

On eve of Green Party convention, Ralph Nader appeals to Teamsters union leaders

Jerry White
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World Socialist Web Site reporter Jerry White is covering the Green Party national convention, being held this weekend in Denver, Colorado. White will file a series of reports beginning Tuesday, June 27 on the proceedings of the convention, the program of the Greens, and the policies of their presidential candidate, Ralph Nader.

On the eve of his nomination as the Green Party's candidate for US president, Ralph Nader sought support from top Teamsters officials Thursday during a private meeting with the union's executive board in Washington, DC. Nader appealed to the union officials on the basis of their shared platform of economic nationalism and protectionism, and won a standing ovation from the 24-member board.

At a joint press conference after the meeting, Teamsters President James P. Hoffa praised Nader, saying, "No one spoke stronger on issues important to working families." He added, "There is no distinction between Al Gore and George W. Bush when it comes to trade. We agree wholeheartedly with what Mr. Nader had said. Ralph Nader understands what globalization means: money and jobs are going overseas. US workers can't compete with slave labor. It's a race to the bottom."

The Teamsters president also praised Patrick Buchanan, the right-wing politician seeking the presidential nomination of the Reform Party. "Only Ralph Nader and Patrick Buchanan have stood with the American workers on trade," Hoffa said. He called for Nader and Buchanan to be included in upcoming nationally televised presidential debates, in order to present the argument for a protectionist trade policy.

At the press conference Nader reiterated his opposition to trade agreements backed by the Clinton-Gore administration, including the North American

Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the normalization of trade relations with China. Nader promised that if elected president he would terminate the NAFTA agreement with Canada and Mexico.

The Teamsters union has long promoted xenophobic and nationalist politics. Currently the union is conducting a thinly veiled racist campaign to ban Mexican truck drivers from coming across the border. Appearing on the Fox News Sunday television program earlier this month, Nader solidarized himself with the union's anti-Mexican campaign.

Nader's campaign has generated concern in Al Gore's camp that the Green Party candidate might win over a sufficient number of traditionally Democratic voters in close states to influence the outcome of the elections. It is believed that Nader could tip the balance in Michigan, Ohio and other swing states in the Midwest. In California, a poll this week showed Nader drawing 7 percent.

In the midst of the AFL-CIO's campaign last month to defeat the House vote on normalizing trade with China, United Auto Workers President Stephen Yokich also hinted that he might support Nader. There is little likelihood that the Teamsters or the UAW will endorse Nader, but they see his campaign as a means of promoting their program of economic nationalism and placing pressure on Gore and the Democrats.

During the press conference at Teamsters headquarters, Nader made clear that his own campaign was fundamentally aimed at pressuring the two parties of big business. When asked if his candidacy might take crucial votes away from the Democrats, he replied that he would bring in many voters who would be unlikely to go the polls if their choices were limited to Gore and Bush. Those voters, he said, would help the

Democrats in their drive to retake the US House of Representatives and pick up seats in the Senate.

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