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USA Elections

The Green Party After the Election

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THE POLITICAL DYNAMIC augured well for a progressive third party challenge in 2016. With the two most unpopular major party candidates in history, and a large progressive vote mobilized for Sanders in the Democratic primaries, hopes were high that the Greens could do much better, perhaps reaching five percent or more to secure general election federal funding for the 2020 Green presidential campaign.

But lacking a large, well-organized membership base to provide local legs for the campaign and a sizable cohort of Green elected officials to give the Green Party political weight, the campaign was marginalized by the media and discounted by the voters. So the limited gains for the Greens should not be surprising at all. (See box below.)

Until the Green Party has built a real power base of well-organized, dues-paying members and elected Green caucuses in city councils, state legislatures and the U.S. House, it will not be taken seriously in a presidential run by most media and most voters. It is now time for the Greens to go back to grassroots organization and movement building.

As we enter Trump time, the Greens and the broader left should learn from their mistakes during the Bush II era when too many got caught up in the Anybody-But-Bush strategy to get the Democrats back in power. For the Greens, that approach yielded the divisive and self-defeating safe-states strategy of 2004 by one faction of the party, which undermined the party's very rationale for existing as an independent alternative.

Greens should be friendly with grassroots Democrats in the Sanders/Warren wing as they quixotically try (again) to replace corporate Democrats with progressive Democrats.

Greens should work with them in the fightback against Trumpist scapegoating and oppression of immigrants, minorities and women, expansion of the security and surveillance state, imperial wars, climate madness, cuts to public health care and schools, union-busting and on many other fronts.

But the real power structure of the Democratic Party — the corporate donors and their political representatives, led now by the corporate neoliberal Chuck Schumer — will do what corporate Democrats always do with progressive Democratic personalities: use them as bait to lure progressives into a supporting corporate Democrats as the lesser evil.

Meanwhile, the greater-evil Republicans are smoothly incorporating Trump into their rightwing faction of corporate America centered on the big financial, real estate, fossil fuel, manufacturing, prison and military interests. Indeed, beneath the high-profile appointments of hard-core racists and militarists, the Trump transition is drawing mainly on the premier Republican-oriented conservative think tanks and lobbies like the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute for staffing and policy.

This corporate hard right — now in control of the presidency, both houses of Congress, and soon the Supreme Court — will move quickly after inauguration to enact an extremist version of neoliberal trickle-down economics featuring tax cuts for the rich, deregulation, union-busting and privatization of Medicare, Social Security, and public schools.

Trump's racist campaign was despicable. The consequences of his election are dangerous. Open racists feel license

to harass and harm minorities; closet racists with power over employment, education and housing opportunities will feel more license to discriminate.

But Trump's election cannot be explained by white racism alone (the racist vote has been a solid Republican bloc since Reagan, or even Nixon). Working-class resentment against the arrogance and elitism of Clinton and the corporate Democrats also played a big role.

What I heard from working-class Trump voters in the upstate New York Rust Belt, mostly white but also several Black folks, was that their vehement dislike for Clinton (and affinity for Sanders) was based on their perception of her as the epitome of the professional and managerial class that condescendingly orders them around at work and rips them off in the marketplace as representatives of utilities, banks, insurance companies, the health care system, lawyers and the courts.

Being a woman no doubt rubbed it in for some of the men, as the gender gap in the vote indicates. But Clinton's closing appeal of her competence vs. Trump's bad temperament, rather than a class-based economic appeal, only reinforced these perceptions of her as being on the other side.

Where Greens Need to Go

Hope for economic populist change was the common thread in white working- and middle-class people's votes for both Obama and Trump. It trumped their racism in the votes for Obama, and their racism excused Trump's racism in their vote for change in 2016.

Greens should also engage the disgruntled Trump populists of the working class and middle class who voted for Trump as an outside change-agent promising economic relief and an end to elite insider arrogance and corruption, and who will be quickly disappointed as it becomes clear that Trump fails to deliver.

Both major parties have discontended, economically insecure working-class and middle-class voting bases, for which the campaigns of Sanders and Trump became outlets. We can expect a resurgent liberalism trying (again) to reform the Democratic side and, after a brief honeymoon, renewed anger among the economic populists on the Republican side.

These populists won't stop supporting would-be reformers in their respective parties until they see an alternative to support that is credible and competitive. An alternative left party with a mass-membership structure and financing will necessarily have to gain a foothold in the electoral system through local elections where grassroots education, public actions, door-knocking, phone banking and fundraising can compete against the corporate-funded Democrats and Republicans.

Local governments have real powers: legislation, regulation, taxation, hiring, contracting, purchasing, even eminent domain to socialize essential public services, utilities and key local industries such as banking, housing and commercial development, and business development, including worker and consumer cooperatives. Local elected officials become viable as candidates for state and federal offices.

But a strategy of building a left political alternative from the bottom up cannot limit itself to municipal and county elections. A local Green Party that can run effective campaigns for municipal or county offices can also run effective campaigns for state legislatures and Congress. State budgets and policies have enormous impact on local government and school funding.

The Green Party After the Election

A serious municipal reform program has to address state budgets and policies. Independent left candidates for state legislature running on that reform program gives all other lobbying and public action in support of it more leverage because incumbents have to worry about losing votes to the independent challengers.

The same holds for federal budgets and policies. Only in federal races can the left present alternatives to regressive federal taxation, deregulation, privatization, and militarization.

The program should center itself around an Economic Bill of Rights that revives and updates the Economic Bill of Rights demanded by the Poor People's Campaign of 1968. The Poor People's Campaign carried forward the program of Freedom Budget of 1966, which grew out of the demands of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

The Freedom Budget called for a job guarantee, a guaranteed minimum income, universal public health care, and quality desegregated housing and schools for all.

Building out from the leading theme of an Economic Bill of Rights, the program must address other pressing problems including a crash program of conversion to clean renewable energy to minimize global warming, demilitarization for peace and funding economic rights, restoration of civil liberties and civil rights, and desegregation of housing, employment and schools.

The 1966 Freedom Budget's premise was that racial justice for African Americans would not be secure until there was economic justice for all Americans. The election of 2016 shows that premise remains as relevant as it was 50 years ago.

Building the Green Party from the bottom up on the mass-membership model is the only way to have the organized and energized mass base, democratic accountability and morale, and funding necessary to compete for power against the corporate power structure and its political representatives in the Democratic and Republican parties.

A grassroots mass-membership party is also the only way to give the biggest cohort of voters a political home. There are 100 million eligible voters who did not vote in 2016. They are disproportionately in the low-wage working class. The mass base for left parties the world over, the working class, largely abstains from U.S. elections. A grassroots mass-membership party can give these people a home where they feel their participation is welcome and makes a difference.

The new age of Trump will be worse than what would have been under the reign of President Clinton II. But what the Green Party needs to do now would have been pretty much the same under either as president:

- 1) Build a mass-membership party rooted in locals with dues-paying members.
 - 2) Focus on local elections for municipal, county, state legislative, and U.S. House seats.
 - 3) Be active on the issues and organizing between elections.
 - 4) Build a political base and working class unity around a program centered around an Economic Bill of Rights.
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Stein-Baraka Ticket

THE STEIN-BARAKA TICKET tripled the Green Party presidential vote from 2012 to nearly 1.4 million, or 1.0%. That is up from 469,627 votes (0.4%) in 2012 but still well below Ralph Nader's 2.9 million (2.7%) in 2000.

The campaign kept aloft the banners for popular progressive reforms that both corporate parties reject, including a job guarantee, single-payer health care, 100% renewable energy by 2030, free public college and student debt relief, police demilitarization, a scaled-down military and surveillance state, and a pro-democracy and human rights foreign policy. The increased lists of donors and volunteers developed can be put to use right away in issue and electoral campaigns.

On ballot access, the Greens come out of the election with no net gains: 22 state ballot lines. The vote for the presidential ticket or another statewide Green candidate secured ballot lines for the next election cycle in 12 states. But while the Greens secured new ballot lines in Connecticut and Missouri for the next election cycle, they lost ballot lines in Massachusetts and Texas.

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