

The WSWS and the California campaign of Peter Camejo: letters from the Green Party and a reply

Peter Daniels
22 October 2003

Below we are publishing two letters sent to the WSWS earlier this month by Green Party activists and a reply by Peter Daniels, writing in behalf of the WSWS Editorial Board. The letters were sent in response to an article by Daniels entitled "Peter Camejo and the Greens bid for 'respectability' in California recall campaign". The article was posted September 30, 2003.

To the editor:

This is in regards to Peter Daniels' 30 September libel of the GPUS:

I see Mr. Daniels cannot resist wide, sweeping generalizations in his continued efforts to spew misinformation about the Green Party. This is most unfortunate, as I have great respect for WSWS as a news service and cannot normally find fault with their reporting. It might be nice if the "factual" information of Mr. Daniels' opinion piece stood up to the normally very high journalistic standards I've learned I can expect from WSWS.

"The gubernatorial campaign of Peter Camejo in the California recall election marks a further turn to the right by the Green Party."

Really? Daniels can determine this from the gubernatorial campaign of one candidate in a single state? The gubernatorial campaign of Peter Camejo has now suddenly become indicative of every single local and every state party?

This is reductionism of the sort that I never once thought I could expect from anyone at WSWS. Should it be true that Camejo has made a "further turn to the right," then what that indicates is a "further turn to the right" by Camejo. Camejo can no more be representative of the whole entire party than Jerry Brown could of the Democrats.

"The Greens and their candidate have tailored their election statements and appearances to demonstrate their "responsibility"—i.e., subordination—to the political and media establishment and the financial elite."

Have we? Can Daniels truly say this without hesitation of the likes of Lorna Salzman, Jill Stein, James O'Keefe, Chuck Turner, Stan Aronowitz, Joel Kovel and each and every candidate that the Green Party has fielded? Can he say this even of myself, a candidate for City Council of Agawam in Massachusetts? Can Daniels even list all of the candidates that various Green parties have fielded? Has Daniels actually paid attention to these many campaigns, or has he merely read the newspapers?

"The Greens, the [Sacramento] *Bee* made clear, are well pleased to have Camejo as their candidate."

Well, if the *Bee* made this clear, then it must be true.

"In other words, he has no principled opposition to an imperialist and colonialist occupation of Iraq, so long as it carries the window dressing of UN sanction."

Camejo's position on this issue remains incongruent with the position staked out by the GPUS. I suppose in Mr. Daniel's efforts to tar the

GPUS, that inconvenient fact merits no mention.

"The Green Party platform"

Camejo's election platform is neither the GPUS platform nor the various state party platforms, documents I doubt Mr. Daniels has ever studied.

"Camejo and the Greens propose no measures to seriously address the socially destructive and irrational workings of the profit system that underlie the crisis."

Mr. Daniels should stop pretending that Camejo's platform is the GPUS platform or any state party's platform, and try looking at these party platforms for once before declaring he knows what we propose or stand for.

"The opportunist hide-and-seek of the Green Party on this critical question underscores the party's lack of internal cohesion and its unprincipled and unserious attitude toward political questions."

Mr. Daniels confuses genuine disagreement within a party that has a wide and diverse constituency with opportunism, and it would appear that he has no comprehension of decentralization as a Green Key Value.

"Nader performed an important political service for the forces that successfully defied the popular vote and installed the most reactionary administration in modern American history."

What this sad old song reveals about Mr. Daniels is his failure to truly have embraced historical materialism. He constantly makes the claim that the Greens have a pattern of voting blocs with Republicans as if an imperialist who smiles more often than a competing imperialist somehow commits fewer crimes.

"The party is defined by its reformist perspective, which is rooted in and reflects the outlook of dissident elements within the middle classes. It can, in the end, play only a reactionary role, serving as a political lightning rod to divert social discontent along channels that are harmless to the essential interests of the ruling elite, while helping to keep the working class politically subordinated to the parties and politicians of big business."

Within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, at least, this party has been firmly committed to the task of expanding this electorate far beyond the privileged and intends to drive a wedge between the working class and those "parties and politicians of big business" regarding whom Mr. Daniels now suddenly sees no difference despite excoriating us for having acted on exactly that same basis.

"The Greens in the US aspire to follow the example of the Greens in Germany, who unceremoniously abandoned what were supposedly their founding principles—such as anti-militarism and opposition to nuclear power—to win and retain posts in the capitalist government."

The Greens have resolutely condemned the German Greens apology for neo-colonialism and militarism, as Mr. Daniels surely well understands. Mr. Daniels now stands betrayed as a liar.

Rest assured, I shall be looking forward to Mr. Daniels' next piece as I can't wait to find out if he might actually learn something in the future regarding journalistic ethics, factual research and simple honesty.

Don't expect me to hold my breath.

Sincerely yours,

Owen R. Broadhurst

Town of Agawam Green-Rainbow Party

Dear Mr. Daniels,

Your article about Peter Camejo and the Green Party was posted to a Green web site.

Your article is wrong and stupid.

One of my colleagues, Owen Broadhurst, appears to have written you a fine letter, carefully going through the mistakes and presumptions in your logic.

I fear I do not have the eloquence for that.

Though, I have to say, you are really dumb if you continue to fall for the line that Nader gave Bush the presidency.

It is difficult for me to imagine that any thinking person could honestly believe the lie that Nader gave Bush the election. Propagating that lie is the real crime of supporting the ruling elite.

By propagating that lie, you are frightening any third parties from ever running. By repeating that lie, you are confusing the electorate into fearing their own power and their own right to vote their conscience.

I think that someone who is able to publish something at the level you have couldn't possibly need this explanation, but here goes:

1. It is obvious that the turning point of the vote was Florida.

a. The Bushes were going to win Florida NO MATTER WHAT. Do you get that? It did not take a spoiler. It was a done deal, separate of the participation of Nader's campaign. You see, Bush really didn't win Florida. Understand? So, it could not be Nader's fault he won. It was not won. It was stolen. Would have been no matter what.

b. I believe that it was Michael Moore who pointed it out, but some woman named Monica Moorhead was running in Florida on some kind of socialist line. So, it was the socialists—as much as or more than Nader—who gave Bush the win.

2. I know the Greens. They are not people who would have voted for Gore more than Nader. In New York, where I am from, in the last Governor's race I did day-before-election phone calls. Many of our enrolled Greens were voting for the Right-Wing-Fascist-Businessman Tom Golisano of the Independence Party. The Green Party is not a Democrat-vote-stealer. It is not in competition with Leftists, maybe not even progressives. The Green VOTE (not the party or its platform or leadership necessarily) represents people who are just FED UP, Republicans who are ANGRY that their party is not Conservative enough, Republicans who like TREES and haven't read our platform, centrists, and leftists, and some anarchist kids who wouldn't have voted if it wasn't cool to have a protest party. It is a DAMNED LIE to pretend that Greens draw votes from Democrats.

(And, why do YOU want to continue that lie? What is in it for you?????)

3. There is a principle called ARROW's Theorem. It suggests that a third candidate on the ballot becomes a complex equation, because it gives people another place to put their "against candidate A" vote, instead of putting it towards "candidate B". It suggests that people that HATED GORE that might have VOTED FOR BUSH voted for Nader instead, taking away BUSH VOTES.

4. What are you a fascist? You would deny people the right to vote for the candidate of their choice? Would you deny me the right to run for office if I believed in my heart I am the person to save our country?

People have to subordinate their will and power to YOUR IMAGINED PARADIGM AND STRATEGIES.

Your article was dumb.

Worse, your article was oppressive. It is oppressing people into believing their only choice is to be oppressed by the Democrats or oppressed by the Republicans.

You might want to do some research on where the Green vote comes from. It will help give future articles a ring of truth, instead of the same old Democrat propaganda routine.

Kimberly Wilder

Reply by Peter Daniels:

Both of the above-posted letters accuse the *World Socialist Web Site* of lying about the Green Party of the US. The first letter, from Mr. Broadhurst, begins by calling my article of September 30 a libel. The second correspondent, Ms. Wilder, not only accuses me of lying, but winds up suggesting that the WSWS is fascist.

These are strong words. The authors of these letters are evidently current or past Green Party candidates. It is therefore fair to assume that they are politically active within the party and occupy positions of some authority. Their charges of lies and falsifications in relation to the Greens and their California gubernatorial candidate Peter Camejo need to be examined and answered.

Neither letter deals concretely with any of the facts raised in my article concerning the campaign of Camejo and the California Greens in the recent recall election. The letter writers make no attempt to refute the accuracy of my statements about Camejo and other leaders of the Green Party in California, or any other facts about Camejo's gubernatorial campaign reported over the course of several weeks by the WSWS. Nor do they attempt to refute the specific political characterizations we made on the basis of these facts.

Instead, Broadhurst accuses me of "libel" because I took what is, for him, the impermissible step of associating the Greens nationally with the statements and actions of Camejo and the Green Party of California. This is a novel argument. It is also entirely unprincipled.

If the national party cannot be held responsible for the campaign waged by its affiliate in California, and no spokesperson or candidate of the Green Party in any part of the country is bound by the program and policies of the national party, then in what sense are the Greens a party? Why, moreover, should anyone place the slightest trust or confidence in anything a representative of the party says?

Why, moreover, should not the same standards be applied to those parties to which the Greens are nominally opposed? Why hold the Democrats responsible for the policies and record of Clinton—or the Republicans, for that matter, for the presidency of George W. Bush? If no party can be held accountable for the policies of its representatives, and the representatives are not bound by the policies of the national party, then why not simply pick and choose between "good" Democrats and Republicans and "bad" ones? What is the point of even having an alternative party?

In this connection, Broadhurst makes the following revealing riposte: "Camejo can no more be representative of the whole entire party than Jerry Brown could of the Democrats." If this sentence has any meaning, it is that, in Broadhurst's eyes, Jerry Brown, the Democratic ex-governor of California and the current mayor of Oakland, is so progressive and left-wing that he could not possibly be considered representative of the Democratic Party as a whole. Such a view of Brown only exposes the hopeless illusions in sections of the Democratic Party that underlie much of the Green Party's political activities.

In arguing that any attempt to associate the Green Party of the US with the statements and political orientation of the Green Party gubernatorial campaign in California constitutes "libel," Broadhurst complains that I and the WSWS are ignoring other electoral campaigns of Green candidates around the country, including his own campaign for City Council in Agawam, Massachusetts.

It is ludicrous to argue that the Camejo campaign for governor of

California is no more politically significant than any number of local Green campaigns. Not only is California the largest state in the country, the home to nearly one in eight residents of the US, but the recall election was the focus of national attention for virtually the entire summer, and rightly so.

The election ended up producing the first-ever recall of a California governor, and only the second recall of a governor in US history. Politicians, newspapers, commentators and ordinary people in the millions recognized in this election a political event of great national significance. Indeed, the California events were followed closely by the international press, and were considered, again rightly, to be of international importance. There is no campaign, with the possible exception of the presidential race of Ralph Nader in 2000, in which the Greens have had a wider audience.

Was all the attention focused on California mistaken? A huge misunderstanding? Should the millions who followed the recall campaign have been paying equal attention to Broadhurst's campaign for City Council in Agawam, Massachusetts, or that of "Lorna Salzman, Jill Stein, James O'Keefe, Chuck Turner, Stan Aronowitz, Joel Kovel and each and every candidate that the Green Party has fielded"?

Among those who do not think so are—the Green Party of the United States. Anyone who looks at the web site of the US Greens will find a banner headline boasting of the national significance of the Camejo campaign. Under the headline one will find a link to a press release issued by the US Green Party. This press release echoes the praises heaped on Camejo and his campaign by the Green Party of California, which I cited in my article and which Broadhurst simply ignores.

The US Green Party, along with its leading spokespersons in California, proudly asserts that Camejo has given the Greens political respectability and enhanced the party's chances to be included in televised debates during the 2004 presidential election. In other words, the Greens as a whole embrace the very same unprincipled politics of expediency and opportunism that I documented in my article on Camejo's campaign.

That the national party considered Camejo's campaign to be of exceptional importance is underscored by another fact conveniently overlooked by Broadhurst. Nader made a trip to California to personally endorse Camejo's candidacy. Unless I am mistaken, the party's 2000 presidential candidate made no such appearance to endorse Broadhurst's campaign in Agawam or that of Lorna Salzman, Jill Stein, et al.

Does Broadhurst read the web site of the US Green Party—or will he contend that the party web site represents only the views of the individuals who compose its articles?

Or is he trying to pull the wool over the eyes of people, including Green Party members and supporters, who were disturbed by Camejo's crass opportunism and pandering to his Democratic and Republican opponents? Is he resorting to name-calling to confuse and divert people in and around the Green Party who have read the WSWS's analysis of the Camejo campaign and found it to be factually correct and politically incisive?

For the record, let me briefly review the major facts that I cited about Camejo's campaign, which in turn formed the basis for the political assessment that the campaign represented a further turn to the right by the Green Party.

Camejo was silent on his past socialist affiliations, including his years of membership in the Socialist Workers Party and his candidacy for president on the SWP ticket in 1976. This silence was echoed by his Democratic and Republican rivals and the mass media. Far from being red-baited for his past identification with socialism, Camejo was given the stamp of approval and included in all of the candidates' debates televised across the state.

He received generally favorable coverage in the media. The *Sacramento Bee* article that was cited in my September 30 article specifically praised the Green Party candidate as a successful financial adviser and political

moderate. This feature article in one of the state's leading bourgeois newspapers approvingly quoted the California Greens' spokeswoman Beth Moore Haines, who gushed, "Green types often have an allergy to money. Greens first need to know how to get it and then use it well to promote the ideas that are important to them. And Peter has been an ambassador for that kind of thinking."

Candidate Camejo gave full and enthusiastic support to the right-wing Republican-financed recall drive. Neither Broadhurst nor Wilder attempt to refute this undeniable fact. Nor do they answer our political characterization of this policy as a bloc with the extreme right and a display of indifference and contempt for democratic rights.

At the same time, Camejo conciliated with Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante, the leading Democratic replacement candidate in the recall election. Not only did he cite, in his own platform, his points of agreement with the platform of Bustamante, but in the final days of the campaign he tacitly endorsed a vote for Bustamante, declaring that he would "understand" if Green supporters voted for the Democrat in order to keep Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Republicans out of the state house.

Camejo maintained an almost total silence on the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Given his prominence in the campaign and on a national stage, this bit of cowardice constituted a blow against the Iraqi people and the hundreds of millions around the world who are either deeply troubled or outraged by the imperialist and colonialist policies of the US government.

Camejo's silence on Iraq was part of a more general silence on the Bush administration. In the midst of a deepening crisis for the Bush White House, even as Bush's poll numbers were plummeting and the deaths and casualties in Iraq were mounting, Camejo chose to present the crisis in California as an essentially local affair, and let the conspirators in Washington off the hook. He rarely mentioned Enron's role in the energy crisis of 2000-2001, which had such a devastating impact in California, thereby shielding Bush, the main recipient of financial and political patronage from disgraced former Enron CEO Kenneth Lay.

Can any thinking person seriously doubt the existence of a link between Camejo's silence on Iraq and the Bush administration and the media's generally indulgent treatment of his campaign and its willingness to include him in the debates?

Camejo's platform eschewed the slightest hint of any radical, let alone socialist, policies. As we reported, he made no call for public ownership of the giant energy corporations, or of anything else. His calls for "fiscal responsibility" constituted a clear signal to the corporate and political establishment that he was a man they could trust. Camejo echoed the efforts of the Republican right to place the entire blame for the state fiscal crisis on the incumbent Democratic governor, Gray Davis, going so far as to demand an audit of state finances only for the years of Davis's tenure, a demand that was adopted by Schwarzenegger.

As we pointed out, there is a direct line of continuity between Camejo's right-wing position on the California recall and the role of Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader in 2000. Nader stated during that campaign that he supported the Republican-led impeachment of Clinton and would have voted to convict and remove Clinton from office if he had had a vote in the 1999 Senate trial of the president.

He underscored his readiness to give aid and comfort to the antidemocratic conspiracies of the Republican right by remaining silent throughout the five-week election crisis in Florida in November and December of 2000. During the entire period of Republican efforts, through a combination of court action and mob threats, to block the counting of votes in that pivotal state, Nader said nothing.

As I pointed out in my September 30 article, had Nader, who obtained 97,000 votes in Florida, spoken out against the Republican drive to steal the election, his voice "would have carried considerable weight with the public and complicated matters for the Bush campaign." Instead, "Nader

performed an important political service for the forces that successfully defied the popular vote and installed the most reactionary administration in modern American history.”

My article went on to discuss the political connection between Camejo’s political history and his current role as standard bearer for the Greens. Camejo joined the Socialist Workers Party when it was breaking from Trotskyism in the early 1960s, and he enthusiastically embraced the SWP’s turn to the right—its support for Castroism, black nationalism, feminism and other forms of identity politics, student power and middle class protest. This prepared him for his current role.

Camejo and the Greens, as I explained, are preparing to follow the example of the US Greens’ sister party in Germany, which quickly discarded its supposed founding principles, including antimilitarism and opposition to nuclear power, in order to take up its coalition posts alongside the German Social Democrats, as part of a government representing German imperialism.

My allusion to the German Greens’ role is the only fact that Broadhurst acknowledges in his letter, but he does so by claiming, “The Greens have resolutely condemned the German Greens [sic] apology for neo-colonialism and militarism.”

We are entitled to ask whether the US Green Party has broken off relations with the German Greens. Has it called on members of the German Greens to resign in protest and build a new party? Has it called for the defeat of the German Green Party in elections? Evidently not. The US Greens, notwithstanding their “resolute condemnation,” are apparently content to coexist with apologists for neo-colonialism and militarism.

Given this devastating balance sheet of the Camejo campaign, it is not surprising that neither Broadhurst nor Wilder cares to get too close to the facts presented in the WSWS analysis.

Wilder’s rather hysterical and at times incoherent letter is built around a real lie: the allegation that the WSWS attacked Nader and the Green Party for running in the 2000 presidential election and taking votes away from Gore and the Democrats. In an attempt to fob this red herring onto the public, she misrepresents our denunciation of Nader’s silence on the Republican dirty tricks campaign in Florida as an attack on Nader’s right to run for president.

Unfortunately for Wilder, the record of the WSWS on this issue could not be clearer.

On July 3, 2000, we posted an article entitled “Why the *New York Times* wants Green Party candidate Ralph Nader out of the presidential campaign.” We wrote: “It apparently does not occur to the *Times*’ editors that political organizations outside the two traditional parties of American capitalism should, as a matter of democratic principle, have the fullest opportunity to present their views to the public, or that the people should have the right to hear them.”

We continued: “Readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* will know that we do not endorse the politics of Nader or the Green Party, let alone the extreme-right-wing chauvinism of Buchanan. But the support which both of these third party candidates have received is at least in part a reflection of rising popular hostility to the political monopoly of the two big business parties.”

This position was reiterated in another article, “*New York Times* calls for exclusion of Green candidate Ralph Nader from presidential debates,” on September 4, 2000. On October 5 we featured an article entitled, “US Green Party candidate Ralph Nader barred from site of presidential debate,” an action we denounced. We said: “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.”

The Socialist Equality Party’s political opposition to Nader had nothing to do with his right to run for president, but was based on the nature of his

campaign, which did not present a principled alternative to the Democrats and Republicans.

In point of fact, our defense of Nader’s right to run in the 2000 presidential election was far more principled than the argument presented by Wilder in her letter to the WSWS. Her “defense” of the Green presidential campaign boils down to the assertion—ludicrous on its face—that Nader did not take votes from the Democratic candidate. This claim exposes the fiction that the Green Party is genuinely, in a political sense, independent of the Democratic Party. It is, in fact, so much in thrall of the major bourgeois parties that its spokespersons defend its right to run candidates on the grounds that by doing so it will not politically harm its supposed opponents!

There is one section of Wilder’s letter that amounts to a self-indictment. In arguing that Green candidates do not take votes from the Democrats, she declares that in the last New York gubernatorial election “many of our enrolled Greens were voting for the Right-Wing-Fascist Businessman Tom Golisano of the Independence Party.” She does not speak of this as a scandal, or even an embarrassment. Rather, it is a matter of some pride, and provides her with a counter-argument to those who denounce Nader for taking votes away from Gore.

As she explains: “The Green Party is not a Democrat-vote-stealer. It is not in competition with Leftists, maybe not even progressives. The Green VOTE (not the party or its platform or leadership necessarily) represents people who are just FED UP, Republicans who are ANGRY that their party is not Conservative enough, Republicans who like TREES and haven’t read our platform, centrists, and leftists, and some anarchist kids who wouldn’t have voted if it wasn’t cool to have a protest party. It is a DAMNED LIE to pretend that Greens draw votes from Democrats.”

Here the deliberate strategy of the Green Party is summed up in a crude nutshell. Leaving aside for the moment the “fascist” label somewhat loosely attached to Golisano’s right-wing campaign, the meaning is clear. The Greens seek to appeal to confused and disoriented elements from the extreme right, as well as the left.

Wilder’s outburst casts further light on the Green Party’s record of blocking with the Republican right by covering up or sanctioning its use of conspiratorial and antidemocratic methods. The record of both Nader and Camejo in this regard is not some accident or aberration. As we have pointed out, this in no way prevents the Greens from simultaneously adapting themselves to elements within the Democratic Party.

To sum up, these two letters serve to confirm and underscore the basic analysis of the Green Party made in my article. There are, of course, many people sincerely looking for a progressive or even a socialist alternative to the Democrats and Republicans who have either joined the Green Party or voted for its candidates. This, however, does not alter the political and social character of this political formation. On the contrary, it makes it even more important that its true character be exposed and explained.

The unprincipled character of the Greens, their incapacity to present a clear position on any fundamental political question, from the California recall to the war on Iraq, is characteristic of middle-class layers seeking to maneuver between the capitalist ruling elite and the working class. The Greens are a party of reformist protest that seeks to pressure the corporate establishment and its two major parties. Their strategy and tactics are dictated by the effort to join the political establishment in order to “influence” it.

The Green Party of the US is moving to the right. This assessment has aroused the ire of our two correspondents, but they cannot refute it. On the contrary, their letters confirm that the Greens are being driven by powerful class forces to a position even to the right of their counterparts in Germany and other parts of Europe. In the center of world imperialism, the evolution of the Greens is likely to assume even more grotesque and reactionary forms than what has thus far been seen from this political tendency in other parts of the world.



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