Pacific Party offering alternative to Oregon voters

Human rights, environmental issues will be platform focus

By Rene DeCair
Emerald Reporter

A group of disillusioned Democrats and environmentalists, tired of both the Republican and Democratic party platforms, have formed the Pacific Party to offer voters a choice in this "dog-eat-dog" world.

"People choose not to vote, rather than to vote for the lesser of two evils," said Gary Kutcher, the Pacific Party's Lane County coordinator, citing figures that about 60 percent of eligible Oregon residents usually do not vote.

Kutcher said his group will seek its support from those "who have never voted because they realize it is essentially a one-party system."

The Pacific Party needs to collect about 38,000 signatures from registered voters in order to be considered a minor political party and run candidates in the Oregon 1992 elections.

Kutcher said the group is not trying to organize a national party because it is too much work — at least for now — and because the National Organization for Women is considering forming a like-minded national party of its own.

The Pacific Party was formed three months ago, Kutcher said, when it became clear during the Persian Gulf war that neither of the two major parties was interested in working for peace, although Kutcher believes citizens wanted the conflict to stop.

Pacific Party membership rosters also include supporters of the Green political organization who were tired of listening to "intellectual debate" for the past six years on whether to form a party, Kutcher said.

"Greens in Portland and other states have decided it's time to stop talking and start acting," he said.

The Pacific Party's platform, which stresses energy conservation, peace, equality among races and genders, and an accessible electoral process, is similar to the Greens' ideology and shares some Democratic stances.

But some people wonder whether adding another political party to the system could do more harm than good.

Margaret Wilson, treasurer of the Lane County Democratic Committee, called the formation of additional parties "the dumbest idea." But everyone has the right, she added.

She said it will be difficult for Pacific Party members to compete in a four-way race against another minor group, the Libertarian Party, as well as Republicans and Democrats.

In fact, Wilson believes the Pacific Party may even back-fire on its supporters if the group manages to split the liberal vote along ideological lines — such as the recent split on the conservative side when independent candidate Al Mobley ran in last November's election for governor and captured much of the vote that would likely have gone to Republican Dave Frohnmayer.

But others, like University political science Professor James Klonoski, say they admire a group that is willing to change the status quo.

"More power to the people who think we've stopped dead-center," Klonoski said. But he also said they might have a difficult time attracting constituents because political parties do not mean much to people anymore.

But Klonoski said a group like the Pacific Party might have more success on a nationwide level, rather than in Oregon.
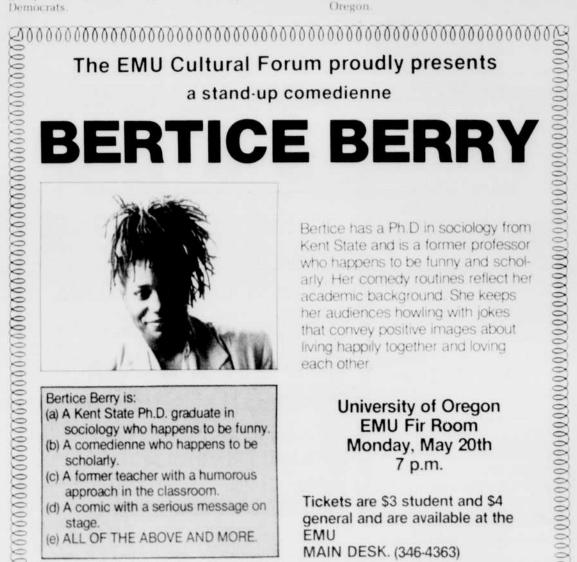
Kutcher, however, said the Pacific Party will have great success in Oregon if they can draw on support from voters who realize their party will work without compromising on human rights and environmental issues.

Kutcher said the non-voting citizens will vote for his groups when they "see that there are honest folks out there to vote for."

"We're going to make an active effort to encourage people to register to vote," he said.

Moreover, Kutcher said the Pacific Party can draw a natural base of support from people who believe that government does not represent the average person. Kutcher said an independent candidate from Vermont last year who won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives running on a platform similar to the Pacific Party's.

"We could have a significant effect in the next election," Kutcher said.

Photo by Andre Ranieri

Gary Kutcher, Lane County coordinator of the newly formed Pacific Party, works to collect the signatures necessary to run party candidates in the 1992 elections.

Improved recycling bins make debut on campus

Student recycling workers distributed 125 new and improved recycling bins to high-use areas Saturday, in the hopes of making efficient recycling an easier task for students, faculty and staff.

The new bins are color coded and labeled for easier identification of each paper type: colored ledger, white ledger, newsprint and computer paper.

In addition, new bins for unbleached recycled paper were added this weekend.

Sybil Kerker, a sophomore University student who has been working on the recycling project, said that separating white paper and unbleached recycled paper is more efficient.

"Recycled and non-recycled papers have different weights and have different fiber content," she said.

Kerker is hoping that clearer labeling will encourage people to recycle properly by putting different types of paper in the appropriate bins.

"People often set aside the paper they want to recycle, put it in paper bags and just set the bags next to the bins for someone else to sort," she said.

Kerker said although it is good that people are making some effort to recycle, not sorting their own paper creates more work for an already overworked recycling staff.

The bin project is completely student run, with much of the work done by OSPIRG and the Student Recycling Task Force.

Kerker, an OSPIRG member, said that money raised by the passage of the student ballot measure allocating student fees to campus recycling is helping make this and future projects possible.