

OCCUPY THE GREEN PARTY: WHY SUPPORT FOR BRITAIN'S POLITICAL LEFT IS SURGING

BY [CHARLOTTE DINGLE](#), [Occupy.com](#)



The U.K.'s [Green Party](#) is growing – fast. The left-wing party now has over 52,000 members and counting, following a surge late last year that saw its membership leap by 57%. The Greens now have more members than the Liberal Democrats who are currently in the Coalition Government with the Conservative Party.

So why are people finally sitting up and taking notice of the Greens? Occupy.com spoke to some new party members about what made them join, and asked key party figures what they believe is behind the Greens' recent popularity.

"I'd never really thought about voting Green until I read about the TV leader debates," admitted Ruth Brent, 43, a social worker who sent off for party membership last week. The

Green Party gained extensive media coverage after broadcasters decided that only Britain's three main parties – Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats – and the anti-immigrant U.K. Independence Party (UKIP) should be included in televised debates ahead of the General Election in May.

After a concerted campaign from smaller parties, disgruntled at UKIP's inclusion in the debates and their exclusion, it took the Conservative leader David Cameron announcing that he wouldn't participate in the debates unless Green Party leader Natalie Bennett also took part, which changed broadcasters' minds.

The debates will now also be a platform not only for the Greens, but for the Scottish National Party and Welsh party Plaid Cymru.

"Suddenly they were all over the papers and I liked some of the quotes from their party leader so eventually decided to look at their website – and this week after much mulling it over I finally joined," Brent continued.

"I'd assumed they were just a lunatic fringe party obsessed with environmental issues, but no. They've got solid policies across the board which seem to me a lot more intelligently thought out than what I've heard from the main parties. They're real socialists, unlike the rapidly declining Labour Party, which is becoming not a lot better than the Conservatives."

Around a quarter of Green Party members are under 30, making it an unusually young political party. One of these is Colin Ellis, 25, a recent graduate and new Green member.

"They're the only party offering an alternative to the neoliberalism of the main parties," Ellis enthused. "I joined because U.K. politics needs shaking up and to have a real left-wing party in the running again. Labour and the Lib Dems have sold out and are drifting rapidly to the right. I voted

Lib Dem before but they've shown their true colors and gone back on too many promises in their time in power.

"As a jobless graduate I feel only too acutely aware of how much their policies on unemployment and job creation could improve so many people's lives. Instead of adopting the ridiculous racist scapegoating which has seduced voters into seeing UKIP as the credible radical alternative to the tired old main parties, they are actually thrashing out sensible policies on making the U.K. a better, fairer place for everyone to live in."

Like in Brent's case, the Greens came to Ellis's attention after the television leadership debate coverage. "There's a real sense that a lot of people just didn't really know who the Greens were and what they stood for before," he added. "It's a shame they've got the name they have because I think it's dismissed them in a lot of people's minds as being a single-issue party. They've had to work a lot harder to fight their corner."

Green Party leader Natalie Bennett agrees that people's despair at what she calls the "business-as-usual" approach of Britain's three main parties is a key reason for Green support shooting up.



[dropcap]“V[/dropcap]oters have looked at Labour, the Lib Dems and the Conservatives and decided they just weren’t going to meet the needs of our pressing economic, social and environmental crises,” Bennett told Occupy.com. “They’ve decided to get behind the Green offer of real hope and change.”

She concurred that the discussion surrounding the television debates was crucial to the Greens’ recent growth. “Albeit obviously made entirely for his own reasons, David Cameron’s comments about our inclusion in the TV debates helped us get more attention than we’ve had in the past,” she said.

Darren Johnson, one of just two Green Party members of the London Assembly, said: “I think an uninspiring Labour Party and discredited Liberal Democrat Party at a time of growing concern on issues like cuts, climate change and rising inequality have created a perfect storm for the Green Party to build support and provide an alternative.”

“Politics in this country are very turbulent,” agreed Baroness Jenny Jones, Johnson’s colleague on the Assembly and the Party’s only peer in the House of Lords. “Smaller parties are benefiting from that. When UKIP had a surge, many people looked round to find another small party which existed as an antidote to them and found the Greens.”

But can the party now be trusted to deliver? The Greens came under fire last week following accusations that they had dropped one of their most popular policies, the Citizen’s Income, from their manifesto. The [Citizen’s Income](#) would give every adult £72 a week from the government, regardless of their income.

“The Citizen’s Income features in something we call our ‘Policies for a Sustainable Society’ (PSS), not our manifesto,” Jones explained. “This document looks at how we’d like society to be. It’s an ideal. We use the things in there to direct our thinking, but they’re not manifesto items.”

Hinting at the possibility of a coalition win in May, Jones added: “The Citizen’s Income isn’t in our manifesto because we wouldn’t be able to implement it with so little power.”

Bennett said she’s now “working to help the media and the public understand the differences between the manifesto and the PSS, which has been a source of much confusion.” Another policy in the PPS, which states that it “should not be a crime simply to belong to an organisation or have sympathy with its aims, though it should be a crime to aid and abet criminal acts or deliberately fund such acts,” has sparked criticism from many who so say it indicates the party endorses terrorism.

“You can’t just have freedom of speech when it fits you and your agenda,” Jones insisted. “Passive membership of terrorist groups should be allowed, but we’re a non-violent party so definitely wouldn’t support anyone who wanted to stir up

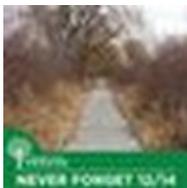
violence.”

What do the Greens feel about their chances of success in the forthcoming general elections?

“We’ve identified 12 focus seats,” Bennett responded. “One of these is Brighton, where we already have our sitting MP, Caroline Lucas. We also see Bristol West and Norwich South as particularly strong prospects. But that implies politics still more or less as usual. There is a chance that in this election British politics could break wide open and the future look entirely like the past.”

SELECT COMMENTS

(ORIGINAL THREAD)



■ [DHFabian](#) • [a day ago](#)

I don’t know if any nation’s Green Party is on the left, but I do know that we need a legitimate leftward movement in the US. Through the years that we’ve created a poverty crisis, US liberals have kept the motto: “Stand in Solidarity to protect the status quo of the bourgeoisie alone,” the middle class. We have a poverty crisis in a nation that considers itself enlightened when it comes to fundamental human rights. In fact, we are the generation that ended the fundamental human rights (per the UDHR) of the jobless poor, and many of the unemployable, to food and shelter. Our own history shows why it’s impossible to save, much less rebuild, the middle class without shoring up the poor.

■



[subcomandante Felix DHFabian](#) • [a day ago](#)

You have a major problem if you think the interests of the middle class and the poor are politically the same. It is middle class conformity – in exchange for a position of privilege – that maintains the hierarchy and capitalism. Rebuilding the middle class is a counter-revolutionary course of action, which is why it is so popular with progressives and reactionaries alike. .

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[floodWALLSTREET](#) • [2 hours ago](#)

Yea; U.K PLUS (aka 5-EYES) need not trust any party. Being 'Partyless' requires [deep] Contemplation. Just to Become Just!

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[cruisersailor](#) • [10 hours ago](#)

I wish the American Green Party was growing by leaps and bounds.

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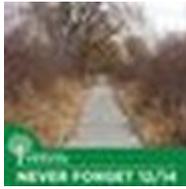
[subcomandante Felix](#) • [a day ago](#)

Unfortunately, in the U.S. we are still waiting for the Greens to surge – perhaps in 2016? It is certainly not because there are not good people involved – the Green

shadow cabinet – nor for lack of a strong political critique of the U.S. neofascist shamocracy government. Part of the problem is structural, representative democracy. Representative democracy, even under the best of conditions, is a hierarchical system of decision making. The more important a decision, the higher it is made in the hierarchical governance structure. At the lowest level is the election, where “we the people” vote for representatives to govern for and over them. Once the vote is cast, meaningful participation by the people is over. Studies have shown that the impact of petitioning for redress of grievances and protests has decreasing impact the higher you go in the decision making process. Even on the lowest level, the electoral process, their impact falls to almost nothing after the election. Obama is a classic example. Sure it helps to have good people and good political parties, but their ability to make transformational change is limited by the hierarchical decision making of representative democracy.

The main reason that the U.S. Greens are not surging however, is that in the U.S. progressives and the left (no they are not the same) put too much of their energy into obstructive politics, i.e. participating in the electoral process and later protesting when it goes south. As Gandhi showed us, effective political action must be based in a strong cultural constructive program, i.e. Occupy. Although I don't believe in representative democracy as a long-term process for transformational societal change, I do recognize the necessity of engaging in the short term. It is imperative to defend and stand in solidarity with those most vulnerable in society, even if the gains, i.e. reforms, are limited and do not address structural problems (the reason reforms are always limited). What is important is that effective participation in representative democracy be based on a strong constructive cultural program. Greece is a good example. The recent electoral victory of Syriza is based on decades of cultural work in the solidarity networks – it didn't just happen because people got fed up with austerity. The Zapatistas said it this way: “Where those above destroy, we below rebuild ...together we know that within our rebellions is our “NO” to the politics of destruction that capitalism carries out across the world. And we know that within our resistances are the seeds of the world that we want. These rebellions and resistances are not just those of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. They are also found in the footsteps of the ordinary peoples across the continent and in all corners of the earth where individuals, groups, collectives, and organizations not only say “NO” to destruction, but go about constructing something new.”

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[DHFabian](#) [subcomandante Felix](#) • [a day ago](#)

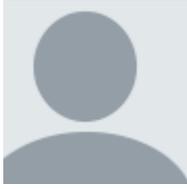
Remember what happened with Occupy? What began as an extraordinary people's movement was quickly redefined – by Dem pols and liberal media – as a middle class workers movement alone, the better off. The poor, and those who get why unrelieved poverty is sinking the nation, walked away. We have a poverty crisis. Not everyone can work (health, etc.), and there aren't jobs for all who urgently need one. The US shipped out a huge share of jobs since the 1980s, ended actual welfare aid in the 1990s. When was the last time you heard a call for restoring basic poverty relief? Mainstream America still howls that welfare is “bringing taxpayers to their knees,” inexplicably unaware that the last welfare check was issued in the 1990s (TANF is a short-term, marginally subsidized work program, exclusively for those with minor children.)

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[subcomandante Felix](#) [DHFabian](#) • [a day ago](#)

Occupy was never an “extraordinary peoples movement” and it certainly had nothing to do with whatever the media redefined it as. You seem to have missed my point that Occupy was an experiment in cultural organizing – autonomy, solidarity, mutual aid – not a political movement with demands etc. Obviously there were political aspects of Occupy, in that it represented a wide diversity of people but the political was never the primary focus. You are right that many working people, those with jobs and family responsibilities could not participate as much as they wanted but that doesn't mean they left or didn't take anything from that experience. I know that in D.C., the presence and participation of homeless people was an ongoing issue of great concern to all involved.



sonichu • [2 days ago](#)

The Greens are radical feminists, and I'm not just saying this because they're left-wing. Check their actual policies, and if you agree that women shouldn't be punished for violent crimes they commit just because they're women, then go ahead and vote for this bunch of misandrist creeps.



[Roger Hendrix](#) [sonichu](#) • [2 days ago](#)

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