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The pro-capitalist program of the US Green Party

By Tom Hall

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The 2016 US presidential campaign has revealed an extraordinary crisis of legitimacy of American capitalist politics. In spite of a primary campaign whose dominant features were growing social opposition and deep alienation among voters from both the Democratic and Republican parties, the American public faces the prospect in November of choosing between the two most hated presidential candidates in modern American history, with Hillary Clinton, the multimillionaire stooge of Wall Street and the military/intelligence establishment on the one hand, and Donald Trump, the fascistic billionaire on the other.

The election has unfolded against the background of growing social opposition in the working class in the United States and internationally. In the primary election campaign, this found its most significant expression, and from the standpoint of the ruling elite, the most worrying, in the broad support for the campaign for the Democratic nomination of the self-described “socialist” Bernie Sanders. This has revealed that in a country whose political life has long been dominated by anticommunism, millions of people hold anti-capitalist views.

Sanders, however, is not a socialist, but a longstanding congressional ally of the Democratic Party. From the outset, his aim in running was to channel social and political opposition back within the harmless channels of the Democratic Party, long the graveyard of social movements in the United States, by means of left-sounding slogans such as his call for a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class.”

Nevertheless, many of his supporters reacted with shock and anger to his endorsement earlier this month of Hillary Clinton, the favored candidate of most of corporate America.

The remaining months before the November election promise to be explosive. Under these conditions, the Green Party is positioning itself as the next line of defense against the emergence of an independent political and socialist movement of the working class. The Green Party and its presumptive presidential candidate Jill Stein have been hard at work in recent weeks appealing to disillusioned Sanders supporters and portraying themselves as a genuinely independent “left” political alternative.

The emptiness of this claim of political independence has already been graphically demonstrated in the current election campaign. Both before and after Sanders announced his withdrawal from the Democratic primary race and endorsement of Clinton, Jill Stein publicly offered to withdraw her candidacy if Sanders agreed to become the presidential candidate of the US Green Party. Sanders summarily rejected the offer.

Workers and youth must learn to analyze and assess all political organizations not by their “left” presentation of themselves or their nominal organizational independence from the Democratic Party, but by their “ *history, program, perspective, and class* basis and orientation,” as the Socialist Equality Party explains in its *Statement of Principles* .

An examination of the most recent platform of the Green Party, ratified in July of 2014, demonstrates the reactionary character of the party’s politics. The Green Party is a bourgeois party, representing the interests of privileged strata of the upper-middle class. It is steeped in nationalism, defends capitalist property relations and opposes the political independence of the working class.

A middle-class program

The platform is divided into four chapters, but begins with a number of introductory sections. On the first page of the platform, titled “About the Green Party,” it states: “The Green Party of the United States is a federation of state Green Parties. Committed to environmentalism, non-violence, social justice and grassroots organizing, Greens are renewing democracy without the support of corporate donors.”

It continues: “Greens provide real solutions for real problems. Whether the issue is universal health care, corporate globalization, alternative energy, election reform or decent, living wages for workers, Greens have the courage and independence necessary to take on the powerful corporate interests.”

This introduction already demonstrates the middle-class character of the Greens. Despite their denunciation of “corporate-dominated politics,” they do not mention capitalism, socialism or the working class in describing their orientation. Instead, they invoke nebulous slogans without any specific class content, such as “renewing democracy” and providing “real solutions for real problems.”

The platform continues with the party's "Call to Action" statement. This explicitly defines the role of the Green Party as serving as an external (from an organizational standpoint) pressure group on the two major parties and the capitalist two-party system. It states: "The United States is locked in a vicious circle, in which it has become increasingly clear that the 'bipartisan' political duopoly will drift further rightward at an increasing pace without a true opposition party as a counterweight, as both corporate parties seek to better serve their 1 percent masters."

This makes clear that the Greens' political perspective is to gain access to the political establishment in order to pressure it to the left. They themselves define their role as serving as a satellite of the capitalist establishment, rendering their claim to political independence utterly empty and dishonest. In practice, they orient politically to the Democratic Party, promoting the fatal illusion that this instrument of American imperialism, controlled top to bottom by Wall Street, can be pressured from below to adopt progressive policies and transform itself into a party of the common people.

The same section concludes with a veiled attack on Marxism and profession of political eclecticism and pragmatism. It states: "Now is the time to discard failed ideologies and political structures [having just called for reforming the existing political structure], and join together with the flourishing global grassroots Green movement to tackle real problems with real solutions." This is a recipe for the most craven political opportunism, which is borne out in the rest of the document.

More will be said about the politics of the "flourishing global grassroots Green movement." For now, it is sufficient to point out that this includes Green parties in Germany, Australia and other countries that have either joined or supported capitalist governments that brutally attacked the working class and waged war in the Balkans, Afghanistan, the Middle East and elsewhere.

Next comes the "Preamble." This section includes an explicit defense of the capitalist market, calling for a "regulated market economy." Far from a left-wing or even revolutionary party, the Greens advocate not a fundamental restructuring of society, but at most a return to the sort of nationally regulated equilibrium that predominated in the years after World War II.

This same section invokes a number of political tropes that are standard fare in right-wing capitalist politics. It strikes an economic nationalist posture by focusing its criticism on economic policy on the export of jobs to other countries, without relating this to the capitalist system itself: "Jobs are being permanently relocated outside the country."

It complains about government deficits, suggesting a justification for austerity: "Every single level of government—local, county, state and federal—is operating in the red, running up crushing amounts of debt."

It speaks of social justice and equal opportunity, "emphasizing personal and social responsibility, accountability and an informing ethic of Nonviolence." In other words, the poor and downtrodden bear individual responsibility for their plight and had better "shape up."

By means of honeyed and banal phrases, it rejects the class struggle and preaches class collaboration, calling for “a democratic structure and process that empowers and reaches across lines of division to bring together our combined strengths as a people.”

Under the heading “Ten Key Values,” the platform relegates social class to the status of a subsidiary aspect of identity politics, declaring: “We must consciously confront in ourselves, our organizations, and society at large, barriers such as racism and class oppression, sexism and homophobia, ageism and disability, which act to deny fair treatment and equal justice under the law.” “Key Values” number 7 is devoted entirely to “Feminism and Gender Equality.”

In the name of “ecological wisdom,” this section of the platform broaches the reactionary Malthusian conceptions that form an essential component of Green Party politics, declaring that “we must live within the ecological and resource limits of our communities and our planet.” Key Value number 10 (“Future Focus and Sustainability”) spells out more explicitly the backward, anti-growth bias of the Greens, calling for a “sustainable economics that does not depend on continual expansion for survival.”

Under “non-violence,” the platform qualifies its ostensible pacifism so as to make the Green Party acceptable to the political establishment, writing: “We will work to demilitarize, and eliminate weapons of mass destruction, without being naïve about the intentions of other governments. We recognize the need for self-defense and the defense of others who are in helpless situations.” This translates in practice into support for the diplomatic and military intrigues of American imperialism, including support for imperialist wars (Libya, Syria, Iraq) fought under the pretext of “human rights.”

As a whole, the Green Party platform is an unprincipled, eclectic combination of demands, extending across 71 pages, which are guided by no unifying political perspective or analysis and which often run at cross-purposes with one another. The one constant throughout is a superficial approach to every question, a hallmark of all types of middle-class politics, which consistently slurs over or ignores the fundamental class issues and rejects an approach to politics based on an historical analysis.

The basic orientation of the document as a whole is a narrow, parochial nationalism. Almost all of the Green Party’s political demands proceed entirely from the standpoint of reforms to be carried out within the United States.

In the whole of the document, the term “socialism” appears only once, in a pejorative connection. There is no mention of the crisis of American and world capitalism.

The question of social inequality is decidedly downplayed. To the extent that the Greens offer any solution to the problems of poverty and joblessness, it is to “move beyond the narrow ‘job ethic’ to new definitions of ‘work,’ ‘jobs’ and ‘income’ that reflect the changing economy.” In other words, to redefine the problems out of existence.

The Green Party accepts and defends capitalist property relations. It rejects the nationalization of the banks and major corporations under the democratic control of working people in favor of

“[reducing] the size and concentrated power of corporations without discouraging superior efficiency or technological innovation.” Instead of workers’ control of production, the Greens call for “employee ownership and workplace democracy,” which, later on in the document, resolves itself into explicit support for the corporatist collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy with capitalist management.

Silence on imperialist war

There is no mention in the “Call to Action,” the “Preamble” or the “Ten Key Values” of the danger of war or the criminal role of American imperialism. In the remaining 66 pages of the platform, across four chapters titled “Democracy,” “Social Justice,” “Ecological Sustainability,” and “Economic Justice and Sustainability,” there is not a single heading that refers to war or imperialism. This is the case in a document published in the 13th year of the “war on terror,” in the midst of the war in Afghanistan and the US war for regime-change in Syria, with the US-backed war in Gaza underway, and the death and destruction wreaked in Iraq and Libya continuing to claim lives and drive masses from their homes.

When this platform was published, moreover, the United States was already in the third year of its anti-Chinese “pivot to Asia” and was in the process of escalating its offensive against Russia begun with the US-backed putsch that overthrew a pro-Russian government in Ukraine. Civil war was raging in eastern Ukraine, with the US backing troops of the right-wing nationalist regime in Kiev and neo-fascist militias sent to put down the separatist rebellion of Russian-speaking provinces.

Germany had announced its plans to rearm and take on an aggressive posture in Europe and beyond, and Japan had declared its intention of repudiating pacifist provisions of its constitution in order to once again become a major military power.

The silence of the Greens under these conditions could mean only one thing: subordination to US imperialism and its drive toward a third world war.

The international record

The class character of the Greens as a political tendency is demonstrated by the record of Green parties internationally, many of which have entered government or played crucial roles in their respective countries’ political systems. The record of betrayals and political reaction is an indication of what can be expected if the US Greens win greater political influence.

The US Green Party’s platform makes only passing reference to this record, sandwiched in between the cover page and the table of contents, when it states that it is “partners with the European Federation of Green Parties and the Federation of Green Parties of the Americas.”

The German Greens, the largest and most important member of the European Federation of Green Parties, and whose initial electoral successes in the early 1980s were the impetus for the formation of the US Green movement, became the first Green Party to enter a national

government in 1998, the so-called “red-green coalition” with the German Social Democratic Party.

The Greens immediately dropped their longstanding programmatic commitment to pacifism and became full-throated supporters of the NATO air war in Serbia, the German military’s first foreign deployment since the end of World War II. As part of the same coalition government, they helped force through the Hartz IV labor laws, the most sweeping attack on welfare programs in Germany since the end of the war.

Since then, they have supported sending German troops to Afghanistan, backed the German- and US-sponsored coup in Ukraine, and endorsed German involvement in the wars in Libya, Iraq and Syria. They are among the most bellicose parties in parliament in their support for Germany’s aggressive moves against Russia. They have played a leading role in the scapegoating of refugees fleeing the US-led and German-supported proxy wars in the Middle East.

They have also assumed responsibility for attacks on the working class at the state level. In April, the German Greens entered into a coalition government in the state of Baden-Württemberg with the Christian Democratic Union, Germany’s principal conservative party and the party of the current chancellor, Angela Merkel.

The Green Party in Australia, affiliated with the US Greens through the Global Greens Network, played a critical role in propping up the hated minority Labor government of Julia Gillard from 2010 to 2013 through the cross-bench support of their party’s sole member of parliament. The Gillard government was one of the most right-wing in the country’s history. It greatly expanded Australia’s involvement in US-led military operations and lined up fully behind Washington’s war preparations against China carried out in the name of the “pivot to Asia.” It slashed funding for health care, education and welfare programs and continued the brutal anti-refugee policies of previous administrations.

The US Greens might contend that they are not responsible for the activities of their international affiliates—an inherently false and unprincipled position. In any case, the reactionary record of Green Parties internationally is not the result of bad choices by individual leaders or national parties, but rather the inevitable consequence of the pro-capitalist and nationalist political orientation and perspective at the heart of the entire international Green movement.