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USA

Democracy Is the Key

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This interview with Peter Camejo, Ralph Nader's running mate, was conducted by Ann Menasche for the US socialist journal "Against The Current"

What is importance of Nader-Camejo campaign in 2004?

This campaign represents a very large point of view in America - against the invasion and occupation of Iraq and in opposition to the Patriot Act. But since there is no run-off, the electoral system doesn't allow people the freedom to vote for who they want, and they are in a two-party trap.

What gives the Nader campaign such importance is that an overwhelming number of people who will vote for Kerry do not agree with Kerry; in fact on many points they are closer to Nader. The Nader campaign shows the undemocratic nature of American society, the fact that we do not really have free elections in America, that in effect we have a system that guarantees a result but gives people the impression that they made the decision.

I understand that Nader did not get enough signatures in California to win ballot status. Why did that happen and how will that impact the campaign in California?

The Democratic Party is on a full offensive with great resources to prevent people in the United States who agree with Nader's pro-peace, pro-working class platform, to be able to vote for Nader.

Part of those forces were able to manipulate the Green Party convention and a very peculiar thing happened - a candidate with only 12.2% of the vote in the primaries nationally ended up being the candidate. We are now beginning to discover that it was done by packing Green Party meetings with people who were pro-Kerry. [\[1\]](#)

In California, Greens voted 86 % in favor of candidates who back Nader, and only 11.8 % for David Cobb, but they will end up with Cobb on the state ballot as the Green Party candidate. Nader-Camejo may not even be on the ballot as independents. We may need to have a write-in campaign. However that won't stop the campaign.

How is it going in other states?

The national office of the Nader campaign still believes we are going to be on the ballot in 40 or so states, but it is difficult to predict because in each state in which we meet the requirements, the Democrats try to find some technicality to knock us off.

In the state of Oregon there was a meeting to get on the state ballot, which required 1.000 people in attendance. We had to turn away hundreds of people. Then when we asked people to sign the forms to put Nader on the ballot we discovered a group of 200 Democrats: They took off their outer shirts and underneath their shirts said "Kerry". [\[2\]](#)

This is the type of conscious, and I believe illegal, actions being taken by the Democrats. The other thing they do is to put out that we are being funded by Republicans - this is a total fabricated lie - they know very well that is not the case. But in fact, we are expecting 25 % of our vote to come from Republicans who are against Bush yet do not want

to vote for Kerry. Our funding from registered Republicans is about five percent, most of whom are Arab Americans who are against the Patriot Act.

Why do you think Cobb won the nomination in the Green Party? What does this mean for the future of the Greens?

I think Cobb reflects the pressure from the Democratic Party within the Green Party. He wants to move the Green Party away from its independence from Democrats - basically his message is "Vote Green unless Kerry needs your vote. In that case vote for Kerry."

He's backed by a whole group of Green leaders, starting with the list of 17 that declared that lesser evil voting is correct. Green leaders like John Rensenbrink (from Maine - ed.) Medea Benjamin (from Global Exchange, in San Francisco - ed.) are all for forming an alliance with the Democratic Party, turning the Greens into a domesticated focus group that runs local candidates and pressures the Democrats around certain issues.

This is a totally different vision than the Green Party originally had of creating a force for independent political action and bringing forward an alternative voice and alternative platform.

Cobb was able to pack the Convention with his people and take the nomination. A beautiful example is Maine - where Cobb lost almost two to one to Nader. Lorna Salzman (a long-time Green Party leader from New York state who ran in the primaries and withdrew at the convention in favor of Nader - ed.) and Nader got votes equal to twice the votes that Cobb got. But when the delegation showed up at the convention they voted 95 % for Cobb. The Cobb people brought their people - pretending they were for Nader or Salzman.

Are there any thoughts about long-term strategy to influence the Green Party to be more democratic and independent?

We are definitely trying to form an organized current in the Green Party for democracy and for independence so that the membership can take control of the Green Party.

Will you be organizing a caucus around the Avocado Declaration?

No. The Avocado Declaration is a comprehensive view of what the two-party system is. People don't necessarily have to agree with that to agree to democracy inside the Green Party, and that it should be a party independent of the Democrats.

Those will be the two basic planks. There should be one person, one vote, and clear methods established upon which delegations are picked.

Also, we need to establish proportional representation in the leadership when there are political differences, to give each current representation based on their strength.

I was struck by the fact that there was no debate on the convention floor.

The convention was organized so that it would not allow the membership to hear the different points of view. They had one debate and even in that one there was to be no opening presentations if I had not protested.

The point is the whole conference was set up to prevent the membership and the delegates from hearing what the political differences were. Their whole policy was to try to prevent the membership from hearing the differences because they knew that that would completely work against them.

I think that many people who voted for David Cobb were unaware that he supports Kerry or that he was in support of the U.S. occupation in Iraq on both his website and in public statements he made on the radio.

Do you think it would have made any difference if Nader had come to the convention and was willing to accept the nomination?

I think looking back you can see things that should have been done. But what Nader noted was that a sector of the Green Party was moving away from being willing to challenge the Democrats and Republicans.

Do you think there is a danger that the Green Party might split?

The Greens are split - there is a cold split right now between the Cobb Democratic Party wing and the wing that favors independence and democracy. Will it turn into a hot split? It depends on what happens over the next couple of years.

There is a real danger of a split and that is why at the convention I proposed a unity statement which would have allowed the Cobb people to do what they want to do and the Nader people to do what they want to do through a dual endorsement.

Of course, the Cobb people rejected that because their real goal wasn't for him to run a campaign but to prevent Nader from being on the ballot in California and other key states. They were perfectly willing to split the Green Party if that was the price they needed to pay to stop Nader.

[1] Some states, like California, held Green Party primaries and elected their delegates to the national convention. Others did not.

[2] Earlier in the campaign, Democrats admitted that they intentionally spoiled a Nader nominating convention, swelling the number of attendees and then refusing to sign ballot petitions. This effort prevented other people from attending the convention - the doors were closed by the government when over 1,000 people were in attendance - and reduced the number of signers to just below the 1,000 people needed to get Nader on the ballot.