

US Congress targets Green Party candidate Jill Stein over allegations of collusion with Russia

Trévon Austin
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On Monday, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr said his committee has begun investigating Jill Stein, the Green Party's presidential candidate in the 2016 election, in relation to evidence of alleged conspiracy or "meddling" by Russia. Stein said she was contacted by the committee with requests for information, including emails.

The targeting of Stein is a major intensification of the anti-Russia witch-hunt, which, in addition to fighting out factional disputes within the ruling elite, is aimed ultimately at domestic political opposition within the United States.

For over a year, Democrats have argued that Jill Stein's campaign assisted Trump's campaign by diverting support and votes away from Hillary Clinton, pointing to the fact that Trump's margin of victory was smaller than Jill Stein's total number of votes in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. This is now being used to suggest that Stein was in cahoots with Russian officials.

Mark Warner, the committee's top-ranking Democrat, laid out the reactionary motives for investigating Stein's campaign. "I will point out though that Ms. Stein was at the infamous dinner that included General Flynn and Vladimir Putin, and we do know that she has very complimentary things to say about Julian Assange, who certainly was being used by the Russians to take some of the hacked information and release it into our political system," he said.

In 2015, Stein attended a dinner in Moscow celebrating the tenth anniversary of RT, the Russia-based news organization. The event has been used as a pretext by the committee to allege possible collusion between Stein and the Kremlin.

Photographs from the dinner show Stein sitting at a table with President Vladimir Putin and other prominent Russian officials. Michael Flynn, Trump's former national security advisor who has agreed to a plea deal in the investigation of alleged Russian interference in the election, is seen sitting at the same table.

Assange attended the Green Party's 2016 convention via Skype to discuss the leaked Democratic National Committee emails that pointed to efforts by the pro-Hillary Clinton DNC leadership to undermine the primary campaign of Bernie Sanders. Stein praised WikiLeaks and Assange, calling him a hero for publishing the emails.

In a statement released Monday, Stein said she attended the 2015 dinner in hopes of "reaching an international audience and Russian officials with a message of Middle East peace, diplomacy, and cooperation against the urgent threat of climate change."

The fact that RT hosted the Green Party's 2016 presidential debate, and has interviewed Stein multiple times, is also being used to suggest collusion between Stein and the Russian state.

Stein said she plans to cooperate with the committee's requests, but warned against "the politicization, sensationalism and collapse of journalistic standards that has plagued media coverage of the investigation."

In January, the director of national intelligence (DNI) released a report on "Russian intervention" in the 2016 election, declaring RT to be an arm of the Kremlin aimed at "sowing divisions" among the American people. Various actions have since been taken against

the news organization, including forced registration under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), setting a dangerous precedent for the freedom of speech and press in the United States.

The DNI report alleged that “RT broadcast, hosted, and advertised third-party candidate debates and ran reporting supportive of the political agenda of these candidates. The RT hosts asserted that the US two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a ‘sham.’”

These statements make clear the antidemocratic political motivations behind the censorship of RT and the investigation of Stein.

Jesse Ferguson, a former Clinton campaign spokesman, argued that Americans should know if a candidate was used by Russia to divert votes away from Clinton. “Russian operatives were not promoting Jill Stein because they thought she would win,” he said. “They were promoting her because they thought it would hurt Hillary Clinton and help Donald Trump.”

Zac Petkanas, former rapid response director for the Clinton campaign, typed “Jill Stein is a Russian agent” eight times in a single tweet. He continued in another thread to say that the Senate’s probe mattered because “she [Stein] played a big role in electing Putin’s favorite candidate: Donald Trump.”

Jill Stein has denounced these allegations. In a podcast on the *Intercept*, she said that there wasn’t any substantial conversation at the table where she was seen with Putin and Flynn because of language barriers. She was not paid for attending the event, and only gave a speech about nuclear disarmament and pursuing peace instead of war.

The Green Party is a bourgeois party that poses no serious threat to the political establishment. But the campaign to link Stein to “Russian meddling” sets a dangerous precedent for all critics of the US government. The return of McCarthyism is centered on anti-Russian hysteria, but is part of a broader campaign to censor political opposition in the face of mass social unrest.

The United States is the world’s wealthiest country, yet it has the highest levels of social inequality in the developed world. More than 40 million Americans, or 14.5 percent, live in poverty. Congress has passed a tax plan that will only further destroy the conditions of the working class by funneling trillions of dollars to the

ultra-wealthy and slashing funding to social programs.

What the two big-business parties fear most is the development of a mass movement against the capitalist system. They aim to combat this threat by censoring the Internet, criminalizing political dissent, and preventing the free exchange of ideas.



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