

US presidential campaign: Hillary Clinton as lesser evil to Trump? Support the independent candidacy of Jill Stein!

Friday 12 August 2016, by [SHEPPARD Barry](#) (Date first published: 10 August 2016).

Since the mid 1930s, self-styled progressives and many socialists have often justified supporting one of the two capitalist parties by claiming that it is the “lesser evil” to the other one – except when they have claimed their party of choice to be a “positive good.”

Most often the “lesser evil” is the Democratic Party. In this year’s election the “lesser evil” is Clinton and the Democrats as opposed to Trump and the Republicans. But this has not been a “normal” election year. In the Democratic Party Senator Bernie Sanders waged a surprisingly strong challenge to the party establishment represented by Clinton. His main message was that the working class is continuing to suffer in the anemic recovery from the Great Recession which has mainly profited the rich.

Sanders identifies himself as a “democratic socialist” and raised some pro-working class demands. Noam Chomsky characterized him as a “New Deal Democrat,” referring to Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency, which is accurate.

Clinton was correctly seen by many Sanders’ supporters as defending the past eight years of the Obama administration. The Democratic machine was organized against Sanders, a fact emphasized by the release of internal documents of the Democratic National Committee by WikiLeaks that proved the case.

While Trump is reviled for his open racism, hatred of Latino immigrants (but not white ones) and foreigners, as well as his open Islamophobia, misogyny, hinting at the use of violence and authoritarianism – and much else, Clinton is seen as also evil but less so.

A headline in the Socialist Worker referenced the lesser evil argument, but added a twist: “The Evil of the Two Lessers.” Indeed, both Clinton and Trump are disliked by a majority of those eligible to vote (Trump more so). Polls also show about two thirds think that both are equally dishonest and untrustworthy.

After his defeat in the Democratic primaries, Sanders came out in support of Clinton, as he always promised he would do. His objective was never to break with the Democrats but reform the party, and move it away from Bill Clinton’s move to the right.

He urges his supporters to join the Clinton campaign. But many are angry and dissatisfied with Clinton, and trying to think out what to do. This is also true of many in the social movements, and in the small socialist organizations. The form this is taking is a broad discussion of whether to go with the Clinton lesser evil or to support the independent candidacy of Jill Stein of the Green Party.

Interest in the Stein campaign jumped with Sanders’ defeat and embrace of the Clinton campaign. At the recent convention of the Green Party, which formally endorsed Stein, she took up the lesser

evil question:

"We have a role to play that will not be played by anybody but us. We are the ones we have been waiting for. When they tell us to get out of the way, because we are standing in the way of the lesser evil, the answer to that is this politics of fear, which we've been told to bow down to, has only delivered everything we were afraid of."

Referring to the record of the Obama administration which Clinton stands on, Stein said, "All those reasons we were told to vote for the lesser evil – because we didn't want the offshoring of our jobs, the meltdown of the climate, the massive bailouts for Wall Street, the expanding prison state, the attack on our civil liberties and on immigrant rights – all those things we didn't want is exactly what we got by allowing ourselves to be silenced and letting lesser evil speak for us."

She also raises Obama's continuation of the wars without end under the rubric of the "War on Terror."

"On climate change we are told that there will be a civilization-ending development in the form of massive sea level rise as soon as 2050....So we cannot wait, we have to act now if we want to stop that from happening."

"We need to declare a state of emergency right now and undertake a wartime-scale mobilization to create 20 million jobs and create 100 percent clean energy now."

"We have a crisis in nuclear weapons, and again thanks very much to the Democrats. Bill Clinton, who removed us from the Anti-Ballistic Treaty framework for nuclear disarmament, and then Barack Obama, who created a trillion-dollar budget for us to spend on a new generation of nuclear weapons and modes of delivery."

Concerning how to fight Trump, she said, "The only solution to the likes of Donald Trump is a truly radical, progressive agenda that restores our needs and ends the economic misery that promotes the kinds of demagogues we are seeing in Donald Trump.... Hillary Clinton is the problem; she is not the solution to Donald Trump."

The Green Party in the U.S. isn't the same as Green parties elsewhere, some of which have joined capitalist governments. It has moved to the left, recently adopting a new statement of purpose defining itself as anti-capitalist. On the alternative to capitalism, it remains vague, reflecting internal differences, and doesn't call for socialism. Stein herself often goes beyond this, and refers positively to socialists and proposes an alliance with socialists.

Among the main socialist organizations there is a divide over supporting Clinton as the lesser evil to Trump. The Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism, which came out of a split in the Communist Party after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has maintained the position of that current of supporting the Democratic Party. This year they joined Sanders' Democratic Party campaign.

After Sanders lost, they have modified their stance. Now they call for a vote for Clinton in states where the race becomes close between Clinton and Trump, but in states that are not up for grabs they will vote for Stein. This is not a real change, obviously, as it means they are for Clinton as the lesser evil to Trump.

The major social democratic organization, Democratic Socialists of America, also comes from a long-standing tradition of supporting the Democrats, and takes a similar position now as the CCDS. Some DSA members have come out in favor of Stein in all states, but their basic orientation is the same as

the CCDS – to reform the Democratic Party along the lines Sanders proposed.

Socialist Alternative (which is not connected to the Australian party with the same name), the International Socialist Organization and Solidarity stand for a break with the Democratic Party and raise the need for a mass independent workers' party to be eventually formed, and support Jill Stein's campaign as a step in that direction.

Socialist Alternative joined the Sanders Democratic Party campaign, as did a section of Solidarity. This weakened their stand for a break with the Democrats and in fact was in contradiction to it. However, they now are supporting Stein.

The context for this discussion has been the long-standing position of the labor union bureaucracy of subordinating workers' interests to the capitalist Democratic Party and opposing building an independent labor party. A similar position has been taken by the major establishment Black, Latino, and women's organizations. Subordination to the Democratic Party has led revolutionary socialists to characterize the Democrats as the "graveyard of labor and social movements.

The situation of long-term economic stagnation that created the sentiment of opposition to the status quo among many workers and especially the youth that Sanders tapped into will continue, and there will be new crises within that stagnation. Stein's campaign can tap into the same sentiment and begin to raise the need to break from the strangle hold of the two party system of capitalist rule in the U.S. that has stifled the working class and the oppressed for so long.

Socialists should support this effort, while continuing to build whatever worker struggles that can erupt and movements such as Black Lives Matter and others outside of the electoral process. Stein's campaign also will support such struggles, which dovetails with her message of the need to break from the two-party system.

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