



The first meeting of U.S. Greens was in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1984

WHO FOUNDED THE GREEN PARTY IN THE UNITED STATES?

by

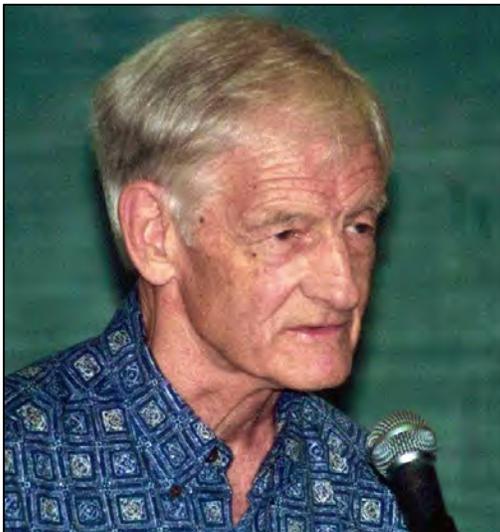
John Rensenbrink

Cofounder of the Green Party of Maine
Cofounder of the Green Politics Network
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When you Google the U.S. Green Party, you will notice in Google's knowledge panel, on the right, that Howie Hawkins is named as

the founder. This is untrue, although his associates may have been seeding the internet with such a claim. Herewith is my effort

together with statements by key founders to provide a sense of some of the key people who actually did found the Green Party of the United States (GPUS). There may have been others and they should get in touch with me, but the following eight did essential founding work that eventually resulted in a national Green Party. The Green Party of Maine were the first Greens in this country, founded in January 1984. Two months later the book *Green Politics* (written mostly by Charlene Spretnak, with input from Fritjof Capra) was published in New York; it was reviewed in many newspapers and excerpted in *The Nation*.



John Rensenbrink delivered the keynote speech to the Green Party of Canada in 2000, in Ottawa, Ontario.

The momentum created by that book led to a founding conference in August of that year in St. Paul,

Minnesota, to form a Green Party. With each of the key founders building on the previous work of others, the founding activity extended from 1984 to 2001. That year the GPUS received formal, legal standing from the Federal Election Commission as a bona fide national political party.

Howie Hawkins resisted the course and development of the Green Party of the United States from 1984 on. He and his associates expounded the anarchist belief that there should be "Nothing above the local level." Throughout the 1980s, as he publicly admitted at a conference in 2002, he acted as an "agent blockateur" to block all efforts within the proto-party national Green Politics organization, called the Green Committees of Correspondence (GCoC), to transition to a political party. Instead, he argued for a non-party, dues-paying mass movement, and within GCoC he formed the oppositional Left Green Network (LGN) in 1987 to, in his words, "Left the Greens." With Howie as the driving force in the LGN, it finally succeeded in taking over GCoC at its annual meeting in 1991 in Elkins, West Virginia (a conference that included, by the way, a workshop naming all the Green women leaders who had been driven out of GCoC over

the years by the LGN). In the wake of that conference, large numbers of GCoC members nationwide moved quickly into the work of building Green state parties, shifting their focus away from the LGN-dominated GCoC, which soon changed its name to the Greens/Green Party United States of America (G/GPUSA). In the following months, I and others formed the Green Politics Network (GPN) for the major purpose of providing a home for the emergent state parties. As recalled by the Founders of the Green Party of the United States below, G/GPUSA opposed and tried to prevent a state-based national Green Party, but it could not be stopped. In 1996 the state parties united to form the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP). That same year Howie and his associates filed an application with the Federal Election Commission claiming that G/GPUSA was the official Green Party; it was rejected. By 2000 G/GPUSA had dwindled to a small number of members, who voted to reject a proposed merger with the ASGP, even though the ASGP had voted to take them in. No merger took place, and no G/GPUSA materials were consulted when GPUS wrote its foundational 2000 platform, which was part of its successful

application to the FEC. After G/GPUSA faded away, Howie participated as an individual in the Nader campaign in 2000 and then joined the Green Party of New York State, running for different offices many times, including Governor and President of the United States. He said the Green state parties should be guided by activist socialist cadres. After his presidential run in 2020, he emphasized his commitment to build a new Green socialist party. He wrote, "What we're trying to do is build a major working class party on the left." This continues his long record of derailing and using Green Politics in this country to further his own political goals in opposition to, and undermining, a Green Party in the United States. Far from being its founder, Howie Hawkins is its long-time nemesis.

Founders of the Green Party in the United States

Charlene Spretnak. In 1983 Charlene made a solo trip around West Germany interviewing 60 of the 66 German Green Party members who were then featured in the book *Green Politics*, of which she was the principal coauthor (March 1984). The book introduced the new political orientation and called for a Green Party to form in the United States.

During the six months after publication, the book was widely reviewed, and the momentum for a Green Party here began to build.



Charlene Spretnak in 2007

Charlene encountered a pocket of opposition, though, when she was invited to give a plenary talk at the First North American Bioregional Congress, near Kansas City in May: one of their leaders railed against a Green Party, to enthusiastic applause, on the grounds that it might seek to crowd out and dominate the bioregional movement. Charlene's talk plus a bridge-building statement by the small Green Politics working group that she presented at the end of the conference dissolved the opposition. In August Charlene and four others convened a founding conference of a Green Party in St. Paul, MN. The

invitation letter stated that each of 62 organizations were invited to send two representatives. However, the conference was crashed by Howie Hawkins and nine other members of Murray Bookchin's Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont. As anarchists, they were aggressively opposed to the formation of any party, especially above the local level, and they dominated the discussions, eventually derailing the efforts to form a party at that conference. Finally, most of the participants agreed to postpone the formal forming of a party, not because of anarchist ideology but because it was decided that a few years should first be spent seeding the Green analysis and vision at the local level. In the aftermath of the founding conference, local Green Politics groups formed all over the country and sent regional representatives to a steering committee for many years. This was the initial network of grassroots Greens that eventually grew into Green state parties and then the GPUS. The Green Politics organization formed at the conference was named for a network active during the American Revolution, the Committees of Correspondence [later the Green CoC]. At the conference, a committee (Charlene, Eleanor LeCain, and

Mark Satin) was charged with writing a Green values statement, which they called the Ten Key Values and which became a key organizing tool for the Green Party even into the present time. Charlene also spread the word about Green Politics via her many talks at universities and conferences nationwide during the 1980s.

John Rensenbrink. In January 1984, John and Alan Philbrook called a meeting in Augusta, Maine of likely Green Party-minded people in Maine. They took a big initiative and formed the Green Party/Movement of Maine. It was the first and for a time the only state Green Party. It faced opposition from Maine Bioregionalists and from Murray Bookchin's Social Ecology group in Vermont. Consequently, they only learned later about the St. Paul founding meeting, the birth of the 10 Key Values, and the formation of the Committees of Correspondence. John, as a Maine representative to the newly minted Committees of Correspondence, piloted the creation of Strategy and Policy Approaches in Key Areas (SPAKA) which during the next several years was the Program for the Committees of Correspondence. They in turn became the basis for the first

Platform of the Green Party of the United States. In early 1992, John proposed a new political group that adopted the name Green Politics Network, GPN. He was immediately joined by Mindy Lorenz, Dee Berry, Barbara Rodgers-Hendricks, Sue Conti, Hank Chapot, Linda Martin, Greg Gerritt and Tony Affigne. GPN created a home for the state Green Parties that were forming in the country. It also pledged to be a place of safety for women who were being muzzled and insulted by male Green leftists. In 1996, John with Linda Martin called for a meeting of State Green Parties to meet in Alexandria, Virginia. The historic meeting established the Association of State Green Parties, ASGP. ASGP then led to the establishment of the United States Green Party in Santa Barbara and Santa Monica in 2001.

Dee Berry. In December 1984, Dee volunteered—together with Ben Kjelshus, and others in her Kansas City, Missouri group of Greens—to run the newly created Clearing House for the Committees of Correspondence. The Clearing House had been started in Minneapolis but faltered due to ineffective leadership. Under Dee's and Ben's leadership, the Clearing House got in touch with the many local groups of

Greens in the United States, most of which had sprung up since the founding conference; the groups soon numbered over 350.



Dee Berry in Denver, at the 2000 Green Party Presidential Nominating Convention

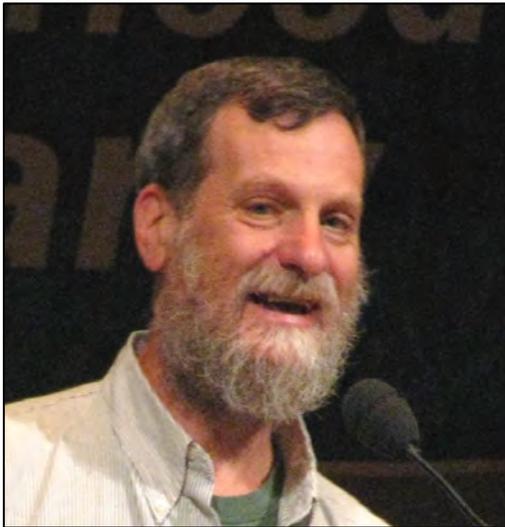
Dee started a newsletter, *The IC Bulletin*, so named because it reported on the work of the Interregional Committee, but it also provided a round table or forum of news and opinion for the many groups and individual Greens. It proved to be a very effective building tool. Dee and Ben's Clearing House also organized Annual Meetings of the Committees of Correspondence, which are now a Green tradition. Following from the ANM in Colorado in 1990, Dee hosted a meeting in a convention center near Kansas City for both the pro-party/electoral-first Greens and the anti-party/movement-first Greens (Howie and others).

These opposing groups arrived at a bicameral solution: each would have a body, or branch of their own within the Green Politics movement. Further, the two bodies would establish ways and procedures for discussion, negotiation, and mutual decision. This proposal was forwarded to the Green Committees of Correspondence for approval; two-thirds approval was needed. But in the weeks that followed and into early 1991, Howie Hawkins and the Left Green Network objected to the proposal and pushed for a NO vote.

Though the vote for the proposal almost reached the two-thirds requirement, it nevertheless went down to defeat. It was a missed chance at unity, one that did not occur again. The movement branch was taken over by the Left Green Network. The LGN gained governing control of the GCoC at the ANM in Elkins in 1991, after which an exodus of members followed. In the spring of 1992, Dee and Ben joined the creation of the Green Politics Network to further development of the state-level Green Parties.

Greg Gerritt. Greg joined the newly formed Maine Green Party/Movement at its second meeting in February 1984. Living in the Western Mountains of

Maine, he twice ran for State House as a Green.

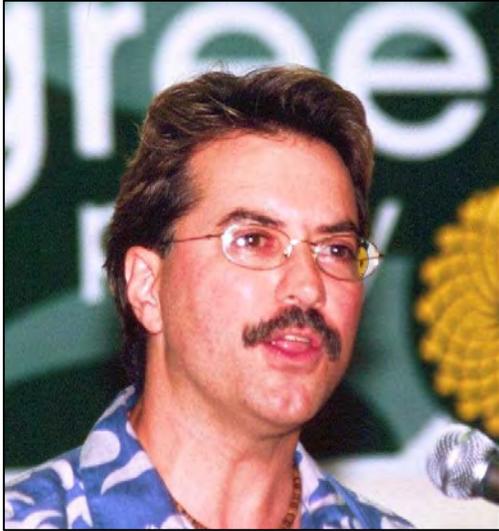


Greg Gerritt at the 2008 Green Party Presidential Nominating Convention

In three-way races, he received 16% and 20% respectively. He was the first Green to run for partisan office in the U.S. and the only one to do so for several years. Greg became very influential in the Maine Party, serving as Secretary and later managing the office. Following the 1996 campaign season he and his wife, Kathy Rourke, moved to Providence, Rhode Island, and became active in the Green Party of Rhode Island, serving on its Steering Committee and running for Mayor of Providence in 2002. Greg became very involved in the evolution of the U.S. Green Party from 1988 on. He had leading roles in the Green Committees of Correspondence and its Annual National Meetings. As part of the

Elkins ANM in 1991, he took on the leadership of a committee to work out a modus vivendi for electoral organizing, a problematic endeavor. He sent reports to the leaders of G/GPUSA. These reports included recommendations for a federation of Green State Parties. They were rejected, and he received a letter of censure from the GPUSA. In the spring of 1992, he joined the newly forming Green Politics Network. He participated in its creation of the Association of State Green Parties and drafted the first set of bylaws. These established ASGP as a confederation of State Green Parties. After several years during which ASGP prepared the way for a fully fledged United States Green Party recognized by the Federal Government Election Commission, the Bylaws were grafted into the guiding foundational document of the Green Party of the United States, in 2001.

Tony Affigne. Tony began three decades of Green Party work at a 1990 meeting of the Green Party Organizing Committee. Then in 1992, he helped draft founding documents for the Green Politics Network, joining John Rensenbrink, Betty Zisk, Dee Berry, Ben Kjelskus, Barbara Rodgers-Hendricks, and others.



Tony Affigne spoke before the 2000 national convention of the Green Party of Canada, in Ottawa.

That same year, Affigne co-convened the first meeting of the Green Party of Rhode Island, later serving as chair of its state committee and its delegate to the Green National Committee. Tony had previously run for Governor of Rhode Island in 1986 as candidate of the Citizens Party, the forerunner of the Greens, and his 1982 independent campaign for Providence City Council had made him the first-ever Latino candidate in Rhode Island history. Affigne helped found the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP) in 1996 and was an ASGP representative and signatory to the "Boston Agreement." As chair of ASGP's Accreditation Committee, he helped shepherd the party from its original 12 states in 1996 to the 29 parties

who came together in 2001 to form the Green Party of the United States. The same year, he had served in the U.S. delegation to the Global Greens Congress in Australia, where the Global Green Charter was adopted. He later served as co-chair of the GPUS International Committee (with Julia Willebrand). A long-time activist in Rhode Island's Latinx communities, in 2010 Affigne helped found the Greens' Latinx Caucus, later serving on the Caucus steering committee and as its delegate to the Green National Committee (GNC).



Steven Schmidt in Denver, at the 2000 Green Party Presidential Nominating Convention

Steven Schmidt. Steve promoted and ably defended the creation of the Association of Green State Parties (against the anti-political-party Greens) in the early days of the nascent U.S.

Green Party. In 1995 at a national gathering of Greens in New Mexico, he presented the "40-State Green Organizing Effort," a strategic plan that included a presidential campaign by state parties with a convention to be held in Los Angeles. The proposal was accepted and state parties moved forward with their national organizing strategy. Steve Schmidt chaired a new Platform committee from 1995 to 2001 and during this time structured and drafted a significant amount of the founding platform, which can be found at https://www.greenpolicy360.net/w/Category:Green_Platform. The official, founding U.S. Green Party Platform was an integral part of a subsequent, successful submission to the Federal Election committee for national committee/party status.

Nancy Allen. Nancy gave the newly born Maine Green Party/Movement a huge boost in 1991. The *Bangor News* carried the story full on. She was a leading Democrat and announced her shift to the Green Party. It stunned many Democrats and others, too. It put the Maine Green Party on the map. Nancy followed this decisive change with a campaign against a coal fired plant in Bucksport that would have burned 500 tons of coal a day. This would have affected

Acadia National Park and all of midcoast Maine. Thanks to the Green Party the plant was defeated.



Nancy Allen in Denver, at the 2000 Green Party Presidential Nominating Convention

In 2000 at the historic annual meeting of the Association of State Green Parties in Denver—the Ralph Nader nomination for President convention—Nancy took charge of the Green Party's media outreach. She built it to give the Green Party a much needed voice at this crucial time as legions of press reporters from the U.S. and foreign countries eager for news found in Nancy a clear and reliable source. She has served as a media specialist for the U.S. Green Party since, as a member of the Media Committee.

Mike Feinstein. Mike, as a young Green, rollerbladed at the early meetings of the Greens. Later, he

worked with Mindy Lorenz, a vibrant force in Southern California and in national Green politics, to get the Green voter registrations necessary to qualify the Green Party for the California ballot in January 1992, putting the Green Party of California on the map as a fully fledged State Party.



Mike Feinstein in Santa Monica, California, at the press conference announcing the creation of the Green Party of the United States, July 2001.

This was a major boost forward nationally for the emerging state Green Parties. Mike was the main organizer of the Green Parties of the West Conference in Santa Monica, CA in February 1993, that featured many of the then-record number of Greens that had just run in November 1992 elections. Later Mike ran for and was elected to the Santa Monica City Council with four-year terms in 1996 and 2000, and was appointed

Mayor by his colleagues for 2000-2002. Nationally among U.S. Greens, Mike was a bridge force in his efforts to bring together the Left Greens and the Petra Kelly Greens at annual national gathering meetings of the U.S. Greens - and in 1996, together with Lynne Serpe, he co-organized the first Green Party presidential nomination convention, held at UCLA in Los Angeles. Together with John Rensenbrink, Mike wrote an account of the early history of the U.S. Green Party. Mike is also also the founder of the GPUS Elections Data Base and an invaluable source of information about U.S. Green election history, as well as about the party's rules and bylaws.

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*Topsham, Maine
March 8, 2021*