



The Green Party of Virginia



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Blue Heron Launched

by Eric Sheffield

Last spring the Rockbridge Greens began an experiment in community-financing that succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. The simple, but innovative, project raised \$56,000 in loans in a little over two weeks. These loans used to finance the relocation and expansion of the Blue Heron Cafe in Lexington came directly from members of the community.

Community-Based Economics is one of the Ten Key Values of the Greens. In contrast to the mainstream glorification of a global economy, Greens believe that only by bringing economic control and decision-making back to the community level will working people be able to maintain the quality of their local environment and reverse the decline in job security, wages, and benefits.

The Blue Heron experiment, as it came to be called, began a few days after Laurie Macrae, owner of the Blue Heron Cafe, informed Rockbridge Greens activist Eric Sheffield that she had found a new location for her business and would soon approach the banks seeking \$50,000 to finance the move. Sheffield, sensing an opportunity to practice some community-based economics, convinced Macrae to seek financing for part of the project directly from the community before borrowing from the financial institutions.

Sheffield and Macrae worked to come up with a community-financing plan involving an appeal to members of the community, a loan repayment schedule, and a simple loan agreement form which Macrae would use for accepting loans. At the same time, Macrae was putting together a detailed business plan which she would use for both the interested community members and financial institutions. After much work and review by both financial and legal experts, Macrae finished the business plan and printed up 40 copies. Sheffield, meanwhile, had completed a flier with some creative advertising and a letter to be mailed to the 130 members of the Rockbridge Greens.

The banks and the community were approached virtually simultaneously with the investment opportunity, and they both wanted in. The bank offered Macrae a \$50,000 loan at 12.5% interest. At the same time, loans from Greens, Blue Heron patrons, and other members of the community started pouring in. Macrae had offered to accept loans of \$500 - \$5000 at an interest rate of 6%. Within two weeks she had achieved her goal of \$50,000 in community loans. Several days later, having topped \$56,000, Macrae had to start turning potential investors away.

The results of the experiment far exceeded the expectations of anyone involved. Twenty-eight individuals committed loans from \$500 to \$5000 for periods of one to five years. Seven of the loans were for the maximum \$5000. The lenders of \$42,000 agreed to let Macrae use their money for up to five years if necessary. Thirteen of the lenders were Greens and Macrae described 24 as friends, one as an acquaintance, and two as strangers.

The experiment was truly a win-win opportunity for all those involved. Many of the investors were eager to take their money out of the globally-tied financial institutions. One of the biggest trends in investing is toward "socially responsible" investments rather than the typical investment where the investor doesn't really know if her money is being used to hook kids on cigarettes, manufacture land mines, move union jobs to overseas sweat shops, create nuclear waste, or whatever. In addition, some of the smaller investors actually received a higher interest rate than would otherwise have been available to them. All the investors felt empowered in deciding exactly what their money would be doing and then actually watching it work. Macrae was overwhelmed by the show of community support and will save \$15,000 and pay off her loan fifteen months earlier compared to the bank's offer.

In September, after months of renovations, the Blue Heron Cafe opened in its new location and immediately became the hottest restaurant in Lexington. Since then, twenty-eight investors and hundreds of others have enjoyed the exotic vegetarian fare that Macrae and her crew prepare --- including what has to be the best locally-grown, organic salads in all Virginia.

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Greens of Virginia State Meeting

The Greens of Virginia will hold their state meeting on Saturday, May 9 from 11:00 A.M. until 4 P.M. We will meet in Harrisonburg, Virginia at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, Room 4, 154 North Main Street. Valley Greens will host the meeting and provide lunch. If you wish to stay overnight either Friday or Saturday or need directions, call Sherry Stanley at 540-248-7721. Please submit agenda items no later than April 30. State meetings are open to all members of the GOV and affiliated locals.

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Fall Elections and Maybe Again?

Virginia Greens hit the ballots last fall. At the end of Election Day, the first two Virginia Greens had been elected to public office.

In November Dale Diaz, Charlie Jordan, Daniel Metraux, Eli Fishpaw, and Sherry Stanley challenged incumbents for House of Delegates seats. Half the General Assembly races would have been unopposed if third party candidates had not come forward to oppose them; even then 39 of the 100 delegates faced no opponents. The two-party system offers little democratic choice to begin with, but when either of those parties stays home, even the pretense clouds over.

The five delegate candidates attended forums, walked neighborhoods, handed out literature at parades, made radio ads, received a surprising amount of press coverage, taped TV speeches, met voters on Election Day, and made an impression in the fall races. Often they set not only the tone but the subject of the races. When the opponents focused on car taxes, Green candidates changed the subject to single-payer health insurance or corporate subsidy or the external costs of production. The voters responded, and these candidates received anywhere from 6 percent to 30 percent of the vote.

But Stephanie Porrass and Philip Welch, Rockbridge Greens, made Green history. They now sit on the Board of the Natural Bridge Soil and Water Conservation District in Lexington and Buena Vista.

With the elections over and the General Assembly in session, the next campaign began. Virginia Greens in coalition with other third parties, particularly the Libertarian Party, moved to liberalize Virginia's strict ballot access laws. Linda Martin, NOVA Green and our new press secretary, testified before a House of Delegates subcommittee on behalf of House Bill 49, setting the stage for a Green effort supporting this and other bills designed to make it possible for ordinary citizens to run for office in our state. We faxed; we phoned; we visited senators, asking for cosponsorship; and we sent electronic mail. Thanks to these efforts, HB 49 passed --- with some amendments naturally. Nevertheless, we could reap some benefits immediately. This bill makes it easier to get a candidate on the ballot in the upcoming congressional races. Consider this an invitation to nominate a Green candidate from your district for the U.S. Congress. Stephanie and Phil on Soil and Water c! an be just the beginning.

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Key for Council

James Madison University students make up one-third of the city of Harrisonburg, but they are not represented in the city government. Valley Green candidate Michael Key in his bid for the Harrisonburg City Council race promises his fellow students "a place at the table to discuss our issues." Improving communication between JMU and other city residents is only part of Key's message. He is also concerned with a recent zoning plan, problems with the sewer system, a lack of sidewalks and crosswalks for pedestrians, and an inadequate public transportation system. He supports the Virginia Green platform adopted last year and emphasizes creation of local businesses.

The Valley Greens nominated Key at their first meeting in February, but the idea had been around for a while. This city council candidate is not new to politics. Key just turned 20 and serves as a senator in the JMU Student Government Association and helped Dale Diaz in her campaign last fall. He is known as a political organizer on campus. Now the other two-thirds of Harrisonburg will get a chance to know Michael Key and vote for him for one of two seats on the council in the May 5 election. He faces two incumbents, one from each of the well-funded political parties. Anyone who would like to help Michael financially (Green candidates restrict donations to \$100 per individual), please send a check quickly to:

Key for Council Campaign,
c/o Michael Key,
800 South Main, Box 4086,
Harrisonburg, VA 22807

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The More The Better

The past few months have produced a surge in Green locals. We have two newly formed locals and plans for an invigoration or possible reorganization of another.

First, the energy produced in the House of Delegates campaigns in the Shenandoah Valley tempted a few Greens to start a local in that part of the state. With the help of student Greens at James Madison University, the newest local has started with a big project --- a city council candidate. The Valley Greens district encompasses Harrisonburg, Woodstock, Waynesboro, Staunton, and all the area surrounding these cities.

Then, at almost the same time, new Green Eric Angel from Roanoke responded to a request from the co-clerks to start a local in that area. The Blue Ridge Greens represent Roanoke and anything close enough for members to make it to a meeting. They will meet the public at local Earth Day activities in April.

For the past few years, we have listed two locals in the Charlottesville area: Blue Mountain Greens and Charlottesville Greens. But those locals had hit hard times. Now Jana Cutlip and Aaron Feldman have joined forces to gather all the Greens in the Charlottesville area and decide what direction they should take. Recently all Greens in the vicinity received letters inviting them to form a strong, healthy local.

Now for the rest of the state. If you do not have a local in your area, it's up to you. Let's make Virginia Green!

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Corporate Rule by Another Name

by John Balkwill

Corporate Rule by Another Name
"I rode a tank in the generals' rank
When the blitzkrieg raged and the bodies stank."
--Mick Jagger, "Sympathy for the Devil"

We last established that there's no trace of democracy in the land, but how do we describe what's in its place? President Jackson foresaw: "Unless you become more watchful in your States and check this spirit of monopoly and thirst for exclusive privileges, you will in the end find that the most important powers of Government have been given or bartered away, and the control of your dearest interests have been passed into the hands of these corporations." Corporations exist that owners may avoid responsibility for actions which generate profit.

Corporate developers, polluters, and thieves control local governments through campaign financing bribes. At the national level it's corporate defense cheats, drug lords (including the "health care" mob), the energy mafia, and other vampires who sap democracy's lifeblood. CEO's like Chainsaw Al Dunlap have become the ruling establishment, tasked with increasing profit at any cost to the public interest.

President Franklin Roosevelt made this chilling observation: "The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic State itself. That, in its essence, is Fascism --- ownership of government by an individual, by a group, or any controlling private power."

One attribute of a fascist state is a massive military machine. We spend more on weapons than most nations combined, profits from which go to those George Bush calls the "investment class." Not counted in our "defense" budget (to make it appear smaller) are nuclear weapons spending, spy agencies, the Veterans Admin., national debt interest from past "defense" spending, and much more, including FBI spying on nonviolent peace, environmental, and social justice groups in the name of "defense" (recall the FBI Director excusing, after the Oklahoma City bombing, why he doesn't spy on kindred armed-to-the-teeth militia groups: "Because we don't have the authority and need more").

Where do we begin with the torture/murder attribute of a fascism definition? With the CIA's drug-running Mujahadin? Joseph Savimbi's CIA-financed army in Africa? The CIA's drug-running Contra mercenaries of Nicaragua? The Army of Indonesia? Uncle Sam supplied, trained, armed and/or provided political support for these terrorists as they committed documented acts of rape, torture, and murder of hundreds of thousands. During this half century, U.S. surrogates killed millions in some nations on behalf of corporate control at any cost to the public interest.

Justice William O. Douglas advised, "Power that controls the economy should be in the hands of elected representatives of the people, not in the hands of an industrial oligarchy." But even our system of justice is corrupted by corporate power, the most significant influence in the seating of judges. Russel Mokhiber wrote (Multinational Monitor 12/94), "The handful of the world's corporate criminologists who have studied this issue are in agreement that corporate crime and violence kills far more people than all street crime combined. . . . Attorney General Janet Reno has set violent crime as her number one priority. By 'violent crime' she means violent street crime. She has rarely, if ever, condemned violent corporate and white-collar crime." Extortion is a crime for us rabble, who get long prison sentences for convictions, but corporations are allowed to publicly blackmail to wit: unless a community gives them free land, buildings, and a good chunk of the local tax ! revenue, they will move to Katmandu and hire child labor, GATT insuring nothing can be done about it. Each year in this country, corporations kill tens of thousands of their employees by ignoring known safety or environmental hazards and hundreds of thousands of customers by selling products known to be unsafe. Those who can't afford "dream teams" get death penalties for murder, as Capital punishment is clearly punishment for those without capital, but it is usually disregarded when corporations kill, even with willful deliberation.

The corporate lap dog Federal Reserve Board insures that unemployment is kept high enough to sink wages, ergo our world's highest per capita prison population, a wealthier wealthy, poorer poor. In 25 years our percentage of citizens in the middle class has dropped from first to last among the 13 major industrial nations. In real terms, average working class wages have declined 19% since 1973. Advocates for the poor estimate 2 million homeless and 20 million hungry, mostly kids, conditions considered in other industrial nations to be cruel and barbaric, and existing to keep down the cost of labor in the Land of the Free.

Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney divulged that "Corporations have seen their share of the nation's tax burden reduced from 32% in 1952 to 9% in 1991," the working class picking up the slack. Corporations have learned that campaign financing bribes are much cheaper than taxes.

In fact, ten years ago I interviewed retired Admiral Gene LaRocque, who showed me a list of the top ten "defense" corporations, each of whom had contracts worth billions from the taxpayer, none of whom paid any taxes, and each of whom actually got millions in tax credit welfare, loopholes for being among the largest election investors. Shortly after that, a minimum corporate tax was imposed to assuage the corruption. But after he and fellow Republocrat Speaker Newt repealed the minimum corporate tax in their 1997 budget deal, President Bill shamelessly opened a Florida fundraiser with "The party with the most money wins."

What makes it work is corporate media, increasingly employed to mold opinion using misinformation. A handful of unprincipled transnational corporations control most of our print and electronic media. Their employees are tasked with covering for corporate immorality at any cost to the public interest. The few who wander from this line get the axe: columnists Barbara Reynolds (USA Today) and Colman McCarthy (Washington Post) recently. This newspaper is a way around it. We don't have much money in the Party so don't throw your finished copy into the trash. Give it to someone at the office. A neighbor, friend, relative --- somebody on the street. Point out that on the back there are a rock-solid Ten Key Values, which we always stand for, unlike the Republocrats, who prefer to keep the public ignorant of that which they represent. Ask folks to fill out the membership form on the back and send in a few bucks on behalf of democracy building, so as to some day be able to boast that "I was Green before Green was cool."

Wise Ch-an, Sen, Thien, and Zen masters of the East, after millennia of collected contemplation, conclude there are three poisons which are all that keep us from a just world: hatred, greed, and delusion, the symptoms of modern fascism. In the political world, Ten Key Values are antidotes which foster compassion to melt hatreds, promote sharing over greed, and substitute understanding for delusion.

At the very least, a small number of informed citizens frustrates fascism, so we're already accomplishing much, and good folks are working on this in other states. A peaceful rebellion takes time, but if each of us annually brings in just two new members, we'll triple our size every year. At that rate, it won't be long before we have enough mass to stimulate a breakout of democracy. There is no doubt that Tom Paine would be on our side today romancing that "The sun never shined on a greater cause." Only a lack of patience and solidarity can deter us from lifting tomorrow's children into the promise of our dreams.

Columnist John Balkwill, a Tidewater Green, welcomes response to this column. Please send yours to the editor.

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Letter to the Editor

by Al Markowitz

To the editor:

In response to Paul Gagnon, Chris Simmons defends capitalism as a potentially responsible system, "not inherently evil." He is wrong. He naively takes this position due to his identification as a "businessman," not being able to distinguish between small and big business.

When the bottom line is profits --- all else goes out the window. In order to survive, businesses must compete. Big business eats small businesses by being able to underprice. Mr. Simmons --- nice as he may be --- cannot pay his employees "too much" and still make a profit, much less compete against less conscientious businesses.

Cooperative businesses at least eliminate the exploitive nature of the employer-employee relationship, but having the same profit-driven interests, they must be subject to community control to insure ecological responsibility.

A profit-oriented system cannot deal with ecological issues in a meaningful way as it is not in its immediate interest to do so. A profit-driven political system can only be corrupt because corruption is the very nature of capitalism.

Enclosed is an article I wrote relating to this situation. Hopefully it will be of use to you. If we are to create real change toward a just, civilized, and humane society, we need to examine the system we live in, learn from history, and not blunder along naively.

In struggle,
Al Markowitz
Norfolk, VA

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