

The political issues in the campaign for a recount in the US elections

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Three weeks after the US presidential election, the political crisis triggered by the initiative to recount the vote in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania—three states that helped ensure Trump’s victory over Clinton—is escalating. This initiative coincides with the continued growth of Hillary Clinton’s lead in the popular vote, which now stands at more than 2.2 million. This is, by far, a historically unprecedented margin for a candidate who did not also win in the Electoral College.

Jill Stein, the presidential candidate of the Green Party, initiated the recount campaign last week following a media report featuring University of Michigan professor and cyber security expert J. Alex Halderman. In a thoroughly unprincipled use of right-wing arguments to legitimize the recount effort in the eyes of the Clinton campaign and the Democratic Party—which did not intend to contest the election results—Halderman claims that a team he leads found persuasive evidence that electronic voting machines in these three states may have been hacked by Russia, a statement that he repeated in an affidavit supporting Stein’s petition for a recount in Wisconsin.

On Saturday, the Clinton campaign announced that it would participate in the process begun by Stein. Trump responded on Sunday by not only denouncing the recount but also charging, without any factual substantiation, that he also won the popular vote if the “millions” of illegal votes for Clinton were discounted.

The demand for a recount is a legitimate political response to a situation in which the votes in the states in question were particularly close (a Trump margin of 22,000 in Wisconsin, 10,000 in Michigan and 68,000 in Pennsylvania).

Much more is involved, however, than a technical procedure in these three states. The recount campaign

has exposed political fissures within the ruling elite, complicated efforts to carry out a seamless transition to a Trump administration, and intensified the mood of popular discontent and crisis that has been building since Election Day.

The response of the Obama administration to the recount says a great deal about its indifference toward basic democratic principles. In comments to the *New York Times* reported on Sunday, a senior White House official insisted on the “overall integrity of the electoral infrastructure,” which ensured results that “accurately reflect the will of the American people.”

This is obviously untrue. The election of Trump does not represent the “will of the people.” He lost the popular vote by a substantial margin. Moreover, Trump campaigned on the basis of demagogic lies, portraying himself as a defender of the working class.

The Democratic Party is far more worried about provoking opposition among workers and youth than it is about the tactical differences it has with the Republicans and Trump. On basic elements of class policy, the two parties are, as the CIA agent-in-chief Obama put it, “on the same team.”

The Green Party, rather than denouncing the undemocratic character of the election process, is justifying its recount initiative with the claim that Russian hacking may have affected the outcome of the vote. Instead of seeking to raise the democratic consciousness of the voters, the Greens—in a manner typical of capitalist political parties—employ reactionary arguments that are pitched toward the interests of the ruling class. In effect, the Greens are arguing that they are seeking a recount not to prevent Trump from stealing the election, but rather to stop Putin from interfering in American politics.

There is an unstated premise in the Green Party

initiative—and Stein has said nothing to contradict this—that the election of Clinton would have spared the United States all the unhappiness that will follow from Trump’s victory. This is an exercise in political deception, which portrays Trump as some sort of dreadful and accidental departure from the familiar grooves of American democracy.

It does not seem to occur to the Greens that the result of the 2016 election is, in objective terms, the expression and outcome of a profound crisis of American society. Even if Trump fell short of Clinton in the popular vote, the fact that he received 62 million votes is a devastating condemnation of everything that the Democratic Party and the Obama administration represent. What level of social distress and dysfunction could lead so many millions of people, including many workers, to give their vote to this reactionary charlatan?

In what way would a Clinton presidency contribute to surmounting the economic, political and social crisis that provided the objective impulse for the rise of Trump? Trump's election is the product of twenty-five years of unending war and fifteen years of the “war on terror,” accompanied by historic levels of social inequality and the erosion of basic democratic rights. It is also a verdict on eight years of the Obama administration, whose policies Clinton pledged to continue.

The Greens, far from advancing an alternative to the Democratic Party, are positioning themselves as its most consistent defenders. Backed by a host of organizations that operate around the Democratic Party and supported the Greens in the elections, Stein is seeking to elevate the role of the Green Party as a political instrument of the ruling class in containing and smothering social opposition.

Under conditions of a historic crisis of capitalism, the working class must advance its own perspective and not allow itself to be corralled behind one or another faction of the ruling class and its political representatives.

Whatever the outcome of the recount, the election of 2016 has inaugurated a new period of convulsive political upheavals within the United States and beyond its borders. Even in the very unlikely event that the votes in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania are overturned, who can seriously believe that such an outcome would be accepted by Trump and his most

ruthless backers?

There is no easy way out of the crisis of American and world capitalism. The critical question for workers and young people is to break completely with the entire political apparatus of the ruling class and advance an independent response based on a socialist, internationalist and revolutionary program. We urge our readers and supporters to draw the necessary political conclusions from the election of 2016 and join the Socialist Equality Party.



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