nonviolence, ecology, social justice, and feminism are the key principles of Green politics, and they are inseparably linked. We know, for example, that the wasteful patterns of production and consumption in the industrial North deplete and ravage the environment and furnish the motive and means for the violent appropriation of materials from the weaker nations in the South and for the wasteful process of militarization throughout the world. In both capitalist and state socialist countries, human beings are reduced to economic entities, with little or no regard for the human or ecological costs. Politics from the top, the pattern of hierarchical domination, is the characteristic of patriarchy. It is not a coincidence that power rests in the hands of men, benefits accrue first and foremost to men, and that women are exploited at all levels of society.

The Green approach to politics is a kind of celebration. We recognize that each of us is part of the world's problems, and we are also part of the solution. The dangers and the potentials for healing are not just outside us. We begin to work exactly where we are. There is no need to wait until conditions become ideal. We can simplify our lives and live in ways that affirm ecological and humane values. Better conditions will come because we have begun.

We have found so many ways to think each other to death—neutron warheads, nuclear reactors, Star Wars

defense systems, and many other methods of mass destruction. We are killing each other with our euphemisms and abstractions. In warfare, we accept the deaths of thousands and millions of people we call our "enemy." When we dehumanize people, devalue nature, and exalt narrowly defined self-interests, destruction is sure to follow. The healing of our planet requires a new way of thinking about politics and about life. At the heart of this is the understanding that all things are intimately interconnected in the complex web of life. It can therefore be said that the primary goal of Green politics is an inner revolution. Joanna Macy calls this "the greening of the self."¹

Politics needs spirituality. The profound political changes we need in order to heal our planet will not come about through fragmented problem solving or intellectual analyses that overlook the deepest yearnings and intuitions of the heart. Some of my fellow Greens have maintained their dogmatic leftist perspectives and remain suspicious of spirituality, confusing it with organized religion. I share many of their criticisms of religious institutions, but I firmly disagree with their dismissing spiritual concerns and wisdom. The long work of bringing harmony to the Earth requires a holistic vision based on mature values and deep intuitions.

Today's politics are based on the mechanistic worldview that prefers assertion to integration, analysis over synthesis, rational knowledge over intuitive wisdom, competition over cooperation, and expansionism over conservation. A few new ideas are not enough. We need an entirely new way of thinking. As we begin to cultivate a rich inner life

and experience our connection with all of life, we realize how little of what society tells us we need is actually important for our well-being. We must reduce consumption and not cooperate with any practices that harm the natural world or other humans. This is not a sacrifice. It is the way to sustain ourselves.

Green politics must address the spiritual vacuum of industrial society, the alienation that is pervasive in a society where people have grown isolated from nature and from themselves. We in the Greens must also address our own alienation. Our social structures shape this alienation, and they themselves are shaped by it. It is a vicious cycle, and our work of healing must address the whole process. We have forgotten our historical rootedness in an integrated way of life. We must learn from those cultures that have maintained their traditions of wisdom and harmony with nature—Australian Aborigines, American Indians, and others. Tragically, many of these societies are threatened by the same forces that threaten the environment. We must join them in their struggles to preserve their values and traditions.

One such endangered society, Tibet, has been ruthlessly exploited and its people violently oppressed. The exiled leader of the Tibetan people, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, is, for me, a living example of how spiritual vision can influence politics:

Peace starts within each one of us. When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us. When our community is in a state of peace, it can share that peace with neighboring communities.... What is important is that we each make a sin-

¹ Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), p. 183.

cere effort to take seriously our responsibility for each other and for the natural environment.²

We have little reason to place our hope in governments or established political parties, for their primary interest is always in extending their own power. But we can find hope in the strength and imagination of people working at the grassroots to create positive change. We Greens work within the political system solely for the benefit and empowerment of those at the grassroots. Our efforts within the halls of government are not to replace work at the grassroots. Our commitments are, first and foremost, to those who elected us. We must work with them, nonviolently, for life-affirming solutions to the problems of our day.

Green politics is based on direct democracy—our effort is to redefine and reorganize power so that it flows from the bottom up. We seek to decentralize power and maximize the freedom and self-determination of individuals, communities, and societies. This means moving power out of the hands of centralized bureaucracies—above all, the military-industrial complex—and empowering people on the local level. It also means reaching across national borders and ideologies to build alliances with others also working for peace and ecology. It means moving government power away from the state towards smaller and smaller units of organization. In economics, grassroots democracy means a production system that maximizes workers' self-management and minimizes corporate or government control. It means units of production scaled to a comprehensible human dimension and that are lo-

² The Dalai Lama, "The Nobel Peace Prize Lecture," in *A Policy of Kindness* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1990), p. 19.

cally responsive and globally responsible. The day may come when the Greens find a truly democratic and ecological partner among the established political parties, but until then, we must work in government as an anti-party party, an experiment in radical parliamentary opposition unwilling to compromise fundamental values for the sake of expediency.

Thinking green—to think with the heart—is the solution to many if not all of our political dead-ends. To continue increasing production, consumption, and the depletion of our natural resources will only lead us further down the path of suffering. Albert Einstein said that with the spitting of the atom everything changed except the way people think. A new way of thinking must come soon, or the damage will be irreparable. Means and ends cannot be separated. "There is no way to peace. Peace is the way."³

³ A. J. Muste, *The Essays of A. J. Muste*, edited by Nat Hentoff (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970).