

1994

Green Party of California Election Results and Analysis

by Greg Jan

In contrast to the drubbing which the Democrats suffered (both statewide as well as across the country) the Green Party of California fared relatively well. All five of our incumbents won re-election, and three new City Council members also won their races. Our statewide candidates brought the Green message to hundreds of thousands of people, several of our State Assembly candidates did relatively well, and Margaret Garcia, our candidate for Secretary of State, tallied the highest third party percentage vote for that office in the last 16 years. In addition, in at least 3 California cities, we can now arguably claim to be the *second* party, because in those localities, one or more of our statewide candidates *beat* their Republican opponent, coming in only behind the Democrat!

The tragic and continuing shift by the Democratic Party to adopt more and more ill-advised, stupid, and reactionary policy positions has alienated large numbers of that party's traditional "left-wing". Many progressives are now wondering whether it simply has become futile to attempt to influence a party which seems to be solidly under the control of those who favor the privileged few over the vast majority of us: the middle class and the poor. *They are wondering where they should put their time and energy so that they might have hope for a positive future.*

Will the Green Party respond with a thoughtful and convincing argument that the best place to put their time and energy is with us? To do that, we must be able to explain just where we are, and where we can realistically get in the future. A prompt and in-depth *evaluation* of the November, 1994 election results will go a long way towards providing that explanation. Please read the following report carefully and critically. By the time of our February 18-20, 1995 statewide meeting (hopefully) we'll have general agreement on where we are - and we'll be ready to make intelligent, *conscious* strategic decisions to best make use of the opportunities before us.

8 Non-Partisan Victories

As expected, our only victories came in the non-partisan races, such as City Council, Resource Conservation District, or School Board. However, virtually no one in the state forecast that 100% of our five non-partisan incumbents would win their contests, and that we would also add three new City Council members. Two of our incumbents ended up having the easiest contests possible: no opponents filed against them, so they were automatically assured re-election. (Glenn Bailey, running for the Malibu-Las Virgenes-Topanga Resource Conservation Board in Los Angeles County, and William Bretz, running for the Crest-Dehesa Planning Board in San Diego County were the two "no contest" victors).

However, our three other incumbents also ended up winning by comfortable margins: Dona Spring polled 61% of the vote in a two-person race for Berkeley City Council, District 4; Todd Cooper came in second out of four candidates competing for three seats on the Evergreen Resource Conservation Board in Santa Clara County; and Barbara Carr came in first out of five candidates vying for three seats on the La Mesa-Spring Valley School Board in San Diego County. Both Cooper and Carr ran in relatively large districts, winning roughly 20,000 and 18,000 votes respectively.

The three Greens who won City Council seats for the first time are: Allan Drusys, in Yucaipa (San Bernardino County); Steve Schmidt, in Menlo Park (San Mateo County); and Jason Kirkpatrick, in Arcata (Humboldt County). Of the three, Drusys won by the narrowest margin: in a contest for two open seats with eleven candidates on the ballot, he came in second, edging out the third place candidate by less than 50 votes (3,221 to 3,174). Schmidt finished second out of eight candidates running for three seats, and Kirkpatrick also finished second, out of four candidates running for two seats, but significantly ahead of the third place candidate (3,557 to 2,440). The three now join with Bruce Mast in Albany (Alameda County), Julie Partansky in Davis (Yolo County), Dave Zacovic in Whittier (Los Angeles County), and (re-elected) Dona Spring in Berkeley to make a total of 7 Green City Council members in California.

At least ten other Greens ran for non-partisan seats, but did not win this time around. Seven of these candidates were in San Diego County: Timothy Moore and Steve Saint for Water Board seats, Celesta Owen for Hospital Board, Bonnie Gengron and Brian McCall for Planning Group seats, and Susan Wolfe-Fleming and Leo Bennett-Cauchon for School Boards. The other three (all from the San Francisco Bay Area) were: Michael Dean Hitchcock for Redwood City Council (San Mateo County); Rick Bernardi, for Evergreen Resource Conservation District (Santa Clara County); and Jane Kramer, for Peralta Community College District (Alameda County).

Non-Partisan Lessons and Analysis

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from this year's results is that (given reasonable preparation and campaign resources) *there is no question that Greens can win non-partisan elections.* This is especially significant for those Greens who want to be making actual public policy *now*, instead of having to figure out how we'll ever be able to have any real-world effect by spending time, money, and energy on *partisan* races. (For a discussion of those prospects see below under "Partisan Analysis and Conclusion".)

The value of the non-partisan races was neglected during the 1992 election season (probably because, as a brand-new party, we needed to deal with various technical aspects of our business affairs, including managing our partisan electoral procedures and strategy). Many people seemed to have thought of the 9 non-partisan victories we won in '92 as something of a fluke, or a curiosity. Also, the fact that the nine winning campaigns were concentrated in just three counties (Alameda, San Diego, and Santa Clara) further diluted their impact on Greens throughout the state. (This year, our eight winners were spread out over *seven* different counties: Alameda, Humboldt, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Mateo, and Santa Clara. Plus, since 1992, in both Nevada and Yolo counties, elected officials have changed their party affiliation to Green, giving a total of at least *nine* different counties in which Greens have held elected office.)

Another important reason why Greens are further appreciating the value of working to elect Green non-partisan officeholders is experiencing, through the passage of time, the advantages of having access to like-minded policy-makers, and the opportunities this creates for easily learning about, and influencing, actual policy-making. In addition, Green elected-officials have appointed some 30 fellow Greens to various Boards and Commissions, further increasing Green influence on public policy. And of course, if Greens ever want to win a partisan office in California, we'll have a much greater chance if our candidate can show that they have successfully held elected public office before.

The key to winning non-partisan elections seems to be adequate preparation, and sufficient campaign resources. Adequate preparation not only includes knowing how the desired office gets its work done and the main issues the office will be dealing with, but also sufficient networking with appropriate community organizations. Sufficient campaign resources means the appropriate mix of volunteer help and money. For some "low profile" races, paying for a statement in the voter's pamphlet and giving a few interviews to whatever press may call may be all that is needed (although the statement itself can sometimes cost \$1000 or more). In "higher profile" races, such as City Council, more resources and personal campaigning time are generally needed. Allan Drusys, in Yucaipa, spent about \$6500 for his winning total of 3,221 votes, but Jason Kirkpatrick, in Arcata, spent less than a third as much, yet polled 3,557 votes (he did have dozens of solid volunteers though, who contacted every household twice in person). A presentation on selecting and winning non-partisan races is being planned for the February State Meeting in San Diego - for more details, please call your local county contact or our State Clearinghouse at 916-448-3437.

Partisan Results

Margaret Garcia, who ran for Secretary of State, polled the highest percentage among our three statewide candidates, receiving over 310,000 votes, or approximately 4% of the total for that office. This was the highest third party percentage vote for that office in the past 16 years, and the most number of people voting for any single Green Party candidate ever in the history of the Green Party in the United States. Among California's 58 counties, Margaret did best in counties where the Greens are active and have a relatively high percentage of the registered voters. For example, 3.9% of the voters in Humboldt County are registered Green, while the figure is 3.1% for Santa Cruz and 2.3% for San Francisco. In those three counties, Margaret received 8.2%, 7.6%, and 7.1% of the vote respectively. On the other hand, less than 1/5 of 1% of the voters in Madera or Shasta counties are registered Green. There, Margaret received only 2.5% and 1.6% respectively.

Margaret also did well in counties that have a high percentage of Latino residents. In Imperial County, 66% of the residents are Latino, while the figure is 46% for San Benito, and 38% for Los Angeles. In these three counties, Margaret polled 8.8%, 4.4%, and 4.5% respectively. At the other end of the spectrum, less than 6% of the residents of Calaveras and Plumas counties are Latino. There, she received 2.4% and 1.9% respectively.

Some people have suggested that Margaret's candidacy was responsible for the defeat of acting incumbent Democrat Tony Miller. Given that Miller lost to Republican Bill Jones by less than 33,000 votes (versus Margaret's 314,000), it is not at all unreasonable to speculate that if we hadn't had a candidate in the race, that at least 11% of those who voted for Margaret would have instead voted for Miller (instead of voting for another third party candidate, or not voting for anyone in that race), thereby giving Miller the victory.

But who could have predicted in early March, 1994 (when Margaret was required to file her candidacy papers) that Tony Miller would lose by such a narrow margin (remember, at that time he was locked in a battle with former Los Angeles Mayor candidate Michael Woo and State Assemblywoman Gwen Moore for the Democratic nomination)? And even more to the point, who could have predicted in March (before Governor candidate Kathleen Brown had defeated John Garamendi and Tom Hayden) the degree to which the voters would turn against the Democrats, starting with President Clinton and Governor candidate Brown, and right on down the ticket, including the Secretary of State's race?

It seems much more likely that the general failure of the Democrats, throughout California, and throughout the country, was what really caused Miller's defeat, not the neophyte, essentially unfunded Green Party candidacy. However, regardless of who is to "blame" for Miller's loss, Greens should consider this race's complex results a clear warning that we need to carefully consider *all possible outcomes* of entering a race well in advance of our actual decision to enter it. (In this particular case, in mid-1993, the state plenary meeting voted to look for a Secretary of State candidate (as well as candidates for Lieutenant Governor and Treasurer) without this scenario having been clearly raised, let alone discussed).

Daniel Moses, our candidate for Lieutenant Governor, received almost 160,000 votes, or just under 2% of the total for that office. Like Margaret, he did substantially better in counties where the Greens are active and have a relatively high percentage of registrants. For example, in Humboldt, Santa Cruz, and San Francisco

counties, he polled 7.7%, 5.4%, and 8.4% respectively, while in Madera and Shasta counties he received only 0.7% and 1.0% respectively.

Of the three statewide candidates, Daniel probably campaigned the most – he was able to gain coverage by dozens of newspapers, radio, and cable TV stations, and also spoke before groups ranging in size from a couple of dozen to a couple of hundred. Significantly, he received endorsements from five newspapers, with a combined circulation of about 300,000 (including the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, and the *Los Angeles Village View*), as well as from a number of (relatively) well-known individuals, such as David Brower, Hazel Henderson, Ernest Callenbach, Joanna Macy, Paul Winter, Carl Anthony, Charlene Spretnak, and Gary Snyder.

Unfortunately though, despite all of the hard work he put into campaigning, and despite the endorsements he received, his campaign was greatly handicapped by a tremendous shortage of financial and volunteer resources needed to reach the millions of potential voters. Out of California's 19 million citizens of voting age, perhaps only a million at most received any substantive message about the campaign – *over 94% of the potential electorate heard nothing*, and Daniel's mere 2% showing reflects this. Probably \$500,000, or 100,000 volunteer hours (or a combination of the two) would have been needed (by any of our statewide candidates) to reach a significant majority of the enormous California voting population.

Barbara Blong, our candidate for U.S. Senator, also had an extreme shortage of financial and volunteer resources. She received 140,000 votes, or 1.6% of the total for that office. Unlike Margaret and Daniel, she polled only slightly higher in counties where the Greens are active and have a relatively high percentage of registrants. For example, in Humboldt, Santa Cruz, and San Francisco counties, she received 3.5%, 2.8%, and 2.0% respectively, while in Madera and Shasta counties she received 1.3% and 1.4% respectively. The enormous amount of publicity which Diane Feinstein and Michael Huffington, her Democratic and Republican opponents, received (fueled by over \$40 million in total spending – the most expensive Senate race in U.S. history) and the closeness of the race (Feinstein ended up winning by 166,000 votes – 46.8% to 44.9%) undoubtedly contributed to Barbara's lower percentages.

Although the actual statewide percentages received by our three statewide candidates may seem low (3.8%, 1.8%, and 1.6%), they are actually quite acceptable when compared to the percentages which the other California third parties received. For the three statewide races which we contested, our overall average was 2.4%, while the other parties polled the following combined averages: Libertarian – 2.4%, Peace and Freedom – 2.1%, and American Independent – 1.5%. For all statewide races contested (there were 8 offices possible) the combined averages are: Libertarian – 2.8%, Peace and Freedom – 2.1%, and American Independent – 1.7%. Third parties polled highest, on average, in the Attorney General and Treasurer races (3.3% and 3.0% respectively) and lowest in the Governor and Lt. Governor contests (1.4% and 1.8% respectively). The highest individual percentage was 4.3% for the Libertarian Insurance Commissioner candidate; the lowest was 0.9% for the Peace and Freedom Governor candidate. Average percentages for each office were slightly lower, in general, than the 1990 averages, but significantly higher than the 1986 or 1982 averages (for example, the highest third party averages in 1990 were 5.0% for Insurance Commissioner, 3.4% for Attorney General, and 2.8% for Treasurer, while the highest averages in 1986 were 1.6% for Secretary of State, 1.5% for Controller, and 1.4% for Attorney General (excepting the Treasurer's race, which the Republicans did not contest).)

The results for our U.S. House of Representatives and State Legislature candidates was varied (in comparison with the other third parties) but in any case, none of these candidates made any significant statistical impact on their Democratic and Republican opponents. Tim Fitzgerald, our candidate for the 23rd State Assembly district in Santa Clara county, polled 8.1%, which was the highest 1994 third party percentage for any race, anywhere in California (excepting only 5 races where there was no Republican candidate). However, Tim's Democratic opponent easily won the contest, by 37 percentage points (64% to 27%). Assembly candidates Charlie Wilken (Los Angeles County) and Hank Chapot (Alameda County) also did relatively well by "third-party standards", receiving 6.9% and 6.1% respectively (5th and 8th highest among the 53 third party State Assembly candidates who ran in districts that had both Democratic and Republican candidates). However, their showings were also dwarfed by their opponents' winning margins (41 points in Wilken's case (67% to 26%) and 63 points in Chapot's (78% to 15%).) The rest of our "district partisan candidates" did not do as well: Tom Stafford, our 4th Assembly candidate received 2.1%; Walt Sheasby, our only State Senate candidate, received 2.3%; and Craig Coffin, Robert Marston, and Kip Krueger, our candidates for U.S. House, received 3.3%, 2.5%, and 1.8% respectively. Out of all of these candidates, Craig Coffin ended up in the closest race, with his Democratic opponent winning by 8% (52% to 44%).

Partisan Analysis and Conclusion

Probably the nicest thing we can say about our partisan results and their implication for our future is that we are definitely capable of competing as a third party in California, and probably capable (with dedicated effort) of becoming the top third party in the state. Unfortunately though, in California, that means a maximum of about 8% in a statewide race (with 2% – 5% being more typical) and a maximum of about 15% in the other partisan races (such as State Legislature or U.S. Congress, with 8 – 12% being more typical).

Given these statistical limits (which have been the norm for decades), it is foolish for us to plan on winning a partisan race in California anytime soon, short of some sort of miracle (Tom Hayden or Robert Redford deciding to run as a Green, an active Green winning \$20 million in the State Lottery, etc.). There are probably only two practical reasons for us to contemplate entering *any* partisan races at the present time. First,

for the handful of contests that are likely to be extremely close, to attempt to negotiate with the "Greenest" "Demo-publican" (most likely the Democrat) certain policy or legislative positions in exchange for *not* entering the race and drawing votes away from them. This is a very complicated option which obviously involves researching the policy positions of the likely candidates (much easier if there is a Democratic incumbent running for re-election; much harder if several non-incumbent Democrats will be competing in the primary election). We'd have to have identified a reasonably capable Green candidate in advance (and perhaps started planning their campaign) in order to be able to seriously back-up our negotiations, and perhaps most important, we'll need to reach a positive understanding with kindred activist groups in the district in order to insure that we don't alienate our current or future friends. Plus, we may have to re-institute our "open or closed" option for local races, unless we also want to simultaneously be prepared to run an overwhelmingly convincing "None-of-the-Above" primary campaign in case "maverick" Green(s) enter the race.

The only other current practical reason for us to enter a partisan race would be if there was a clear opportunity to use the campaign to educate the public about what the Greens are about, particularly if we have some very specific policy differences with the Democratic candidate, and preferably if the race is not likely to be close. Unfortunately though, in this scenario, we will need campaign resources of at least \$10,000 and many hundreds of volunteer hours *as an absolute minimum* per race if we are to have *any hope* of being heard during the campaign, and probably two or three times those figures is more realistic. It is true that electoral campaigns do attract some resources that are not available otherwise, but given that the realistic minimum requirements are *significantly* more than what we have been used to raising, it's probably going to be much more cost-effective for us to inform the public about ourselves in other ways (such as tabling or presenting "Greentalks") for at least several years.

Given, that in most localities, neither of the practical scenarios for us entering any of the partisan races is very likely, it seems that we need to take a "long-term," strategic approach to planning for our partisan future. One approach would be to work on the structural disadvantages which third parties must deal with, such as working for proportional representation, genuine campaign finance reform, and media access (perhaps using various European systems as models).

Another approach would be to significantly build our membership base and public reputation. (The vast majority of people in California *still* don't know who we are or what we're about or that we're *not* Greenpeace. Also, remember that in counties where the Greens are active and have a relatively high percentage of the registered voters, our statewide candidates received 3 to 10 times as many votes proportionately as counties where we're not active and have few registrants. Plus, for certain very active cities with even higher percentages of registered Greens, we actually beat the Republicans! For example in Fairfax (Marin County), where 5.3% of the voters are registered Green, Daniel Moses beat Republican Cathie Wright 16% to 14% (Democrat Gray Davis won with 66%). In Berkeley (5.7% Green registrants), Moses beat Wright 12% to 10% (Davis won with 73%), and in Arcata (Humboldt County, 11.5% Green registrants), Moses scored 22% to Wright's 15%, to Davis' 51%). Besides doing a voter registration drive, other projects under this approach include using "free media" to publicize ourselves, and community projects such as a creek clean-up, or opposing a toxic waste dump, to generate tangible, issue-oriented accomplishments. And of course, we should promptly network with kindred activist groups and individuals to discuss whether now is finally the time to shift from the uphill struggle to influence the Democratic Party, and instead join in the rapidly growing third party (and electoral reform) efforts.

Finally, we will need to balance these "long-term" strategic "partisan" approaches with the various non-partisan electoral opportunities discussed above. Every locality will need to evaluate what will work best for their particular situation. Time is of the essence: we barely have a year before the next statewide election will again start making demands on us. With the 1994 election, we have a pretty clear picture of our standing, limits, and opportunities. Please contact your local Green Party chapter to voice your opinions, to get involved, and to get details on our February statewide meeting. Given our progress during the less than 3 years which we have been in existence, if each of us can commit to further helping out, then there can be no question that we will make tremendous strides in the next few years towards the Greening of California.

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