

The US election crisis: why is Ralph Nader silent?

Jerry White
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Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader has maintained a deafening silence on the political crisis surrounding the results of the US elections.

During his campaign, Nader correctly criticized corporate domination of the American two-party system as tantamount to the disenfranchisement of the broad masses of the American people and an affront to democratic rights. Yet in the face of a concerted effort by the most reactionary forces within the political establishment, who are lined up behind the Bush camp, to use patently anti-democratic methods and appeals to right-wing sentiment to gain control of the White House, Nader has not uttered a word of protest.

It is remarkable that a presidential candidate who won 3 percent of the national vote—including nearly 100,000 votes in Florida—and presented himself as a progressive alternative to the Democrats and Republicans should have nothing to say about the events of the past two weeks. A public statement from Nader denouncing the attempt of the Bush campaign to gain the White House through the suppression of votes would undoubtedly strengthen popular opposition to the Republicans' machinations.

Yet in several public appearances and television, radio and newspaper interviews since the election, Nader has said nothing about the election controversy. A spokesman at Nader's Washington, DC headquarters confirmed that the Green Party candidate had issued no public statements on the subject. When this reporter asked why, the spokesman said, "We're not deeply involved in what is going on down there. This is just a political battle between the Democrats and Republicans." When asked how Nader could remain silent about widespread charges of Republican vote-rigging and intimidation of minority voters, in which fundamental issues of democratic rights were at stake, the spokesman said, "It's Mr. Nader's prerogative to do so."

How is Nader's silence to be explained? As his spokesperson indicated, he considers the electoral impasse to be nothing more than a dispute over the spoils of government between two identical corporate-controlled parties. It is something that ordinary people need not

particularly concern themselves with.

But how could that be? How could working people adopt an attitude of indifference toward political forces on the right prepared to ride roughshod over their democratic rights, as part of an effort to take full control of the levers of power?

The working class must oppose the attacks on basic rights, but it must do so from its own independent standpoint and with its own methods. Opposition to the Republican right does not imply giving political support to Al Gore and the Democrats. Experience has shown that this party is incapable of seriously defending democratic rights against the reactionaries in the Republican Party. What this crisis poses to the working class is the need to construct its own political party, based on a democratic and socialist program, to defend the interests of the vast majority of American people.

Nader's refusal to oppose the Republican-led attack on democratic rights demonstrates that his organization has no real independence from the ruling elite. His "plague on both your houses" position may appear radical, but in reality it is a form of adaptation and capitulation to the extreme right-wing forces that dominate the Republican Party. Precisely because the Greens are not based on the working class—in fact, they reject the very notion of the class struggle—they are incapable of mounting any resistance to the overt attacks on fundamental rights.

Nader's silence on the current crisis is consistent with his mechanical and false conception that, because in an *absolute* sense an identity exists between the two parties—insofar as they both represent the interests of American big business—there cannot be any *relative* differences. But, of course, such relative differences exist, and in times of political crisis they can play a critical role in developments that affect broad masses of people.

It is true that corporate interests dominate both parties and that the political differences between them have narrowed as the political spectrum of official politics has lurched to the right. But it is also true that over the past decade a ferocious battle has been under way between these two parties. This

must have an objective source in conflicts between different sections of America's economic and political elite.

The struggle within the ruling elite has escalated from a series of phony investigations against the Clinton administration, to the shutdown of the federal government, to the first-ever impeachment of a sitting president, to the current effort by the Republicans to hijack the election. To pretend that these events have no political significance is to deny reality.

The Republican Party is controlled by extreme right-wing forces, which speak ultimately for powerful sections of the corporate establishment who consider even Clinton's conservative policies an obstacle to the far more extreme right-wing agenda they seek to impose on the country. They are determined to lift all restrictions on the accumulation of personal wealth and the exploitation of the working class. To achieve this, the Republicans and their religious right, racist and fascist supporters are prepared to overturn democratic norms and constitutional rights.

The Democrats, who have increasingly turned their backs on the workers and minorities in whose name they once claimed to speak, represent other sections of the ruling elite and more privileged social layers, who seek to defend the interests of American capitalism through the more traditional channels of bourgeois democracy.

For working people to sit idly by while this battle is fought out within ruling circles is to court disaster. The basic issue involved here is not the fate of Gore or Bush, but the fate of the democratic rights of the American people.

Nader's banal and complacent views were highlighted in recent remarks about the results of the election. In a November 17 interview on National Public Radio's *Talk of the Nation* program he said, "What's next? I don't think anything is going to happen regardless of whether Bush or Gore is elected. They will be deadlocked. It's too evenly divided. I don't think there are going to be any major changes in direction."

Nader also told the *New York Times* that if Bush prevailed, his very narrow margin, the closely divided Congress and the Texas governor's own personality would limit the damage he could do. "He doesn't know very much," Nader said of Bush. "He is not very energetic. He doesn't like controversy."

This is an utterly false assessment. Does it make any sense that the forces behind Bush, who have been prepared to throw the country into a constitutional crisis and raise the specter of divisions not seen since the Civil War, are suddenly going to opt for a more moderate course once they take the White House? On the contrary, sensing that their position is increasingly weak and unpopular, they will push ahead with their reactionary agenda.

Nader, of course, does recognize that there are differences between the two parties. That is why he spent much of his time answering arguments that he was taking votes away from the Democrats, not the Republicans, and calling on the Democrats to return to their "progressive roots."

Much more is involved on Nader's part than a theoretical error or a false appraisal of the dispute between the two parties. His silence is also bound up with political calculations of a reactionary character. Nader has said nothing about the Republicans' actions in the election campaign because he does not want to alienate right-wing forces whose support he is courting.

This is not new. In his acceptance speech at the Green Party convention in June, Nader counseled Green members to appeal to conservative voters by saying his campaign championed "traditional, not extreme values," such as opposition to the "voyeurism of the media." He made no secret about appealing to supporters of Senator John McCain and backers of even more right-wing political figures.

He made common cause with Reform Party presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan, joining the ultra-right politician in protectionist campaigns against trade agreements with Mexico and China, which Nader declared were "subverting American sovereignty."

Finally, Nader expressed support for the Republican impeachment drive against President Clinton. In the course of his presidential bid he said he opposed the Senate acquittal of Clinton, and declared that he would have voted to remove Clinton from office. He reiterated this at a New York press conference before the election, saying, "Clinton should have been convicted by the Senate. He disgraced the office and lied under oath. Matters like these cannot go without sanction."

By siding with the forces behind the impeachment campaign and in remaining silent during the present political crisis Nader has, in objective terms, aided and abetted the camp of right-wing reaction.



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