

Green Party candidates at CNN town hall: Promoting illusions in the capitalist system

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In a town hall meeting on CNN this Wednesday, US Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein and her running mate Ajamu Baraka answered questions from audience members and host Chris Cuomo, one of the network's leading news anchors. The event was simulcast on CNN International, CNN en Español, CNNGo, and Sirius XM satellite radio—by far the most significant coverage given to the Green Party this election cycle.

During the Democratic Party primaries, widespread popular opposition and anger found expression in support for the campaign of Bernie Sanders. With Sanders' craven endorsement of Hillary Clinton, the Greens are, with the backing of the pseudo-left and sections of the capitalist media, presenting themselves as the continuators of Sanders' fraudulent "political revolution."

Over the course of the 80-minute program, the comments of the Green Party candidates confirmed the pro-capitalist character of the Green Party, which is seeking to corral disaffected workers and youth back within the confines of bourgeois politics.

In the corporate media environment at CNN, Stein and Baraka refrained from using the words "capitalism," "socialism," "working class," and above all, "class struggle." The very fact that Chris Cuomo remained solicitous and friendly throughout the event should give one pause as to the "anti-establishment" or "outsider" character of the Green Party.

The town hall questions focused primarily on three main issues: the 2016 US elections, the Green Party's positions on war and foreign policy and police violence. In each case, the candidates presented the policies of the ruling class entirely in subjective terms, referring at various times to the Obama administration's decisions to bail out the banks and prosecute imperialist war abroad as individually poor decisions on the part of Obama himself or his administration as a whole.

The first question from the audience came from Gloria Tso, a former Sanders supporter, who asked, "What would you like to say to win over Sanders supporters like me, who are absolutely not voting for Trump but are feeling somewhat disillusioned by Clinton?"

Stein replied with gushing and uncritical praise for the Sanders campaign, saying, "The political system will never be the same... You've learned really, in real time, why it is that you can't have a revolutionary campaign in a counterrevolutionary party. Bernie did everything right and his supporters did everything right, but the playing field was really steeply and unfairly tilted against you."

After decrying the anti-democratic character of the nomination

process and the corruption of the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign, Stein sought to present the Greens as a "revolutionary party" for former Sanders supporters. "Bernie himself said, 'it's a movement, it's not a man.' And it's clear Hillary does not represent what you were working for... Many people have looked to us from Bernie's campaign as 'plan B,' so that if they ran into trouble they could continue building this revolutionary campaign, but now all the stronger for being inside of a revolutionary party that supports the work that you're doing and will continue to build it until we prevail."

In fact, the Sanders campaign was not and the Green Party is not "revolutionary." Stein's identification of the impulse behind the support for Sanders with the candidate himself starkly reveals the conventional and pro-capitalist politics of the organization. Sanders' groveling endorsement of Clinton laid bare the basic purpose of the campaign from the beginning: to channel social opposition behind the Democratic Party. Now, Stein and the Greens are seeking to tap into the same social unrest in order to contain it within the confines of bourgeois politics.

The bulk of the town hall meeting centered on questions of foreign policy, militarism and war, with Stein and Baraka presenting themselves as "peace" candidates in contrast to Clinton and the Democratic Party. They did so, however, in a wholly unprincipled manner, characterizing the "war on terror" and US wars more broadly as "catastrophic policies" driven by "incompetency," instead of the deliberate actions of the world's most powerful imperialist state. There was no mention of the economic impetus for imperialist war, including the drive to secure access to oil resources, nor of the broader geo-strategic interests of the American capitalist class.

In her opening remarks, Stein called for enacting "foreign policy that's based on international law, human rights and economic justice, not on military and economic dominance that's blowing up at us." In effect, Stein is giving support to wars sanctioned by the UN Security Council, such as the 2011 War in Libya, and the promotion of "human rights" as the all-purpose justification for war used by American imperialism.

After Stein hinted that the Greens intend to close all US foreign military bases, Cuomo asked, "I'm just trying to be clear, would you close all of them?"

Stein reassured her listeners in the political establishment, "There may be certain bases for certain circumstances that need to remain open, but our presumption is to close the bases." This

equivocal language leaves open the door to any number of foreign military bases remaining open under the Greens.

Baraka said, “One of the reasons why we have the ISIS threat today is because of the enormous incompetency of US policy in the so-called Middle East over the last 16 years. You can’t talk about the ISIS threat and then not look at the kinds of policies that helped to facilitate the growth of ISIS. [...] The security issue is real, there’s no question about that. And people are concerned about that, and we understand that. But this sort of knee-jerk response in terms of military action, we’ve got to be very, very critical of that.”

Nowhere did Stein or Baraka fundamentally challenge the legitimacy of the “war on terror,” during which over one million people have been killed in Iraq alone, along with hundreds of thousands more in Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. Instead, they merely assert that it is being waged incorrectly and at too great an expense. Elsewhere, Stein has called for reducing the military budget by half, leaving intact a whopping \$300 billion if one were to go by the government’s underestimated figures.

Their promotion of the Sanders campaign (Stein at one point went so far as to offer him the Green Party presidential nomination) further belies the Greens’ phony claims to be opposed to war. Throughout his campaign, Sanders repeatedly expressed support for the Obama administration’s war policies, including the illegal and unconstitutional drone assassination program that has killed thousands.

The history of Green parties internationally also exposes the fraudulent character of their pacifism. In Germany, the Red-Green alliance of the Green Party and Social Democratic Party, in power from 1998-2005, supported the US bombing of Iraq in 1998 and the war in Afghanistan in 2001. The Australian Greens supported the 1999 military intervention in East Timor and have supported the brutal oppression of refugees in recent years. The US Greens are complicit in the pro-war record of their international collaborators, whom they have never denounced.

In closing the town hall meeting, CNN had the Green Party leaders address a question on Black Lives Matter and identity politics. Lacey Dickinson, a Green Party supporter from Philadelphia, asked, “As everyone knows, the Black Lives Matter movement has raised a lot of awareness around violence that’s been committed against people of color, and it’s also exposed a great incompetence in many local police forces. What do you think the role of the federal government should be in kind of structuring and working with local forces, and how would you work to ensure that officers are brought to justice who kill citizens?”

In response, Stein presented American history as one long sequence of racial oppression and violence, referring to “an ongoing crisis of racial injustice that really has been a continuing legacy from the criminal institution of slavery on which this country was founded. From slavery, to lynchings, to Jim Crow, to segregation, mass incarceration, the War on Drugs and now police violence.”

Baraka reiterated this racist narrative of American history, declaring, “The real root issue is the issue of oppression, systematic oppression. And I think that the courageous activity of our young folk to bringing attention to the war being waged

against black people and brown people and native people in this country is the kind of attention we need to have. [...] Why do we have the kinds of police that we have in these black communities? Because we have colonized territories, where basically the police are actually like a military force, and they behave like a military force, because you are policing basically a population that at this point in history is almost superfluous.”

Stein and Baraka deliberately obscure the reality that a plurality of those killed by police in the US are white, while the President of the country and numerous politicians leading major cities are black. Fundamentally, they deny the history of class struggle in the US and the need to unite workers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds in a common struggle to overthrow capitalism.

By framing the issue of police violence entirely in racial terms, the Greens wind up offering the most tepid solutions to police violence. At the local level, Stein called for ensuring “that every community has a civilian review board, so that communities are in charge of their police and not the other way around,” and that each community “have access to an independent investigator” responsible for investigating police killings. Nationally, the Greens are “calling for a truth and reconciliation commission so that we can actually understand what is this living legacy of fear, of racism, of incredible racial bias that police violence is just the tip of the iceberg.”

Stein elaborated, “We’re calling for this truth and reconciliation commission so that we can share our stories, we can share music, art, have a facilitated conversation that our campaign hopes to help engender so that we can come to terms with who we are as human beings and overcome this legacy that’s dividing us.”

The notion that sharing music and art is going to do anything to address the reign of police violence is laughable. It is also aimed at presenting police violence as a matter of the supposed intolerance of white people, rather than as a matter of the building up of the powers of the capitalist state against the working class and youth of all races.

The Greens’ refusal to raise the fundamental questions of capitalism demonstrates their hostility to a class analysis and the political independence of the working class. Each of their policy proposals leaves the basic underlying structure of private ownership over the means of production wholly intact. Acting as a flank of bourgeois politics, the Greens promote nothing more than protest and pressure politics within the confines of the existing economic and political system.



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