An exchange of letters on the Green Party

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The following is a letter received from Tim Tacker, communications director for Rich Whitney, the Green Party candidate for Illinois governor, regarding the October 11 WSWS article, "SEP candidate Joe Parnarauskis addresses University of Illinois forum"*, and a reply by the article's author, Kate Randall.*

This article is misleading. Specifically:

You state, "Abram, along with other Green Party candidates at the local, state and national level, calls for minor reforms to capitalism, while maintaining that the profit system should remain intact."

Greens advocate an alternative to both corporate capitalism and state socialism called Community-Based Economics. CBE focuses more on how responsive enterprises are to be to their communities, rather than who owns them, and as a result Greens advocate a greater role for public enterprise and massive expansion of alternative economic structures, such as worker-owned cooperatives. In fact, Rich Whitney, the Green Party's candidate for Illinois governor, wants to give Illinois workers a "first right of refusal" when the factory tries to leave the state, allowing the workers to buy the enterprise and run it as a workers cooperative, with the state providing the financing allowing them to do so. Because CBE doesn't address ownership, some Greens are Socialist and some are Capitalist. CBE doesn't equal capitalism.

You state, "As the Greens make explicitly clear in their program, 'corporations have become the dominant economic institution of the planet,' and they need merely to be made more socially and environmentally responsible."

No. Greens feel that people need to reassert control over corporations and their own government, calling for things like more workplace democracy and decentralization of wealth and power. Greens oppose the idea of "corporate personhood" where artificial legal entities have the power to claim inalienable rights.

You state, "On the question of war, the Green Party candidate for Illinois Governor, Rich Whitney, who did not attend Monday's forum, pledges to 'veto any further mobilization of the Illinois National Guard for purposes of serving in Iraq,' but does not advocate the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq."

Rich already advocates the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, but as governor, the only thing that he has the official authority to do is veto further mobilization of the Illinois National Guard for what he considers to be an "illegal and immoral invasion and occupation." Nonviolence is a Key Value of the GP.

I look forward to reading your future articles, and I hope that you will seek to correct these misconceptions. Accuracy is one way that you can encourage Greens, and others, to read and learn about your viewpoints, and I hope that you will consider that.

Tim Tacker

11 October 2006

Dear Mr. Tacker,

Thank you for your comments. You counter our characterization of the Greens' policy of calling for minor reforms to capitalism and maintaining the profit system intact by raising the Greens' advocacy of "Community-Based Economics," which focus "more on how responsive enterprises are to be to their communities, rather than who owns them." The fact, however, is that under the existing economic system the enterprises to which you refer are capitalist enterprises.

"Community-Based Economics" poses no challenge to the capitalist ownership of the means of production. Your assertion that the Greens focus on these enterprises being more responsive to their communities, and advocate "a greater role for public enterprise and massive expansion of alternative economic structures"—outside of challenging private, capitalist ownership—confirms the assertion in my article that you do not advance a socialist alternative to capitalism.

You state that because "Community-Based Economics" "doesn't address ownership," this means that "CBE doesn't equal capitalism." The opposite is true. Since the capitalist status quo is based on private ownership of the means of production, your evasion of this question is a tacit acceptance of capitalist property relations.

You cannot have it both ways, but you seek to do just that when you state that "some Greens are Socialist and some are Capitalist." That may be so, but what is decisive is the program that your party advances, and that program is in no sense socialist.

The Green Party is, of course, free to put forward a liberal reformist program based on the premise that the capitalist system can be significantly reformed in a progressive direction. The Socialist Equality Party rejects such a perspective as entirely unviable, and argues against it because it serves as a diversion from the political tasks confronting working people in the struggle against war, repression, exploitation and social inequality.

But it is unprincipled for you to seek to obscure the fact that your program is for the reform of capitalism, rather than its overthrow.

The example you present in your defense, the advocacy of worker-owned cooperatives, has a bitter history in recent decades in the United States. Many examples can be cited, perhaps the most illustrative being the experience of the workers' buyout—or employee stock ownership program (ESOP)—at United Airlines. In the decade-plus since the enactment of the ESOP at United, the workers have been forced to take one cut in wages and benefits after another, and tens of thousands of workers have lost their jobs.

It is not possible within the framework of this reply to go into great detail on modern political economy, but certain points can be made. In the present era of capitalist globalization and transnational production, the community-based economy advocated by the Greens is utterly unrealistic. Were it somehow come to pass, however, it would actually represent a huge regression. It would entail a massive rollback in the level of productive methods and technology and an incalculable reduction in the living standards of hundreds of millions of people around the world.

World economy, as opposed to national or local economy, is an

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objective fact, and is in itself entirely progressive. It is the product of revolutionary developments in science and technology that have vastly expanded man's capacities to develop his productive forces and therefore, potentially, raise his living standards and cultural level.

The problem is not globalization as such, but the continued confinement of world economy within the outmoded, reactionary and destructive framework of capitalist private ownership of the means of production and the system of rival nation states to which capitalism is historically wedded. This framework conflicts at every point with the rational, humane and progressive development of the world's productive forces, producing such evils as war, poverty, social inequality and political repression.

The productive forces are global and must be rationally and democratically harnessed and developed on an international scale. This objective necessity finds its conscious political expression in the program of the Socialist Equality Party, which is based on socialist internationalism—i.e., the struggle to unite the working class internationally in the fight for working class political power and the establishment of a socialist economy.

The notion of some kind of local control and autonomy of economic forces within the existing capitalist framework is an unrealizable utopia, and a reactionary one at that.

You speak of local control over economic life without addressing the existing property relations and social and economic realities of modern capitalism. This ignores the fact that economic decisions affecting workers in one part of the globe are often made thousands of miles away.

Whether a worker in Illinois will have a job, or a factory will be built or shut down, might be decided in Tokyo, or Berlin, or in the headquarters of another transnational corporation. The vital issue is this: what social force will control such decisions? Democratic control is inseparable from the question of which social class wields political and economic power—the capitalist elite or the working class, that is, the vast majority of the people.

Your notion of "community control" is an illusory, idealized version of a long-gone and irretrievable past. It evades the critical question of social classes and the objective and irreconcilable conflict of interests between the two main classes: the capitalist ruling class and the working class. This, in turn, provides the basis for a political perspective based on pressuring the ruling elite and its two major parties, especially the Democratic Party, for reforms, as opposed to the necessary struggle to establish the political independence of the working class from the two-party system and all of the political representatives of the capitalist elite.

You say that the Greens feel people "need to reassert control over corporations and their own government, calling for things like more workplace democracy and decentralization of wealth and power."

Again, it is impossible to achieve such aims outside of the working class challenging the private ownership of the means of production. Democratic control over the economy cannot be discussed outside of addressing the property relations that presently exist.

Today, the major levers of economic life are controlled by a definite class of capitalists (big investors and shareholders, banks, CEOs) who, by virtue of their ownership of the means of production, wield dictatorial powers over the mass of working people. A tiny layer of the population makes all critical decisions on production, employment, marketing, etc., including whether a factory or business continues to operate or is closed down. The reality under capitalism is that workers have no say over the major decisions that affect their lives. To suggest that this can be seriously altered while leaving unchallenged the ownership of these economic forces is absurd.

The Socialist Equality Party tells workers and young people that we aim for the political overthrow of the capitalist system on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program. We say that the struggle for workplace democracy and the defense of democratic rights must be consciously directed against the profit system—not channeled into reformist demands that build up illusions in it. We reject any perspective based on pressuring the two-party system, particularly the Democratic Party, and fight instead for the political independence of the working class.

The working class internationally has gone through many experiences with parties—some of which called themselves socialist—that, while advancing certain demands for the reform of capitalism, stopped short of advancing the independent political interests of the working class. Whether in the case of bourgeois nationalist movements or parties dominated by Stalinist or social reformist politics, the results have been tragic.

Finally, you state that Green Party candidate for Illinois governor, Rich Whitney, advocates "the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and Iraq; but as governor, the only thing that he has the official authority to do is veto further mobilization of the Illinois National Guard."

Nowhere on Whitney's campaign web site can the demand for an immediate withdrawal of US troops be found. An election campaign conducted in the midst of the colonial occupation of Iraq has a responsibility to articulate a clear political attitude toward this war of aggression, not one limited to whatever official powers one might have upon assuming office.

In his campaign as the SEP's candidate for state Senate in Illinois' 52nd district, Joe Parnarauskis has come under criticism for calling for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US troops on the grounds that the war is not a "local issue"—as though the conditions facing working people and youth in Illinois were not directly and destructively affected by the massive squandering of human life and resources in this criminal war! We reject such a parochial and unprincipled view, and see every election race in which we participate as an opportunity to engage in a discourse on these critical issues and advance our independent socialist program.

Kate Randall for the WSWS

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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