

Green Party convention: Left rhetoric in the service of pro-capitalist politics

Evan Blake
9 August 2016

On Saturday, at its convention in Houston, Texas, the Green Party of the United States officially nominated Dr. Jill Stein and Ajamu Baraka as its presidential and vice presidential candidates in the 2016 election. The event, held at the University of Houston from August 4-7, was streamed live over YouTube, drawing over 4,500 viewers at its peak. The convention also involved the passing of several amendments, with the most significant one falsely labeled “anti-capitalist.”

Stein’s 35-minute acceptance speech, in which she denounced the war policies of the government—albeit without mentioning the names of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton—was a rhetorical shift to the left by the Green Party. The Greens are attempting to win the support of radicalized workers and youth disillusioned by the abject capitulation of Bernie Sanders to Clinton, in order to divert them back into the safe channels of bourgeois politics.

The left rhetoric of Stein and the Greens does not correspond to the reformist and pro-capitalist character of the party’s origins, history and program. In reality, it is a nationalist, bourgeois political party, based on sections of the upper-middle class, which fully supports capitalism, opposes Marxism and is hostile to the political independence of the working class. Where Green Parties have achieved influence or come to power, notably in Germany, they have supported austerity measures against the working class at home and war abroad.

The nationalism of the Greens was in plain view to those watching online Saturday, as the American flag emblazoned the screen during breaks at the convention. Following the path laid by Sanders and Donald Trump, the Green Party promotes the scrapping of the Trans Pacific Partnership from a protectionist stance, with many delegates holding signs that read “No TPP!”

In their pragmatic maneuvers, the Greens have formed an alliance with various pseudo-left organizations such as Socialist Alternative, which formerly supported Sanders’ run within the Democratic Party, and the International Socialist Organization. At the Democratic National Convention, held in Philadelphia in late July, hundreds of Sanders delegates from the so-called “Bernie-or-Bust” faction left the convention, and many have gone on to support Stein and the Greens.

Roughly half of the 500 attendees at the Greens’ convention—the largest in the party’s history—registered in the aftermath of Sanders’ backing of Clinton. Speaking directly to this new layer of supporters, Stein said, “On the day that Bernie Sanders endorsed Hillary Clinton, the floodgates opened in our campaign for more volunteers, more ballot access drivers, more funding. We are a different campaign than we ever have been in history for having joined forces with you.”

Stein began her acceptance speech by demagogically shouting, “We are what democracy looks like! Let’s go all of us! We are what democracy looks like, and we are what political revolution looks like!”

In co-opting Sanders’ call for a “political revolution,” which he himself claims is now being carried forward by Clinton, the Greens are trying to have it both ways. They are simultaneously presenting themselves as an

alternative to Sanders and as the continuation of his campaign, as though his complete integration into the Democratic Party and self-abasement before Clinton and the Democratic establishment had nothing to do with the real content of his so-called “political revolution.”

This cynical and false perspective obscures the basic fact that Sanders’ “political revolution” was from the very outset, as the *World Socialist Web Site* warned, an attempt, initiated on behalf of and supported by sections of the bourgeoisie, to head off and derail a growing political radicalization of workers and youth. In adopting Sanders’ rhetoric, the Greens are in fact exposing themselves.

Stein’s phony anti-war rhetoric

Toward the end of her speech, Stein addressed the issues of foreign policy and war, declaring, “In this election, we are deciding whether we will have a world or not going forward into the future. The day of reckoning is coming closer and closer... On the count of climate [change], and on the count of nuclear weapons and this insane nuclear arms race that we are once again headlong plunging into, and on account of these endless and expanding wars that are blowing back at us all around the world, we cannot afford to sit this one out.”

The anti-war rhetoric of the Green campaign is largely a recent innovation, as Stein for the most part has remained silent on foreign policy during her campaign up to now. In contrast to Stein’s denunciations of war and even the threat of nuclear war, the Greens’ platform document, adopted in 2014, is mostly silent on these fundamental issues, which are not mentioned in the “Call to Action,” the “Preamble” or the “Ten Key Values” sections and do not merit a single sub-heading in the remaining 66 pages of the platform.

While in other parts of her speech Stein mentions “war crimes committed by Saudi Arabia in Yemen and war crimes and occupation committed by the Israeli government in Palestine,” she makes no specific references to the past quarter-century of endless war mounted by American imperialism throughout the Middle East and North Africa, instead ambiguously criticizing “these endless and expanding wars.”

Stein conspicuously omits the names of any leading politicians—including Obama, Clinton and Bush—who have overseen these wars, which have led to over one million deaths in Iraq alone, and hundreds of thousands more across Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other countries.

Her vague reference to “an insane nuclear arms race” obscures the central role played by the US, which is militarily encircling Russia and China and continuously escalating the threat of a nuclear third world war. Here, Stein also made no mention of the McCarthy-style attempt to brand Trump as an agent of Putin, and the anti-Russian hysteria being whipped

up by Clinton and the Democratic Party.

In a recent campaign statement, Stein calls for a “50 percent cut in the dangerously bloated military budget,” advanced as a supposedly anti-war position. If she is accepting the government’s vastly underestimated annual military budget figure of roughly \$500 billion, it would mean that Stein would evidently advocate instead a mere \$250 billion annual budget.

Perhaps the greatest exposure of Stein’s pro-war perspective is her unreserved support for Sanders, whom she invited last month to join the Green Party and take her position as its nominee. Over the course of his presidential campaign, Sanders repeatedly stressed his support for Obama’s war policies—including the drone assassination program—and his belief that the United States “should have the strongest military in the world.”

“Ecological socialism” and the Greens’ hostility to “state ownership of production”

Speaking on domestic issues within the US, Stein again adopted seemingly left rhetoric, characterizing American society as embroiled in an “unprecedented crisis.” She proclaimed, “We’re told it’s a recovery, but in fact it is still an emergency. Those good jobs we lost have been replaced by part-time, low-wage, temporary, insecure jobs. A generation of young people is locked into predatory student loan debt, black lives are on the firing line, immigrants face mass deportation, wars for oil are blowing back at us with a vengeance, and the climate meltdown threatens civilization as we know it in our lifetimes [...] So, we are in revolt!”

While noting some of the horrendous conditions in the US, Stein and the Greens present solutions that amount to little more than milquetoast liberalism. Nowhere in her speech did Stein mention the words “working class,” “class struggle,” “capitalism,” or “socialism.” No speakers at the convention called for public ownership of the means of production or the expropriation of the wealth of the financial aristocracy, two basic socialist principles. The Green Party program does not suggest that there should be a significant redistribution of wealth, focusing instead on the supposed “overconsumption” of the population as a whole.

At their convention, the Greens passed Amendment 8-35 to their platform, the so-called “anti-capitalist” amendment. In reality, the amendment is merely intended to give the Greens a radical veneer, while doing nothing to significantly challenge the existing property relations under capitalism.

The amendment replaces an existing paragraph of their program that promotes “small business, responsible stakeholder capitalism, and broad and diverse forms of economic cooperation.” Yet, at the convention, there was no critique of their former stance promoting “stakeholder capitalism.”

The adopted amendment reads, “The Green Party seeks to build an alternative economic system based on ecology and decentralization of power, an alternative that rejects both the capitalist system that maintains private ownership over almost all production as well as the state-socialist system that assumes control over industries without democratic, local decision making. We believe the old models of capitalism (private ownership of production) and state socialism (state ownership of production) are not ecologically sound, socially just, or democratic and that both contain built-in structures that advance injustices.”

Instead of seeking to unite workers internationally, the Greens seek to revert backwards from nationally-based economies toward utopian, locally-based “communalism” along the anarchist model. They write in the amendment, “We will build an economy based on large-scale green public works, municipalization, and workplace and community democracy. Some call this decentralized system ‘ecological socialism,’

‘communalism,’ or the ‘cooperative commonwealth.’”

The amendment makes clear that the Greens are fundamentally opposed to central economic planning, as well as state ownership of the means of production. Their claim that “state socialism” inevitably becomes authoritarian is based on the historically false argument that the Russian Revolution inevitably produced Stalinism. While being presented as “anti-capitalist,” the amendment is in fact a declaration of opposition to socialism and a tacit defense of capitalist property relations.

The Democratic Party and identity politics

In contrast to the Sanders campaign, which claimed that the Democratic Party could be reformed from within, the Greens’ political strategy is to serve as an external pressure group on the two major parties, in particular the Democratic Party, channeling growing opposition back into the framework of bourgeois politics.

This perspective is elaborated by the Greens themselves in their party platform, where they state: “The United States is locked in a vicious circle, in which 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, as both corporate parties seek to better serve their 1 percent masters.”

In other words, the successes of the Green Party as a “true opposition party” will supposedly reverse the rightward shift of American politics. This perspective is no less bankrupt than that of Sanders, and indeed the two coincide, as evinced by Stein’s repeated praise for the Democratic Party candidate.

Like the Democratic Party and its pseudo-left satellites such as the ISO and Socialist Alternative, the Greens have embraced identity politics in its most extreme forms. Almost every speaker Saturday proclaimed racial and gender divisions to be central forces in American society, with multiple denunciations of “white and male supremacy” and “white privilege.”

In her speech, Stein framed the issue of police violence, which affects all sections of the working class, as based entirely on “racist policing,” which she suggested could be resolved through the creation of “police review board[s]” in “every community”—proposals that in fact will do nothing to end the reign of police killings throughout the country.

Speaking before Stein on Saturday, former Sanders supporter and activist YahNé Ndgo presented racism as ubiquitous and immutable. She declared, “I would like all of the people in here who are racists to stand up.” After a number of people rose, she pressured the others to do the same, arguing, “Now all of you people who are sitting down, you have work to do. You’ve got work to do, because you can’t be growing up in this system here and not be racist. It’s not possible!”

With her audience of Green delegates swayed by this extreme racist logic, Ndgo proclaimed, “It’s not your fault, but you can’t do anything to transform it if you can’t even acknowledge it. I need you to say, ‘Hello, my name is _____, and I am a racist!’ I need you to say it!” She went on to argue that through the efforts of the media, films and schools, all Americans have “been programmed to be racist against each other and against ourselves.”

Ndgo’s statements are the logical extension of the racialism being spewed on an almost daily basis by the *New York Times*, and which the Democrats utilized at their own convention last month. Such reactionary sentiments aim to divide the working class and shift attention away from the fundamental issues of economic inequality and the drive to war.

According to recent polls, the Greens are projected to receive roughly five percent of the vote in November, and 16 percent among those under

30, significant increases from their 2012 campaign. The Green Party will continue to grow in the coming months, as many workers and youth look for a way to oppose the right-wing campaigns of Clinton and Trump.

Those seeking a genuine alternative, however, must see through their phony, fake-left rhetoric and take up the struggle for genuine socialist internationalism. The Socialist Equality Party is running Jerry White for US president and Niles Niemuth for vice president to fight for this perspective and provide the necessary leadership for the coming struggles against war, social inequality and attacks on democratic rights.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)