

The International Socialist Organization embraces the Green Party's “left” capitalism

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On June 4, the Saturday before the California primary, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) hosted a public meeting in San Francisco for Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein. The introduction by Bay Area leaders of the ISO, and the speech given by Stein, highlighted their joint efforts to channel growing social anger back into support for the capitalist system.

Both the ISO and the Greens are responding to the shift to the left among youth and workers expressed in the support of millions for the presidential campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, a self-described “democratic socialist,” who has focused on issues of economic inequality and the domination of American politics by corporate wealth.

With the Sanders campaign winding down, and as Sanders moves to endorse the campaign of presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, many of the workers and youth who supported him will be looking for an alternative. The ISO and the Greens are working together to prevent the movement of these layers in the direction of independent working class politics and a genuine struggle for socialism.

Jill Stein's speech was neither an indictment of capitalism nor a call for socialism, despite the nominal “socialism” of the audience to which she was speaking. She presented foreign wars, budget cuts and the Wall Street bailout as simple policy errors that a Green president could correct without any change in the economic system.

Instead of bailing out the banks, Stein would pay them to forgive student loans; instead of tax cuts for corporations, she would provide subsidies for a “Green New Deal;” instead of wars for oil, she would make use of the US military only for “humanitarian” missions.

The policies outlined by Stein in her speech were only slightly more “left” than those of Sanders and well within the framework of capitalist politics. In any country but the

United States, her speech would not even have been considered particularly left-wing. She could easily have delivered her remarks as a German Green—a well-established right-wing, pro-war faction in German politics—or as a British or Australian Laborite.

For their part, the ISO speakers called for a “Red-Green alliance” between what they called the “socialist left” (i.e., themselves and similar groups like Socialist Alternative and Socialist Action) and the “independent left” (openly pro-capitalist groups like Stein and the Greens). The main ISO speaker criticized rival pseudo-left groups that actually participated in the Democratic Party primary campaign in support of Sanders, claiming that the only way to make the Democratic Party progressive was through an independent campaign outside of it.

The ISO has a relationship with the Green Party going back nearly two decades, to the 2000 presidential campaign of Ralph Nader, a nationalist and opponent of socialism. Todd Chretien, a leading ISO member, signed on as a full-time organizer for Nader in 2000, worked for him again as a California state-wide coordinator in 2004, and in 2006 ran for Senate on the Green Party ticket. Although the ISO promoted Nader's independent campaigns in 2004 and 2008, when he did not receive the Green Party nomination, they never quit their participation in the Green Party. With Jill Stein's 2012 campaign, they resumed formally endorsing the Green presidential ticket.

Like Sanders, the Green Party criticizes economic inequality without presenting any alternative to the capitalist economy which inevitably generates such inequality. While Sanders claims to be a “democratic socialist,” he does not call for public ownership and democratic control of economic life. Similarly, the Greens are an explicitly capitalist party and defend the private ownership of major banks and corporations.

The party's 2014 platform called for a "regulated market economy," stated that Greens defend "responsible stakeholder capitalism" and that they seek to limit fossil fuels by incentivizing the "free market." The single mention of the word "socialism" in their platform comes in order to disavow it. Rather than capitalism, they denounce "overconsumption" as the main evil, a program that if implemented would require a significant lowering of the living standards of the working class.

The Green program defines their perspective as a pressure group on the Democrats and Republicans. They write, "It has become increasingly clear that the 'bipartisan' political duopoly will drift further rightward at an increasing pace without a true opposition party as a counterweight."

In her presentation in San Francisco, Stein praised the ISO and said, quite accurately, that she "may use different ideological terms [from the ISO] but in terms of our agenda it's really identical." And what is this capitalist agenda that the ISO supports as progressive? The three main proposals outlined in Stein's speech, as noted above, were student loan forgiveness, opposition to some wars and a "Green New Deal" jobs program.

Stein proposes that the \$1.2 trillion of outstanding student debt be resolved by appointing a Green Party member to head the Federal Reserve and carry out "quantitative easing." A Green government would print roughly \$1.2 trillion and give it to the banks in exchange for the student loans. In short she would oversee an enormous transfer of wealth from the working class to the financial aristocracy.

On the question of war, Stein claims that imperialism is caused by the oil industry and the arms manufacturers, and that if corporate contributions were taken out of politics, US foreign interventions would end. "This is US foreign policy," she said "creating enemies so that we can sell lots of weapons and apply flamethrower [sic] all over the world." She proposed that instead of militarizing, the US, Russia and China should all agree to disarm and use the money currently going to war to make capitalism environmentally friendly.

This is a criminally light-minded approach to the danger of war. The threat of war comes from the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, between world economy and the nation-state system, and between private ownership and the social character of the productive process. American capitalism resorts increasingly to militarism to offset its global decline in relation to its many rivals.

Stein's call to redirect money from current wars to a

"Green New Deal" is pacifist rubbish that would politically disarm any youth and workers who might take it seriously. One might as well preach that the capitalist bosses should end exploitation, give all their wealth to the people, and put an end to all forms of oppression, simply out of the goodness of their hearts.

The phrase "Green New Deal" was actually popularized by Thomas Friedman in his 2008 book *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution*, long before Jill Stein first ran for president with that slogan in 2012. Friedman, a leading foreign affairs commentator for the *New York Times*, is notorious for his full-throated support for the invasion of Iraq.

In his book, Friedman described "green" as the new "red, white and blue." He explained in a 2008 interview with *Scientific American*: "Clean power is going to be a source of power generally in the world—every bit as much as tanks, planes and nuclear missiles have been during the cold war. The country that takes the lead in clean power and clean tech is going to be an economic and strategic leader in the 21st century."

Far from ending national rivalries, the "Green New Deal," is a proposal to lay a more secure foundation for American dominance. Stein adopted Friedman's program but claims the same nationalist methods will serve world peace instead of American imperialism.

The ISO's support for Stein is of a piece with their international politics, where they have endorsed one capitalist party after another, such as Syriza in Greece, which has enacted the country's worst austerity measures and brutalized refugees. The ISO represents a section of the affluent middle class that seeks well-paid academic, government and union positions through small adjustments among the richest 10 percent of society. In the current election they seek to channel those disillusioned in the Democrats behind another candidate who is no threat to the American ruling class.



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