

Rebuilding the Ship: A New Model of Democracy in Emergence

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Introduction

As Green movements, including Green Parties, extend their influence in society, political theorists of all persuasions have been subjecting Green beliefs and platforms to intense theoretical scrutiny. Whereas anarchist ideas about democracy have dominated green movements (Doherty & de Geus 1996, 2), neo-marxist discussions of deliberative democracy are dominating political theory (Smith 2003, 53) While political theorists have acknowledged the influence of anarchist thought and practice on Green movements, they also overwhelmingly reject anarchist ideas and principles as inadequate to the task of developing a green democracy in modern complex societies.

In this paper the authors will analyse in some detail the anarchist techniques and organisational practices which have been dismissed by political theorists as unworthy of further attention, and show that anarchist movements in the past anticipated and developed solutions to many of the dilemmas only now being discussed by theorists promoting deliberative democracy. We rely on both theoretical arguments as well as internal organisational evidence available to us from our personal involvement in green movements, especially the Australian Greens, to show that these solutions have been rediscovered and successfully adapted and adopted in Green movement and Green party organisational structures.

The rejection of anarchist ideas by political theorists, and attempts to downplay their influence on green practice has failed to take account of the fact that both anarchism and green politics are primarily movement based, and inclined to an anti-theoretical bias that leaves most of what is important in anarchist practice out of theoretical discussions. Contrary to the claims of theorists that the green movement is no longer so dominated by anarchist ideas, green practice has both continued to draw on anarchist ideas and be influenced by activists with anarchist sympathies, and it has demonstrated the worth of that tradition in the success and adaptability of its organisational structures. Of greatest benefit has been the adoption of the combined assembly/delegate structural model which, blended with the Greens' consensus decision making process, allows delegates a degree of flexibility in representing their mandate from the assembly.

While some theoretical anarchists have acknowledged that movement anarchists either neglect or reject theory (Carter 1999, x) political theorists continue to rely overwhelmingly on theoretical anarchism for their account of anarchism, rather than look to the forms of organisation and practice that anarchists themselves recognise as exemplary. Greens share the anarchist attitude that real social transformation depends on building new forms of social organisation inside existing political and economic systems. Doing it, not talking about it, is the guiding principle (Bakunin 1972, 195ff.). Information about such movement anarchist organisational forms is more likely to come from hints in activist pamphlets and historical studies of organisational practices than it is from theoretical treatises.

A number of theorists make passing reference to anarchist organisation consisting of *federations* of cooperatives (de Geus 1996, 205; Eckersley 1992, 176). However, they

simply *assume* that the dependence of regional and central councils on the voluntary support of the federating local bodies must render the central coordinating bodies powerless and incapable of action. Political theorists have not *tested* their assumptions against either the principles elaborated in a broader anarchist literature or on how such federations have worked in practice. Instead their descriptions of anarchism have relied on a seriously unbalanced sample of theoretical works on anarchism and more empirical studies of green organisations are notably absent from lists of works cited.

Whilst Habermas lists a series of anarchist 'techniques of self-organisation', he does not acknowledge that they are important in making anarchist federations both democratic and effective. His Marxist roots show when he dismisses 'permanent consultation, imperative mandates, rotation of offices, and interlocking powers' as 'less important' than the abstract organizational form of voluntary association (Habermas 1997, 52). Habermas is not alone (see Eckersley 1992, 170) in misrepresenting the historical record when he suggests that anarchist voluntary associations consisted of primarily 'horizontal contacts at the level of face-to-face interaction' (1997, 53). It takes only the most cursory examination of the practices of the anarchist movement during the Spanish revolution (Guerin 1959, ; Leval 1975, 20), or the polemical works of leading anarchists, Bakunin and Kropotkin, to see that in both theory and practice anarchists have recommended and created federated organisations (Kropotkin 1970, 68) built 'from the bottom up' to the top or centre (Bakunin 1972, 258), and 'federated at every level' (Dolhoff 1972, 7).

Bookchin has acknowledged that 'the structure of the CNT as a syndicalist union and that of the FAI as an anarchist federation was ... quite admirable' (1994b, 16). However, statements such as that 'It would be fruitless to examine in detail the council modes of organization that emerged ... Even in anarcho-syndicalist Spain there is evidence that by 1937 the committee system of the CNT was beginning to clash with the assembly system' (1971, 155); or that 'no one ... takes the "models" of ... the Spanish Revolution of 1936 seriously' (1986b, 1); and 'the tendency [of anarcho-syndicalism] to parochialize anarchism along economic and class lines grossly constricted its scope to a trade-unionist mentality' (1992, 6); would have given political theorists unfamiliar with these traditions little reason to explore them further.

The undue reliance on Bookchin within political theory is leading many theorists astray about the nature of anarchism. Bakunin, whose ideas and activism helped establish the anarchist movement, could have been talking about Bookchin when he said in 1871 that whoever who would reject the federation of workers councils as 'a move to create a new authoritarian power ... must be a sophist or a fool' (1972, 256). Bookchin's expressed lack of interest in the details of 'council modes of organization' (1971, 154) runs directly counter to the insistence by Bakunin and other anarchists that the remedy for excessive centralism does not lie in the unstructured and disorganised popular assemblies, but in a well organised federation of cooperatives (Bakunin 1972, 252ff.; Dolhoff 1972, 7).

A close reading of Bookchin shows that to some extent he acknowledges the role of council and cooperative federations, which he describes as ‘confederal ... network[s] of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities’ (1989, 5). However Bookchin’s celebration of the direct assembly of Athens as the ideal anarchist democracy (1971, 155ff.), and the pre-eminence he gives popular assemblies in general (1986a, 2) is regularly referred to by eco-political theorists as evidence that green anarchists aim at decentralized direct democracy (de Geus 1996, 194; Dryzek 1997, 176; Eckersley 1992, 145). Political theorists who simply reaffirm Eckersley’s description of green anarchism based on her reading of Bookchin (Carter 1996, 57; Doherty & de Geus 1996, 1; Smith 2003, 78), without checking either past anarchist movement history or current green movement practice to verify this description, give Bookchin more credence than the green movement does. While some green activists, largely uninterested in theory, add to the confusion by repeating popular direct democracy rhetoric without regard for whether or not it accurately describes their practice, green organisations have rejected direct democracy and popular assembly as their primary mode of organisation because of their democratic deficits.

Green movements

Anarchism has influenced green politics in Australia from different directions. The first was directly as some activists, like one of the authors of this paper, Drew Hutton, left anarchist groups to help found Greens parties. This was especially the case in Queensland where former anarchists made up the core of the Brisbane Green Party when it set up in 1984 and many of these were still significant in the creation of the Queensland and Australian Greens in the early nineties. The other author of this paper, Karey Harrison, was recruited to the Queensland Greens as it was being established in the early 1990s, having been involved with an anarcho-syndicalist group in Melbourne in the 1970s.

In hindsight, it seems clear why Drew and others would have abandoned anarchism for the Greens, although at the time it seemed more like they were walking off a precipice. Firstly, it seemed to many of them that the ecological imperative was far too urgent not to be attempting to address these problems in the short term rather than wait around for some mythical revolution to arrive. However, there were also clear issues about leadership, effective decision making and internal democracy which the assembly based anarchist groups in Queensland were not addressing adequately.

The first anarchist group in Brisbane, at least in recent decades, was the Self Management Group, set up in 1971. It was highly influenced by the writings of Murray Bookchin whose focus was always on assembly democracy and who had a profound mistrust of attempts to coordinate across wider areas. The decision making processes of the Brisbane Self Management Group were based on assembly direct democracy, usually monthly meetings involving as many as 60 participants. The experience of many of those involved in such meetings convinced them that large assemblies were inimical to any realistic participatory democracy as it simply meant that those with eloquence and confidence had a disproportionate amount of influence. Bookchin's influence in the group, and his hostility to Bakunin, seems to have effectively insulated the group from Bakunin's warnings that lack of organisation leaves assemblies vulnerable to the power of oratory (Dolgoff 1972, 7). Studies of face-to-face assemblies (Smith 2003, 78) have confirmed Bakunin's warnings.

In the absence of formal acknowledgement of coordination and management roles, constrained by rotation and limited tenure, it left the group open to what Freeman had identified within the feminist movement as 'the tyranny of structurelessness' (1970). This meant that, while in theory the members were all equal and acting on the basis that general assemblies were making all the decisions, the real power lay with a small and most dangerously for democracy, unacknowledged group of 'leaders'. At the same time the Brisbane anarchists were horrified by the concept of 'leadership' and refused to acknowledge it or integrate it into any of their practices.

The situation improved later in the decade when the Brisbane anarchist movement became more a coalition of different, smaller groups with meetings of delegates taking place for coordination purposes and the smaller groups being able

to conduct more participatory meetings. However, by the early 1980s, the spectres of nuclear and ecological crises were placing enormous pressure on anarchist organizations to become more relevant and key activists began looking to green politics.

The second direction from which anarchist ideas influenced green politics was a less direct route through the social movements. Environmental groups might practise direct democracy in the direct action phases of campaigns but there tends to be hazy, ad hoc connections between the grassroots and committed members, including paid staff. For activists involved in the direct action phases of national environmental campaigns like the Franklin blockade in the early eighties, it made sense to use radical non-violent methods which drew heavily on anarchist theory so that overall action would usually be discussed in general assemblies and carried out in detail by more diversified affinity groups. The overall campaign strategy, however, was decided on by The Wilderness Society (TSW) leadership - largely self-selected and consisting of networks of experienced activists who trusted each other's judgment. It makes a lot of sense for environmental activist groups to operate in this way. They need to be able to act quickly and respond to urgent situations without having to consult widely and their campaign will necessarily be of limited duration - possibly as little as a few months. At that time it is possible the campaign structure will be dismantled or at least dissolve into its constituent groupings. Therefore it is not feasible to develop a complex delegate structure to run campaigns. A political party like the Greens, however, has to have a more formal structure which will continue for a long period of time and accountability measures need to be well integrated into the organisational structure. A modified form of direct democracy, consensual decision making processes of the direct action campaigns, however, made their way into the Greens where it became incorporated into the party's formal structure.

Despite Bookchin's lauding of the annual Athenian assembly of thousands of citizens (1971, 56-8), practical constraints like time would have prevented this assembly being any more democratic than latter day green movement assemblies. A four hour meeting cannot fit in more than 16 people speaking for 15 minutes each. The Athenian all day assembly could not have fitted in more than 100 even if they only spoke for 5 minutes each. Managing such meetings so that some decisions are actually made requires substantial pre-planning, organisation of support for motions, and tight facilitation of discussion to cut off speakers' lists to keep within time available, and to keep speakers to agreed or preset time limits. The larger the meeting the less those attending can do to influence the agenda, suggest motions or amendments, or do more than either support or reject the motions being put. Contrary to Bookchin's claims about the Ecclesia, the real power would have laid with the Council, whose members were chosen by the tribes, not the assembly. The Athenian council was actually an example of a federated structure but without formal accountability mechanisms for delegates.

The TWS model of network-of-experienced-activists leadership directing popular assemblies was effective for running national environmental campaigns;

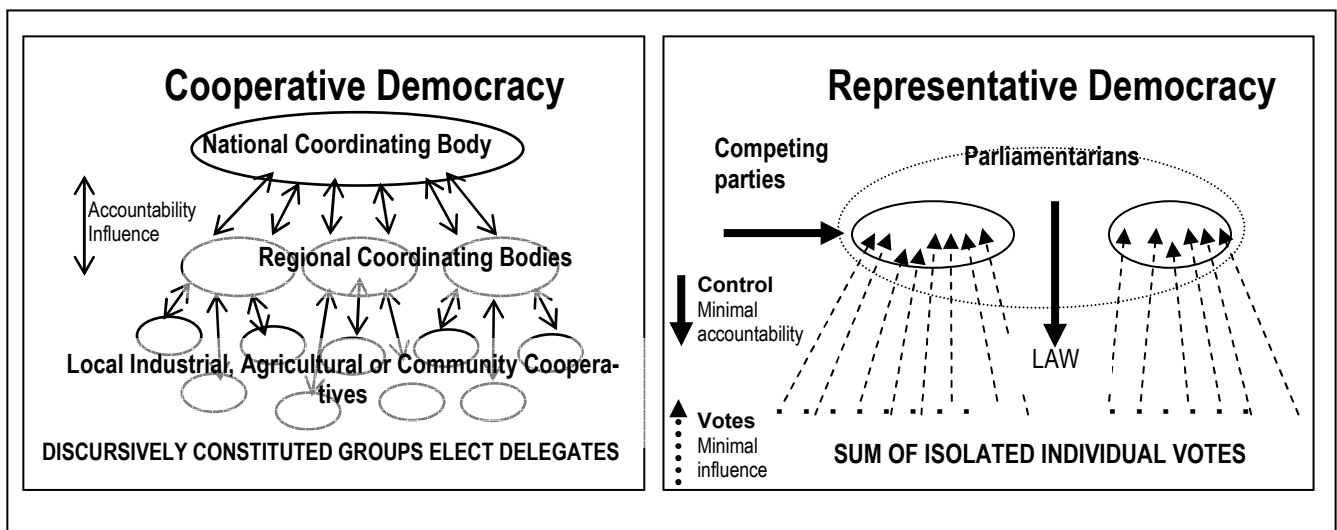
however once subject to scrutiny it did not meet the requirement for a formally and transparently democratic organisation. Social movement cum political organizations like the Greens needed to adopt more predictable, uniform and democratically accountable structure and processes, not only to satisfy minimum requirements of Electoral Acts, but also to meet commitments to participatory democracy by adopting formal democratic procedures. A more formal organisation like the Greens, which wanted to run nationally coordinated election campaigns, had to choose between liberal representative democratic structures, or anarchist-like structures consisting of sets of delegates with flexible mandates, elected from properly constituted grassroots organisations

These two streams of anarchist influence came together with a third stream of utopian marxism when the Australian Greens was formed in the period 1990-92. Ironically, the utopian marxists proved more ideologically hidebound, far less pragmatic than anarchism and its proponents tended to focus heavily on local group autonomy and voice profound mistrust of any attempts at 'centralization', equating that with political authoritarianism and hierarchical structures. The demands of forming an effective national organisation, with membership now approaching 10,000, forced the founding members to confront the need for appropriate but principled organisational structure head-on. The development of detailed constitutional processes of a federal delegate system of decision making and organisation when faced with the necessity of national coordination within a context of commitment to grassroots democracy justifies Bakunin's faith in this as a naturally emergent form of social organisation (1972, 328).

Green democracy

Deliberative democracy shares with anarchism and liberalism a commitment to 'autonomy' and 'rationality'. However, like collectivist strands of anarchism (Bakunin 1972, 234ff.), it parts with liberalism's understanding of 'autonomy' as meaning that an individual's beliefs and desires are independent of the influence of others and is self-determined and adopts a discursive, rather than objectivist, view of 'rationality'. While the liberal view of 'agency' and 'identity' is 'individualistic', deliberative views of democracy are at pains to reject this aggregative view of political will formation (Achterberg 1996, 164; Christoff 1996, 156; Cohen 1997b, 411ff.; Eckersley 2004, 116; Gutman & Thompson 2003, 35; Smith 2003, 59). Liberal arguments for representative democracy give primacy to the autonomous individual, whereas participatory structures, based on *cooperative* (delegated) electoral systems, give primacy to the development of opportunities for discursively generated cooperative action within groups. Whereas classical liberal arguments for participatory democracy focus on the *individual* and the desirability of self-rule, democracy based on federations of cooperatives has its focus at the level of a *group* of people with (or developing) a common purpose who are trying to work together to achieve that purpose. Figure 1 illustrates the structural difference between a federation of cooperatives and representative democracy.

Figure 1: Cooperative vs. Representative Democracy



Within representative democracies, individuals vote directly for *representatives* at the state and national level. Where electorates consist of around 100,000 voters, isolated individuals cannot make much difference to the outcome unless they are voters in swinging seats. In such seats the views of undecided voters are likely to be the focus of attention from the major parties. Where majorities are secure, however, the major parties have shown scant regard for the demands of their core supporters. Within representative democracies elections are determined by the aggregation of individual preferences. The liberal individualism that legitimates this form of democracy is 'conventionally skeptical about conceptions of the common good' (Cohen 1997b, 420).

As individual citizens, unless we are very wealthy (in which case it is our wealth, not our 'person' speaking), we can have little influence on the political process within representative democracies. If we form associations with others and *act together*, however, we can change governments and influence the legislative process. Political movements are not simply the sum of individuals who independently hold the same beliefs - rather they depend on the discursive recruitment to make a commitment to common purpose, and the commitment to talk together until they can find the 'place' from which they can work together. *People work out what they want collectively by talking together*. Both their desires or preferences and the possibility of common action are '*discursive achievements*'. The collective agreement that is the precondition of cooperative action is not simply an alignment of *pre-existing preferences* of independent individuals.

The challenge for democratic theorists who accept this principle has always been how to create institutional arrangements that allow this principle to be realised, as far as is possible, in practice. Through discussions of deliberative democracy neo-marxists are now confronting this challenge in theory, where anarchists have long

confronted it in practice. Critics of both imply that neither green anarchists nor deliberative democracy theorists have had much success at meeting this challenge.

Classical liberalism assumes that self-interested individuals come together to form society to moderate the potentially damaging effects of unmitigated competition for scarce resources. While providing for formal democracy within the political sphere, it protects an autocracy based on property rights within the economic sphere. Because liberalism sees individual interests as intrinsically independent of one another, no formal mechanism for *discursive* will formation, ie, the discursive development of shared goals, purposes, and plans of cooperative action, is seen to be a necessary part of the democratic process. Individuals in isolation from their fellow citizens choose between competing candidates, who they neither know nor over whom they have any means to exert influence, for political office.

From the perspective of discursively achieved autonomy, agency and collective action, participatory democracy is not about reflecting the pre-existing autonomous desires of independent agents; rather it is about providing the discursive opportunities to develop the individual capacities needed for collective self-government. Participative democracy provides the 'discursive space' in which cooperative collective action can be achieved. Non-participatory forms of government are seen as an obstacle to the development of the capacity for self-government, rather than an infringement of a pre-existing autonomy (Pateman 1970, 22ff.).

Smith accuses the 'literature on deliberative democracy' of being 'highly abstract and theoretical', and of failing 'to systematically engage in the "messy" and more detailed task of institutional design', and of 'a lack of detailed analysis of institutions that would allow for the political engagement of citizens in the decision-making process' (Smith 2003, 79). Peter Christoff¹ also suggests that 'considerable institutional innovation' would be needed before the theoretical conception of deliberative democracy could be of use in resolving international environmental issues' (Christoff 1996, 156)

Mills appears to balance this ledger of neglect by similarly accusing green movements and parties of insufficient attention 'on institutional change and on political processes' (Mills 1996, 99). However, Mills seems to be relying on Goodin's reading of Green Party public policy documents, rather than an analysis of Green Party internal organisation and practice. To take documents reflecting the 'public face' of Green Parties as capturing the sum total of their concern for democratic process is to ignore the electoral context in which they are operating.

As Offe points out, the competition for success within the electoral process imposes constraints on candidates and parties which make it difficult for them to represent a diversity of views. This puts the major political parties in the same position as different brands of detergent manufacturers, offering the 'consumer' essentially the same 'product', while relying on 'brand differentiation' based on '*hair-splitting, superficial distinctions, and specious polemics*' (Offe 1976, 407), and 'brand recognition' to 'sell' their candidates. To the extent the major parties offer voters a

choice between virtually identical 'products', voting is reduced to a legitimating formality, rather than providing an opportunity for participation in genuine democratic processes.

Given these constraints, it is not surprising that increasing numbers of voters feel like they have to choose between 'tweedledum' and 'tweedledummer'. The opportunity created within preferential voting systems like those in Australia for the increasing support for minor parties, who articulate needs and concerns excluded and suppressed from the agendas of the major parties (Offe 1976, 397), is an expression of this frustration with the disempowering consequences of the 'competition' for the popular vote.

Parties like the Greens, which hold internal democracy as a core commitment, face the obstacle of developing and maintaining the coherent 'image' required for electoral success, while attempting to act on their commitment to internal democratic debate and the articulation of concerns incompatible with the maintenance of the political and economic status quo. To succeed in its aims, the Greens need to hold these competing imperatives in creative tension, rather than allow one imperative to give way to the other.

Given the urgency of action to reduce the damage being done to global ecosystems, Green Parties have focussed their electoral efforts on achieving policy outcomes, while pursuing their commitment to participatory democracy within internal party forums and Green Party organisational design. While it is not true that the Australian Greens has no mention of democratic processes in its public documents, it requires the same sort of 'reading between the lines', and organisational familiarity to interpret them as is needed for reading Bakunin's campaign polemics. Policy documents on 'Community Participation', 'Local Government', and 'Constitutional Reform and Democracy'² include a mix of short term measures to reform the existing representative system, and measures directed towards the longer term commitment to participatory processes. However, given that minor parties rarely get to set the political agenda, it is not given priority in policy formation as Green policies on either minor or major democratic reform do not get much leverage during elections.

To ignore internal Green party processes as irrelevant to their transformative projects is to miss the dual purpose of Green parties. Green parties are working for change within existing representative parliamentary systems of democracy. But they are also creating alternative participatory processes to both develop people's capacities and skills at participating (Pateman 1970, 49, 105), and to model the form of institutions which can supplement or substitute for less democratic institutions and processes as opportunities arise.

This duality is another example of the influence of anarchist ideas. Contrary to de Geus's claim that anarchists have an unjustified 'confidence in detailed blueprints and encompassing ideologies' (1996, 198) both historical anarchist movements and current anarchist inspired green movements and parties reject this idea. As Bakunin says

we neither intend nor desire to thrust upon our own or any other people any scheme of social organization taken from books or concocted by ourselves. We are convinced that the masses of people carry in themselves, ... in their daily necessities, and in their conscious or unconscious aspirations, all the elements of the future social organization (1972, 328).

The reason that discussions of anarchist modes of organisation are either missing or misleading in the theoretical literature is not that anarchists or greens do not think that democratic processes are not important, but that by and large, anarchists and greens give higher priority to helping people to organise democratically and sustainably, than they do to talking about it.

Opportunities for doing things differently are seen as at least as important in the anarchist tradition in achieving social transformation as conceptual change divorced from social action (Dolgoff 1972, 20). Greens do not just talk about deliberative democracy, they try to do it. Green Party institutional arrangements warrant examination by those interested in deliberative democracy, as they provide a concrete example of a substantive effort at implementing it, both at a national and international scale. Just as 'Anarchosyndicalists sought, even under capitalism, to create "free associations of free producers" that would ... serve as a "practical school of anarchism", ... [and] took very seriously Bakunin's remark that the workers organization must create "not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself"' (Chomsky 1959) as the precursor to more widespread social transformation, so do green parties take seriously the need to model the more democratic forms of social organisation they are aiming for within their own organisation. De Geus puts forward his 'piecemeal engineering model' of social transformation (1996, 197) as if it were something new, but anarchists have understood since the days of the First International that attempts to start from scratch are more likely to result in authoritarian outcomes than libertarian one, and that social transformation is more like the task of "*rebuilding the ship while at sea*" (Dryzek 2002, 13) than it is like starting building one from scratch: like renovating a house (de Geus 1996, 200), one fixes first one part and then another, always leaving enough of the structure intact to stay afloat.

Whilst those promoting deliberative democracy would seem to share green party and green movement commitments to gradual transformation of existing social arrangements (Dryzek 1996, 110; Eckersley 2004, 91), they do not seem to have either models of alternative more democratic institutional arrangements, nor clear ideas about which social transformations would bring deliberative democracy closer to realization. Both voting and opinion polls sum individual pre-existing preferences, as do citizens initiated referendums and plebiscites (Christoff 1996, 166), rather than provide an opportunity for the development of shared goals and cooperative social arrangements. Whilst public consultation, alternative dispute resolution, policy dialogue, and public inquiries (Dryzek 1997, 86-90) provide models of limited deliberative practices, they do not address the need for systemic and coordinated responses to national or global environmental issues, encouraging rather piecemeal

and local responses to particular concerns. In contrast, Green parties do provide a model of a deliberative form of organisation that works in practice from the local to national and international scales of action, and that can deal with systemic environmental problems.

In cooperative (delegated) electoral structures, members of *primary* local functional groups, such as agricultural, industrial, community, or service cooperatives, choose from among themselves a *delegate* to take their shared concerns to the next *secondary* level of regional organisation. In *Cooperative Democracy*, rather than *individuals* as individual members voting for representatives at the state or national level, *delegates* of local groups at the regional level choose from among themselves delegates to take their concerns to the next level of coordinated action. The outline of this structure was clearly articulated in the resolution regarding the 'organisation of the workers' at 'the first congress of the Spanish section of the First International ... in Barcelona' in 1870 (Leval, 1975, 20). At each level, groups of people small enough for all to participate meet to develop collective solutions to their concerns. Policies and actions are agreed to by an iterative process of discursive negotiation through each level of the organisation and back again.

Deliberative meetings of green groups are as susceptible as any other group to the disproportionate influence of founders and leaders (Carter 1996, 67), and to the effects of 'group polarization', where members of such groups 'predictably' move towards extreme positions due to 'limited argument pools' and adoption of 'dominant' positions (Sunstein 2003). While branch delegates may have a disproportionate influence in their local group meetings, the importance and influence of 'charismatic' personalities diminishes at higher levels of the delegate structure where 'charismatic' personalities confront other 'charismatic' personalities. Delegates mandated by 'polarized' local groups tend to depolarize as they deliberate with delegates coming from differently polarized or 'opposed subgroups' (Sunstein 2003, 85).

Whereas representative democracy insulates the status quo against pressures for change, cooperative democracy facilitates the spread of the recognition of the need for change, as aspirations that are put aside as unrealistic when contemplated as an isolated individual can come to seem achievable as members of a group discover their individual aspirations are actually widely shared. Flexible mandates give participants in a discussion the opportunity to learn from wider groups and to break through possible parochial attitudes or insufficient background information. Delegates then help broaden the perspective of their local groups when they inform and persuade them of the reasonableness of the decisions taken at delegates meetings. As delegates rotate, they increase the numbers of delegates or members at lower levels of the organisation with a wider organisational perspective.

The Australian Greens have adapted this classic anarchist organisational principle of a federation of cooperatives to meet their needs as a political party operating within the constraints of a representative democratic system. Within the Australian Greens, the local or primary level of cooperative is the local electoral group or branch, which has considerable powers. With the exception of Victoria the

regional level is a cooperative of delegates from local groups organised as state Green Parties. The Victorian Greens, less influenced by anarchists, has a representative structure at the state level. At the national level the Australian Greens is a cooperative of delegates from the state cooperatives³. Internationally, the Australian Greens is confederated with the Global Greens, and sends mandated delegates to Global Greens Conferences.

Affiliation of national, state, or local groups into higher level confederations depends on their accepting the principles of the higher level organisation, and, for acceptance in the Australian Greens lower level organisations need both policies and constitutions that do not conflict with those of the Australian Greens. This is consistent with principles put forward by Bakunin (1972, 83), but conflict with the description of anarchist confederations as remaining 'thoroughly subservient to the member communities' (Eckersley 1992, 176). The Global Greens is therefore an effective international organisation, committed to the principles of social justice, participatory democracy, ecological sustainability, and peace, organised from the local level up to the global level.

There are four principles that are crucial to the maintenance of delegate accountability: the delegation should be *revocable* (Dolgoff 1974, 81); *tenure* should be *limited* (Bakunin 1972, 245); where the position is paid, delegates should receive either *no pay* or *equal pay* with their members (Bookchin 1974, xix); and, decisions should be made at the *lowest practicable level* in the structure (Puente 1974, 33). These features help protect organisations structured in this way from the emergence of concentrations of power.

1. If delegates at a secondary cooperative approve of decisions which they cannot justify to their mandating body, that body can at any time revoke their delegate status.
2. Limited tenure means that decisions that privilege the position of delegates relative to their members will be at their own expense once they return to ordinary membership status.
3. Equal pay would impose the condition that, in order to improve their own income, delegates would be required to achieve the same gains for their members. This principle is critical for worker cooperatives and their delegates.
4. Making decisions at the lowest practicable level of the organisation ensures both that those most affected by a decision are involved in making it; and that the maximum practicable number of those most affected (depending on the scale of the decision impact) get to participate in negotiating outcomes.

Within the Australian Greens, principles 1 and 4 get most attention. Principle 2 is accepted as ideal, but the reality is more often one of dragooning volunteers into taking on relatively thankless and unappreciated responsibilities. Principle 3 has little relevance to the Greens, because most positions are unpaid, while as a political organization working within a representative democracy and its associated legislative framework, rates of pay for paid positions are set outside the organization.

Despite the obvious similarities in structure and policies one of the first things that becomes apparent when visiting the different regional Green groups is the variances in political culture which, in turn, give rise to different emphases in decision making. This is undoubtedly a product of the regional nature of this vast country but also of the history of the development of green politics. Green political groupings sprang up all around Australia during the 1980s and early 1990s, some under the influence of particular personalities, some formed out of local issue campaigns, some dominated by the more traditional left and some enjoying the freedom of movement that came with their autonomy from any overarching body. When the Australian Greens was formed in 1992, these factors combined to give state organizations a very strong power base while the national organization was minimal, even though some states like Queensland and Tasmania were very much in favour of a strong, well resourced national structure.

Despite the initially limited material support for the national organisation, local, state, and national cooperatives have worked effectively together to develop substantial policy positions. Despite being a confederation of cooperatives, built from local groups into a national and global organisation, Greens are united by their recognition that environmental problems need to be addressed at the level that reflects the scale of the problem. The principle that decisions should be made at the lowest level possible translates to decisions on policy issues with a national scope being made at the national level, with all local groups and states contributing to the process through both their delegates, and through participation in policy working groups. It is a condition of affiliation to the Australian Greens that state and local policies not conflict with national policy. Where a conflict is identified state and local groups have to modify their local policies to be consistent with the national policy, unless they can persuade the state and national organisations to change their policy.

The impressive policy development work done at the national level, compares favourably with less adequate policy work done by some states. The fact that the hundreds of electoral candidates, whether at local, state or national level, often have to rely on national policy for guidance helps build commitment towards the national organisation at all levels of the party. Members from the bottom to the top of the organisation can see the benefits of being part of a national organisation. The invaluable role played by Bob Brown at the national level, and the way his media presence helps immeasurably in lifting the profile of the state and local groups also helps build commitment to the national organisation. Every candidate would like the benefit of Bob Brown visiting their electorate. This is a benefit that only comes with being part of a national organisation. The fact that there are recognisable and acknowledged benefits to being part of a national organisation does not eliminate the tensions between the different levels of the organisation. It does, however, help counter the forces that would otherwise keep members attached to their purely local and parochial concerns (contra Carter 1996, 70; de Geus 1996, 196; & Eckersley 1992, 169).

The Greens' introduction of consensus as a feature of its decision making plays a major part in ensuring its decision making processes are discursive rather than

aggregative. Consensus decision making practices originated in radical nonviolence theory, this in turn derived from Gandhian nonviolence, and requires members to work towards an outcome that is acceptable to all. It has been used in many of the peace and environmental direct action campaigns since then from where it moved to the Greens. While proponents of deliberative democracy recommend consensus in principle, they seem less confident of its application in practice. The success of consensus processes in the Greens shows their hesitancy is unfounded.

Delegates in a federated cooperative organization participate in their mandating group's discussions as the group articulates their shared concerns and the principles upon which the delegate will be guided in decision making for regional coordination of activities. Furthermore, while the conditions for electoral success insulate representatives from the concerns of voters, the principles of delegate accountability discussed above subject delegates to quite different constraints that focus their attention on their members' interests.

Because of its discursive foundations, this model recognises that delegates cannot be bound to a particular decision in advance of the discussions they will enter into at the regional level. Delegates have to be able to listen to the concerns of delegates from other cooperatives or groups to develop (often) unanticipated solutions with the widest appeal. Delegates are accountable to those who chose them; however, in order to maintain the confidence of the members of their electing cooperative they need to report back to persuade them of the appropriateness of the decisions taken at the next level up. This process not only maintains accountability, but also helps educate members at the local level of issues and concerns beyond their immediate experience.

The view of delegates as simply the *executives* of decisions made in popular assemblies derives from the flawed individualist model of agency. This sees decision making as simply the summing of the views of participating individuals. In contrast, we have argued that collective decision making in cooperatives is a discursive process, where the consensual outcome that emerges from the process may not have been anticipated by any of the participants at the beginning of the process. This discursive process is just as much a part of the coordinating activities of delegates meetings as it is of 'grassroots' meetings at the local level. Because of this, any organisation that binds delegates only to support positions previously approved by those electing them is not only at odds with consensus processes but cripples the organisation's ability to coordinate action beyond the local level.

The party's constitution allows constituent bodies to move to a two-thirds majority vote if there is irreconcilable division at a meeting but only if all attempts have been made to achieve consensus. The fact that Green decision making aims at consensus means that it satisfies the conditions of deliberative democracy which are that

deliberation aims ... to find reasons that are persuasive to all who are committed to acting on the results of a free and reasoned assessment of alternatives by equals. ... If ... deliberation concludes with voting ... that ... does not ... eliminate the distinction between deliberative forms of collective

choice and forms that aggregate nondeliberative preferences (Cohen 1997a, 74).

To have a national political party, especially one that has thousands of members and many local groups or branches, operate on consensus decision making is probably close to a miracle - but it works. For it to do so, however, there has been much effort put into its processes. One of the most important of these has been the adoption of flexible mandates for delegates.

While consensus processes have been widely used in small face-to-face groups, adapting these processes for a large federated organisation has enabled Greens to identify principled reasons for rejecting narrow and restrictive mandating of delegates. At meetings of delegates, developing a synthesis that enables consensus to emerge requires an understanding of the issue that goes deeper than the surface wording of a specific proposal. If delegates came to a council meeting bound to a specific position, they would not be able to participate in or contribute to the creative problem solving that consensus processes encourage.

To make consensus work in a large federated structure, meetings of members mandating delegates need to brief their delegates with their concerns, and the principles and goals they would like to see incorporated in the final decision at the delegates meeting, rather than narrowly mandating their delegate to a specific outcome. Delegates fulfil the terms of their accountability to the members who mandated them when they convince a meeting of those members that the decisions taken at the council meeting of delegates reflect the substance of their advice, even if the specifics are quite different.

Flexible mandates give participants in a discussion the opportunity to learn from wider groups and to break through possible parochial attitudes or insufficient background information. This means that deliberation within a federated cooperative structure works against the sort of group polarisation that Sunstein identifies as potential source of social fragmentation, and facilitates the desirable outcome of deliberation - recognition of a diversity of views (2003, 85) As delegates rotate, they increase the numbers of delegates or members at lower levels of the organisation with a wider organisational perspective, reducing the risk of parochialism even further

An important difference between delegates and representatives is that the former have to report back and their positions are revocable at any time. The adoption of consensus decision making, delegate structures and flexible mandates allows for the development of a well resourced, functioning national organization, operating on principles which are not inconsistent with those adopted by anarchists throughout history, albeit they are being used by the Greens within the framework of liberal democracy in a capitalist society.

The Australian Greens commitment to consensus processes provides relatively small groups, at any level of the party organization, with the potential capacity to thwart the will of most members by blocking consensus or maybe even being able to cobble together one-third of the votes to block any forward move after consensus has

failed. However, the articulation of the principles of deliberative democracy underlying our consensus practices has the potential to result in such behaviour being seen as bloody minded or inappropriately factional. Having consensus as the core decision making principle also confronts non-factional delegates and members with the need to come to grips with the aberrant behaviour and seek out those with whom they can work and who are anxious for the organization to move forward rather than be mired in useless, bloody, factional battles.

The federated structure of delegates means that connections are forged between delegates beyond local, regional, or even state concerns. These connections mean that members at lower levels of the organisation are not solely reliant on information or action from a central management committee. It also means the organisation is less susceptible to take over by hostile external interests, as power does not reside solely with a central committee.

Conclusion

The Australian Greens has drawn on anarchist principles of organisation to develop institutional arrangements that incorporate participative and deliberative democracy whilst maintaining the capacity to provide national and international coordination on environmental campaigns and policies. Both the historical examples of this structure in operation (Guerin 1959, ; Leval 1975), and its current utilisation within the Greens confound claims that anarchist structures are limited to horizontal connections between local groups (Eckersley 1992, 170; Habermas 1997, 52); lack the capacity for national or international coordination (Carter 1996, 73; de Geus 1996, 194; Eckersley 1992, 178; Smith 2003, 78); or, lack the means for dealing with environmental problems transcending local boundaries (Carter 1996, 71; Dryzek 1997, 180; Eckersley 1992, 173-4; Paehlke 1996, 20-6; Smith 2003, 78).

Notes

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¹ A Victorian member of the Australian Greens, and National Policy co-Cordinator for 2003-4, and hence well aware of the practical issues involved in democratic institutional design.

² <<http://www.greens.org.au/policies/democracy>> Accessed 14 April 2005.

³ The Australian Greens has links to State web sites at <http://www.greens.org.au/states/index_html>. Most state web sites have links to their constitutions which describe these arrangements.

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