

Over the years that I was fortunate enough to know and work with John, it became clear that a great number of people from many different “walks of life” have been inspired by John and held him in high respect for *all the right reasons*. The world is a better place because of John Rensenbrink. He will be missed.

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**MEMORIES OF MY FRIEND JOHN RENSENBRINK,
HIS PASSION AND PRAXIS**

<https://doi.org/10.5840/du202232217>

John Rensenbrink’s long life was an adventure, an exploration, a mission of leadership and service to humanity—and the Earth. Guided by passion for knowledge, for understanding, for wisdom, shaped by deeply humanist morality, my dear friend John lived in, and helped create, a world of thought and action, an ecological *praxis* of resistance, exuberance, and love.

John and I first met in the midst of the political and economic crises of the 1970s. At home in the U.S., mass movements were defending Black, Indigenous, Latino, and Asian peoples, advocating women’s equality, and opposing U.S. wars abroad. Internationally, decolonization was underway, a powerful anti-apartheid movement threatened white nationalist regimes in southern Africa, and insurgencies and counter-insurgencies (funded by the U.S.) kept Latin America in turmoil. Salvador Allende had been overthrown and assassinated in Chile, at U.S. direction, just two years before. Domestically, both major political parties were enmeshed in the Cold War, and the left had largely been purged from both the Democratic Party and the labor movement. In the post-Watergate era, the Republican Party was well down a reactionary path toward Ronald Reagan’s coming assault on the postwar consensus. A growing environmental movement was battling both industrial pollution and nuclear power. Economically, American communities were struggling to recover from the 1973 oil crisis, from wholesale deindustrialization, and from corporate attacks on hard-won labor agreements.

Against this backdrop, John and I first crossed paths at a national meeting of radical scholars convened at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, USA. In his keynote lecture to a hundred peers including such irrepressible

souls as Betty Zisk, Frances Fox Piven, Richard Cloward, Murray Bookchin, Christian Bay, Joan Roelofs, Murray Edelman, Stanley Aronowitz, Morton Schoolman, and many others, John delivered a rousing call for personal courage and political action, at a time when political science in particular (the profession we shared for more than three decades) had come to seem a timid and soulless enterprise. John was president of the group which organized the conference, known as the Caucus for New Political Science. His fire-and-brimstone speech that day demanded action, not just theory, from his colleagues whose intellectual work, while empathetic, creative, and insurgent, sometimes became unmoored from the lived experiences of the world's people.

Those who've worked with Rensenbrink will recognize this: for him, the hard intellectual work of understanding where humanity has gone wrong, and the practical work, the *action* to make things right, were equally important. In other words, John's passion for social and ecological change embodied a deep *praxis*, where transcendental thought guides transformational action. He was inspired by a distinctive vision, but knew how crucial it is to work in concert with others. For John, *praxis* wasn't an empty or abstract word. It was a way of life.

For many years, John's *praxis* revolved around the creation and nurturing of Green political parties in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world. After standing with John at just a few of his historic contributions to Green political history, I've seen firsthand how deeply his understanding of both people and the Earth shaped his political work. In 1992 John helped establish the Green Politics Network, which gave rise to the Association of State Green Parties (ASGP), which then became the Green Party of the United States.

John's international role was also historic. Greens from 70 countries came together in Canberra, Australia, at the Global Greens Congress 2001, to approve a Global Green Charter and unify the international Green party movement. At that first-ever gathering, John led the effort to ensure that somewhere in the new global organization, would be a place for broad, grassroots participation. John's campaign culminated with a unanimous vote to authorize a Global Green Network (GGN), including representatives from every national party, as "a means of effective worldwide communication among Green parties and Movements." Without John's perseverance the only formal structure of global Green cooperation to emerge from the 2001 Congress would have been a small leadership body, the "Global Green Coordination," dominated by the powerful, well-resourced Greens of Western Europe. Instead, the role of the 12-person Coordination became balanced, if unequally so, by the broader, two delegates per country, Global Green Network. Again, John's vision of a participatory movement, accessible to the global South and East as well as the West, found its way into Green history because he was willing to actively engage, as leader of the U.S. Green Party's International Committee, and as U.S. delegate to the Global Greens.

Through more than forty years, it was my pleasure to walk some of this path with John, finding inspiration in his leadership, and an example in his life of service. For many years, we traveled together as Green Party representatives, including a road trip to Ottawa in 2000 as guest speakers at the Green Party of Canada's National Convention. John's speech explained the difficult electoral environment we face in the U.S., and mine addressed developing relationships between U.S. Greens and Indigenous sovereignty and sustainability campaigns. In 2001 we were together at the first Global Greens Congress in Australia. In 2004 we traveled to Rome, Italy, in the U.S. delegation to the founding congress of the European Green Party. We drove together to Quebec City in 2008, for the hemispheric meeting of the Federation of Green Parties of the Americas, where FPVA welcomed new parties from Guatemala, Bolivia, and French Guyana; established the Young Greens of the Americas; established the FPVA Women's Commission; and voted to oppose the resurgence of nuclear power around the world.

At the 2014 state convention of the Maine Green Independent Party—commemorating yet another of John's many founding roles—his fellow Mainers invited me to speak, to bring greetings from Rhode Island and to remind his closest neighbors of the special place John holds in the hearts and minds of Greens around the world. At his 90th birthday party in 2018, John's lifelong partner, his wife Carla, and his daughters Kathryn, Greta, and Liz, invited me to do the same, but from the warmer, less formal perspective of one who's been both friend and political ally. As I did on both occasions, it's my great pleasure to share these memories with you, with respect, admiration, and love; to affirm again, to his friends and compatriots in the *International Society for Universal Dialogue*, that John Rensenbrink was one of our world's very best. He was an inspiration, an example of just what a well-lived, fully-engaged life can be, and a challenge to us all, to rise above the despair the modern world invokes, to think broadly and deeply about what we must do to survive, as a species and as a planetary ecosystem, and above all, to keep faith that our human purpose is greater than we've seen so far. We can *be* better, we can *do* better, and fortunately for us all, John Rensenbrink's lifelong, passionate *praxis* showed the way.

(Portions of these reflections were previously published in *Green Horizon Magazine*, Winter/Spring 2020.)

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