

Ralph Nader announces 2008 presidential campaign

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Consumer advocate and three-time presidential candidate Ralph Nader announced Sunday that he would run as an independent candidate in the 2008 presidential election against the Democrats and Republicans. He made it clear, in the course of a 15-minute interview on the NBC News program “Meet the Press,” that the purpose of his campaign was to pressure the eventual Democratic Party nominee to adopt a more liberal stance.

Nader’s three previous campaigns have involved three separate electoral vehicles. In 1996, he ran as an independent; in 2000, he was the Green Party candidate; and in 2004 he accepted the nomination of the rump of the Reform Party, the organization established by Ross Perot in 1996, which backed ultra-rightist Pat Buchanan in 2000. This year it appears that Nader and his supporters will seek independent status rather than seeking the nomination of the Greens, who are expected to name former Democratic congresswoman Cynthia McKinney as their candidate.

In his “Meet the Press” interview, Nader outlined his criticism of both parties as dominated by corporate interests and cited the growing disaffection with the two-party system as a whole, reflected in polls showing that as many as 80 percent of voters would consider a choice outside the existing political structure.

He cited a number of issues for his campaign, including the war in Iraq, the response of the Bush administration to Hurricane Katrina, the Bush tax cuts and the crisis in access to health care, as well as the impact of globalization on the living standards of American workers. He criticized Democratic front-runner Barack Obama for abandoning a “pro-Palestinian” position he had held in Illinois state politics in favor of uncritical support for Israeli oppression of the Palestinians now that he is a

presidential candidate.

Nader rejected the claims of Democratic Party officials—parroted by his interviewer Tim Russert of NBC—that his candidacy in 2000 cost Democratic candidate Al Gore the presidency and made him responsible for the policies enacted by the Bush administration over the last seven years. “Not George Bush?” he replied. “Not the Democrats in Congress?”

“Every third party in Florida,” he said, “got more votes than the 537 vote gap.” He said the US should have a “multiple choice, multiple party democracy” as in Western Europe and Canada. “These are the two parties who’ve spoiled our electoral system...they can’t even count the votes, they steal—the Republicans steal the votes, and the Democrats knock third party candidates off the ballot.”

Nader has every right to run for president and seek ballot status in every state, against what will undoubtedly be another ferocious effort by the Democratic Party machine to keep him off the ballot.

That being said, Nader in no sense represents a genuine alternative to the two big business parties, or to capitalist politics as a whole. The *World Socialist Web Site* opposes Nader not because he chooses to run in the elections, but because of the program and perspective he advances. He is not a socialist or a representative of the working class, but a middle-class reformer who, as he explained in the course of his interview, feels shut out of the political system by the swing to the right by the Democrats and Republicans over the past three decades.

Nader spelled this out in answering the final question from Russert, about how his career as a consumer advocate had led him into electoral politics. He explained that in the 1960s and 1970s, the doors were open to him in Washington, and he could get a hearing

from government officials and congressmen for policies of liberal reform, particularly related to regulating the abuses of big corporations.

Richard Nixon, said Nader, “was the last president to really fear liberals enough to change his position, signed OSHA, signed EPA, had a health plan that he didn’t really believe in, had a minimum income plan to abolish poverty, and then it started. Around 1979, the doors started closing on the citizen groups.”

After 12 years of Republican rule, Nader expected the doors to reopen after the election of Clinton and Gore in 1992, but found that the same corporate interests were entirely dominant in Washington. His discontent with the lack of access under the Clinton administration led him to launch his first presidential campaign in 1996.

In all his campaigns since, Nader has focused on pressuring the Democrats to return to some form of liberalism, not on the creation of an alternative to the entire corporate-dominated political structure.

He acknowledged this goal explicitly in the course of his interview, in which he said that his goal was “to try to open the doorways, to try to get better ballot access, to respect dissent in America in terms of third parties and independent candidates, to recognize historically that great issues have come in our history against slavery and women’s right to vote... through little parties that never won any national election.”

Nader did not discuss, nor was he asked, about his backing for former Senator John Edwards in his failed campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. Nader hailed Edwards’s anti-corporate demagoguery in several media appearances during the run-up to the Iowa caucuses, held January 3, and issued a statement on the eve of the caucuses calling on Iowa Democrats to “recognize” Edwards by “giving him a victory.”

The statement centered on attacking Hillary Clinton as a “corporate Democrat,” as though Edwards, a multi-millionaire trial lawyer who compiled a right-wing record during his six years in the Senate, was not equally a representative and defender of the profit system.

In his “Meet the Press” interview, Nader’s illusions in the Democratic Party were expressed most openly when he declared that it was impossible for Republican John McCain to win the 2008 election. “You think the American people are going to vote for a pro-war John

McCain who almost gives an indication that he’s the candidate of perpetual war, perpetual intervention overseas?” he asked, in response to a suggestion by Russert that his campaign might deprive Obama of the chance to become the first black president.

This assertion flows directly from Nader’s superficial and subjective approach to politics, based on rejection of a class analysis. The outcome of the 2008 presidential election will not, in the final analysis, be decided by the free will of the American people. It will be the outcome of a raging struggle within the ruling elite, driven by the debacle of the Bush administration’s foreign policy and the danger of a financial collapse that would have incalculable consequences for social stability at home.

A McCain victory is certainly a possibility, favored by powerful sections of the ruling elite that feel that a new Democratic administration, with a sizeable Democratic majority in Congress, would arouse popular expectations in contradiction to the policies which both bourgeois parties are committed to pursuing.

The politics Nader advances in this election, as in previous ones, can only serve to obscure the underlying source of the policies of war and social reaction of the US political establishment and both of its parties—the acute crisis of American and world capitalism—and promote reformist illusions in the possibility of securing progressive change through third parties and nominally independent candidates who do not seek to mobilize working people independently in a struggle against the profit system.



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