

US Green Party candidate Ralph Nader barred from site of presidential debate

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An official of the Commission on Presidential Debates and three police officers blocked Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader from entering the site of Tuesday night's nationally televised debate between Democratic Vice President Al Gore and Republican Governor George W. Bush.

Nader, who has obtained ballot status in almost all 50 states but has been excluded by the commission from participating in the debates, was attempting to enter the auditorium at the University of Massachusetts in Boston as a spectator. He had been given a ticket by a sympathetic student from Northeastern University.

As soon as he got off the bus en route to the auditorium he was met by John Bezeris, a representative of the commission, and three police officers. Bezeris told Nader, "It's already been decided that whether or not you have a ticket you are not welcome in the debate."

Bezeris brushed aside Nader's insistence that he had no intention of disrupting the debate, and the Green Party candidate was forced to leave. "I was excluded on political grounds and no other considerations were communicated," Nader said later. He added, "I didn't expect they would be so crude and so stupid. This is the kind of creeping tyranny that has turned away so many voters from the electoral process."

The ham-fisted action by the Commission on Presidential Debates underscored the arbitrary and anti-democratic methods that characterize not only the presidential debates, but the electoral process as a whole, which is skewed to maintain the monopoly of the two parties of the corporate establishment. The police action against Nader makes a mockery of the democratic pretenses surrounding the debates.

The commission is composed of representatives of the Democratic and Republican parties and financed by

big corporations. It has ruled that only candidates who register 15 percent or more in public opinion polls are eligible to participate in the three nationally televised debates. This arbitrary criterion has the intended effect of excluding Nader and other third party candidates.

Nader, Reform Party candidate Patrick Buchanan and Libertarian Harry Browne have all sued unsuccessfully to force the commission to allow them to participate in the presidential debates.

As Nader was being barred from the debate venue, some 10,000 demonstrators were protesting outside the hall, most of them denouncing the debate commission and demanding that the Green Party candidate be allowed to participate. Some 30 protesters were arrested. The previous Sunday Nader spoke at a rally in Boston attended by 12,000 people.

The barring of Nader outside the debate venue shed light on the proceedings inside the hall. The Democratic and Republican parties span a narrow political spectrum from conservatism to extreme reaction. Tuesday's debate demonstrated once again that official politics in the US marginalize any critique of the status quo that raises, even in a limited way, the domination of the political process by big business. As for a socialist alternative—it is simply proscribed.

But there are many signs of public disaffection with the two-party system. Voter turnout has declined by 25 percent over the past four decades. Tuesday's debate attracted a smaller television audience than those in previous presidential campaigns. The support for Nader, particularly among younger people, is a reflection of growing discontent with the Democrats and Republicans.

The very fact that the debate commission reacted as it did to Nader's attempt simply to watch the debate is a measure of the fear in ruling circles that the two-party

monopoly that has served it so well for so long is losing any base of mass support in the population at large.

As the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* have made clear, we have fundamental differences with the program of the Green Party, which combines certain reformist demands with economic nationalism, and do not support Nader's candidacy. At the same time we strongly oppose his exclusion from the debates. As a matter of democratic principle, Nader and all other candidates who have obtained ballot status to compete in the elections should have equal access to the media, to the televised debates and to all other political forums during the election campaign.



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