

The Green Party platform: Reformist politics in the service of imperialism

Tom Hall
4 August 2016

The national convention of the Green Party of the United States opens today in Houston, Texas. Its main task will be to officially select Jill Stein as the party's candidate in the presidential election. The convention will also debate minor amendments to the party's current platform, which was adopted in 2014.

Many middle-class pseudo-left organizations that had promoted the Democratic primary campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, such as the International Socialist Organization and Socialist Alternative, are coalescing around Stein and the Greens. In the aftermath of Sanders' groveling embrace of Hillary Clinton, a right-wing symbol of the status quo who is despised for her corrupt relations with Wall Street and her support for US wars of aggression in the Middle East and American warmongering against Russia and China, these organizations are touting the Greens, a bourgeois party, as a genuine "left" alternative to the Democrats and Republicans.

In this manner they are seeking to lay yet another trap for workers and youth who are being radicalized and are looking for a way to oppose the militarism, brutality and inequality of capitalism. The promotion of Stein and the Greens is meant to preempt and block the emergence of an independent and socialist movement of the working class. The Greens are the next line of defense against a political break by the working class from capitalist politics.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in a previous article dealing with the introductory sections of the Green Party platform, the party is a pro-capitalist formation that rejects the class struggle and represents the social interests of well-off layers of the upper-middle class. Steeped in a narrow nationalist outlook, it aims for nothing more than to serve as an external pressure group on the existing capitalist parties, particularly the Democrats.

While certain elements of the platform will likely be amended over the weekend, the basic orientation expressed in the document will remain unchanged. At any rate, the amendments to be voted on at the convention are not based on any principled considerations. For the most part, they are verbal improvisations designed to better position the Greens to capture former Sanders supporters.

A further examination of the Greens' platform corroborates the analysis made in the previous WSWW article. The first major section of the platform, titled "Democracy," combines the promotion of reformism with support for American imperialism. The latter emerges in the form of qualifications to the party's supposed professed pacifism.

Reformism and a rejection of the class struggle

"Our nation was born as the first great experiment in modern democracy," the Greens write in the introduction to the section. "We seek

to rescue that heritage from the erosion of citizen participation."

They continue: "Moreover, we seek to dissolve the grip of the ideology...that government is intrinsically undesirable and destructive of liberty and that elected officials should 'starve the beast' by slashing all spending on social program [sic], in the name of freedom. We challenge that tactic by calling on all Americans to think deeply about the meaning of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. In a democracy, individuals come together to form structures of governance that protect and advance the common good. We the citizens are the government..."

There is not a hint of a class analysis here, or any suggestion that the pretensions of democracy under capitalism, even under the best of conditions, are illusory and compromised to the core by the underlying reality of the bourgeoisie's economic dictatorship, founded on its ownership of the means of production, and its ruthless exploitation of the working class based on these economic relations. The Marxist truth that the state is an instrument of repression of the dominant economic class—played out in the daily lives of workers and youth in the form of police violence and the crushing machinery of the so-called "justice system," with its vast prison complex—is rejected. Instead, one gets the pauper's brew of banalities and fictions typical of what passes today for liberalism.

The Greens can provide no explanation as to why the American political system has become so totally unresponsive to the needs and desires of the broad mass of the population. To the extent that they offer one, it is to suggest that this situation is the result of the apathy of the population itself and the supposed "fact" that the people are under the sway of conservative ideology. The argument that the growth of political reaction reflects defects within the masses themselves is common to all middle-class tendencies, which reject a class analysis of political developments.

The Greens' concern about the dysfunctional character of American democracy is motivated primarily by the fear that the increasingly naked criminality of the American political system is creating a crisis of legitimacy, undermining the authority of American capitalism, and fueling a revolutionary challenge from below. Thus they write: "We seek to heal the alienation and apathy that has been cultivated in the citizenry by the power brokers of the status quo. Righteous anger about the crippling of our democracy is rising in the land, *and the Greens offer constructive alternatives* [emphasis added]."

"In addition," they continue, "we seek to repair the plummeting opinion of the United States in the international community resulting from our arrogant, narcissistic foreign policy of recent years... The United States could well play a leadership role in [the community of nations] but only if we become committed to an eco-social vision of peace, national self-determination, and international cooperation."

Thus, they are concerned not with the criminal character of American imperialism itself, but with the negative impact of its "arrogance" on the international standing of the United States as a "world leader." The

Greens do not call for the arrest or prosecution of any of the current or former US officials responsible for American war crimes.

Instead of class struggle, the US Greens promote the reactionary utopia of class conciliation. One form of this is the Greens' promotion of "local" and "community" politics. The problem, they argue, is not the division of society into mutually antagonistic social classes, but the "centralization" of power on a national and international scale. Thus, they write that they are "committed to the strengthening of our civil society, including the many mediating institutions at the community level that have always characterized our democracy."

Subsection B, titled "Community," is devoted to the promotion of the illusion of social harmony within local communities. The Greens argue that at the local level, "old and young, *rich and poor*, and people of all races and beliefs can interact individually and learn to care for each other [emphasis added]."

The crisis of American democracy is far more advanced than the Greens, with their almost exclusive focus on electoral reform, let on. American capitalism is not merely "distorting" or "corrupting" democracy. It is increasingly imposing authoritarian forms of rule.

The outgoing administration of Barack Obama has become synonymous with illegal dragnet surveillance, the assertion of the "right" of the president to assassinate people, including American citizens, by means of drones, and the transformation of local police departments into a paramilitary force. The Green platform makes no mention anywhere of Obama's drone warfare. Nowhere does it defend whistleblowers Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, or WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who have been viciously persecuted for their revelations of criminal activities by the American government.

The undemocratic character of American politics is expressed in part by the monopolization of elections by the big-business Democratic and Republican parties, but the former is not reducible to the latter. In countries with looser ballot access laws and lower sums of money behind election campaigns, such as France, Germany and Greece, the experience has been fundamentally the same: massive attacks on the living standards of the working class are being forced through over broad popular opposition, and preparations are being made for dictatorship.

The *Citizens United* ruling undoubtedly marks a further stage in the putrefaction of American democracy and consolidation of a plutocracy, but the American state has always ruthlessly defended the interests of the US ruling class. Throughout the entire history of the country, American workers engaged in mass struggles have faced the full fury of the state, with the courts, the police and the military unleashed against them.

The state is not, as the Greens argue, a neutral arena that can be captured by the people through the election of new parties. The experience of the German Greens is instructive. With their entry into the federal government in 1998 in the "red-green coalition," the Greens took up responsibility for implementing the domestic and foreign policy of German capitalism at a time when it was shifting sharply to the right—initiating its abandonment of military restraint and converting the newly reunified German state into an instrument for slashing the wages and conditions of German workers and increasing their exploitation. The party that proclaimed "nonviolence" and "social justice" as two of the "four pillars" of its program presided over German participation in the war in the Balkans, the first foreign deployment of German troops since World War II, and the implementation of the deepest cuts in social spending in postwar German history.

Pro-war "pacifism"

The Green Party's foreign policy comprises only four-and-a-half pages of its 73-page platform, and is tacked on as a subheading in the first section. The Greens portray their foreign policy as antiwar and based on the principle of "nonviolence." They write, for example, "The US must recognize the sovereignty of nation-states and their right of self determination." They assert that the United States "does not have the right to justify pre-emptive invasion," and urge the dismantling of America's nuclear arsenal.

There is, however, no attempt to explain why the United States has spent the past quarter-century embroiled in constant warfare. In fact, this history is hardly acknowledged. The Greens avoid any mention of the actual foreign policies being pursued by the United States, including the anti-Chinese "pivot to Asia" and the NATO encirclement of Russia. There is no mention of any of the wars in the Middle East initiated under Obama, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan merit only perfunctory mention. Instead, the Green Party bases its program of "nonviolence" on moral appeals to American imperialism to abide by international law.

Its only concrete demand relating to "demilitarization" is for the United States' military budget to be cut in half. The annual budget of the US military is more than \$600 billion, not including funding for the various wars conducted by American imperialism. Cutting this budget by half would still leave the United States with by far the largest military budget in the world.

And, of course, it would leave the massive apparatus of violence, murder and subversion intact.

The platform includes caveats to the Greens' "pacifism" big enough to drive a truck through. For example, paragraph 1.d. under "Foreign Policy," which appears directly beneath a call for the US to recognize the sovereignty of nations, declares support for the UN-sanctioned invasion of a country in the name of opposing "genocidal acts or...persistent violation and denial of the human rights of an ethnic or religious group within its boundaries."

The following paragraph states, "The US is obliged to render military assistance or service under UN command to enforce UN Security Council resolutions." This amounts to an explicit endorsement of the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine that has served as the legal justification for a wide range of imperialist wars and occupations since the 1990s, including the war for regime change in Libya that killed more than 50,000 people and left the country in a state of blood-soaked chaos. Far from protecting "human rights," such wars have produced more than 65 million refugees worldwide, the highest number since the end of World War II.

The Greens' touching reverence for the United Nations—the modern incarnation of the League of Nations, which Lenin aptly called an imperialist "thieves' kitchen"—is, in and of itself, proof of their allegiance to American imperialism.

In one of the few places where a specific American foreign policy is mentioned, in the subsection on Iran, the Greens write: "We support negotiation with Iran for a peaceful resolution that reduces or eliminates sanctions...while continuing or strengthening inspections to ensure adherence to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons." In other words, the Greens endorse the policy of the Obama administration, which has used punishing sanctions and intrusive inspections of the country's nuclear facilities to bring to heel the bourgeois-clerical regime established by the 1979 revolution against the despotic US client regime of the Shah.

Leon Trotsky's scathing appraisal of middle-class pacifism applies in full to the US Greens: "In these few words we have the whole program of petty-bourgeois pacifism," he wrote. "'Everything that is in our power to prevent war' means to provide an outlet for the opposition of the masses in the shape of harmless manifestos, in which the government is given a guarantee that if war comes, no hindrance will be put in its way by the

pacifist opposition.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact