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The most unpopular candidates in American history

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The Labor Day weekend marks the semi-official beginning of the final phase of the 2016 presidential election campaign. The next two months will feature four presidential or vice-presidential debates, hundreds of millions of dollars of mind-numbing attack ads, and new depths of political reaction, bombast and lies from both the Democratic and Republican parties.

There is mounting evidence that the avalanche of political filth from the two main capitalist parties, which enjoy an effective political monopoly in the United States, has alienated record numbers of people. Opinion polls taken over the past week have shown support for both Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump declining, with her numbers falling somewhat more rapidly than his, leading to headlines about Trump beginning to “close the gap.”

Clinton and Trump are, it is now widely conceded, the two most unpopular presidential candidates in modern US history. Trump is viewed unfavorably by nearly two-thirds of voters polled, with 44 percent describing him as a racist and 59 percent saying his campaign appeals to bigotry. Yet Trump is only narrowly behind Clinton, whose unfavorability number hit 60 percent in polls last week. Nearly two-thirds of those polled—including many of those planning to vote for her—say that the former Secretary of State is corrupt, a liar and not to be trusted.

What the corporate-controlled media cannot say, but which is undeniably true, is that the two candidates are so widely hated because they represent the increasingly right-wing policies of the US ruling elite, under conditions where American workers and youth are moving to the left.

The actions of the two candidates last week only underscored the vast decay of the American political system. Trump gave a speech in Arizona on immigration which was an hour-long diatribe against undocumented immigrants, whom he blamed for unemployment, crime, budget deficits and terrorism. His fascistic rant concluded with a 10-point plan for the establishment of a police state in America, complete with detention camps for the millions whom Trump pledged to order rounded up in his first action as president.

For her part, Clinton gave a speech on US military policy to the convention of the American Legion—a bulwark of right-wing anti-communism and militarism—in which she presented herself as a more aggressive and reliable commander-in-chief than Trump, whom she suggested was a Russian puppet. She threatened to use force in response to unsubstantiated charges of cyberattacks on the United States by Russia and China, and she hailed the growing list of Republican national security officials, including nearly all the architects of the Iraq War, who have endorsed her campaign.

Clinton's status as the consensus candidate of the US military-intelligence apparatus was further strengthened Friday by the public declaration of two former Republican Secretaries of State, Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, that they would not support Trump. They joined both living Republican former presidents, George H. W. Bush and his son George W. Bush, and the 2012 Republican presidential nominee, Mitt Romney, in refusing to endorse Trump.

While the 93-year-old Kissinger and the 95-year-old Shultz did not explicitly endorse Clinton—perhaps at her request, since Kissinger is widely reviled as a war criminal for his role in the Vietnam War—their joint statement left little doubt about their preference: “We are dedicated to fostering a bipartisan foreign policy and we will devote ourselves to this effort now and after the election.”

In the wake of the Trump and Clinton speeches, a Reuters/Ipsos poll showed the Democrat leading the Republican by only 40 percent to 39 percent, meaning that 21 percent favored a third-party candidate or were undecided. The rising poll numbers for Libertarian Gary Johnson and Green Jill Stein, the two media-recognized “third-party” candidates, demonstrate that tens of millions of voters, predominantly youth and workers, are disgusted by the “choice” offered by the two main corporate-controlled parties and are looking for an alternative.

Polling averages show Johnson getting 10 percent and Stein 5 percent, for a combined 15 percent, 10 times what the same two candidates received when they represented the Libertarians and the Greens in the 2012 presidential election. Most of those planning to vote for either of these candidates fit the profile of supporters of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders: a majority, 51 percent, were under age 34, and more described themselves as sympathetic to Sanders than to either Clinton or Trump.

These figures underscore the political function of both the Libertarian campaign and especially the Green Party, the more superficially “left-wing.” They operate to contain the mass opposition to the Democrats and Republicans within the framework of capitalist politics.

The Libertarians are an explicitly pro-capitalist party, advocating even more right-wing policies than the Democrats and Republicans in terms of dismantling public services and eliminating all restraints on the operations of corporate business. At the same time, they appeal to popular democratic and antiwar sentiments by claiming to oppose government spying and foreign wars.

The Greens provide a critical service to the ruling elite in seeking to trap leftward-moving layers of the population, particularly those initially attracted to Sanders. Stein previously offered the Green Party nomination to Sanders if he would agree to continue his campaign in the general election. Her recent campaign appearances have been characterized by a high degree of demagogic antiwar posturing, aimed at capitalizing on Clinton’s embrace of the Pentagon and CIA.

But the Green Party is no less a capitalist party than the Libertarians, Democrats or Republicans. They support the profit system, advocating only a higher degree of environmental protection. The only mention of socialism in the Green Party platform is an explicit disavowal of it.

And Stein’s sudden indulging in antiwar rhetoric is neither convincing nor credible. Whenever Green parties have entered into bourgeois governments, they have embraced militarism wholeheartedly. Most notoriously, the German Greens paved the way for the reemergence of German imperialism as a significant military force, with Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer spearheading the German military role in the Kosovo war and then in Afghanistan.

There is only one party in the 2016 election that truly speaks for the leftward movement among American workers and youth, and advances a clear socialist and antiwar program. That is the Socialist Equality Party and our candidates, Jerry White for President and Niles Niemuth for Vice President.

The SEP candidates receive no plaudits or fawning interviews from the corporate media, for very good reason: our campaign advances a revolutionary socialist program to mobilize the working class and youth and put an end to the dictatorship of big business. We urge all those who are looking for a genuine alternative to capitalist politics to support and build our campaign.