

Running for President Against the System

To run or not to run? This is a question that every left-wing organization faces every four years. We in the Socialist Party USA spend a good chunk of our National Conventions debating this very question. Yet, for us and for others in the Socialist movement, it is the capitalist system itself that has made running for President on a Socialist line a necessity. The massive economic crisis of 2008 has had the combined result of producing large-scale human suffering while also providing millions of people with a shared experience of being dispossessed by the system. As capitalism transitions from crisis economics to the cruel measures of austerity, a socialist voice in the elections is more important than ever.

There are three vital reasons the Socialist Party USA must run a Presidential campaign.

First, post-World War II capitalism in America had created a massive Military Industrial Complex. Democrats and Republicans alike have contributed to the bloated expansion of this sector. Not even an event as monumental as the collapse of the Soviet Bloc could put a dent in American militarism. The American way of war has produced countless deaths in the world, has crowded out necessary social programs and has had dire consequences for civil liberties in the US.

A Socialist Presidential campaign will be a voice not just against the current wars, but one that is against militarism as a whole. Maintaining an anti-militarist stance on the campaign trail will allow us to add our candidate's voice to those millions of Americans who oppose the policies of war-makers like Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. It sends the message to the world, especially through the media opportunities the campaign is afforded, that there is

resistance to the war machine inside the US.

Second, it is equally important that at a moment when so many Americans are paying attention to politics they are presented with a vision of an eco-socialist future. The lasting legacy of capitalism for our planet is one of deep environmental damage that has produced the extinction of entire animal species and global warming. The BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Explosion in 2010 stands as the clearest evidence of the suicidal nature of capitalist production and the impotence of capitalist-funded politicians, such as Barack Obama, who stood idly by in the face of the wanton destruction of the natural world.

We need a new kind of socialism for the 21st century that proposes a different relationship between humans and the natural world. This certainly means a rapid shift toward renewable forms of energy. In some cases this will require the democratic management of large-scale energy companies while in others the emphasis should be placed on decentralized local initiatives. Overall, eco-socialism is the politics of transition—the movement away from unsustainable levels of consumption to new ways of living that promote harmony with nature.

The lessons of eco-socialism—the damage done by the centralization of decision making in the hands of Corporate America and the short-term logic of the market—are equally evident in larger-scale questions about the capitalist economy. As a result, all human needs and all economic relationships are tested against the idea of maintaining profitability for corporations and maintaining the privileges of the 1%. Such approaches produce the current drive towards austerity. Both Obama and Romney are firmly committed to slashing social programs, to privatizing whatever parts of the State they can, and to increasing the role of the market in people's everyday lives. No social program is sacred. There are no political third rails. Once the November elections are

over, the cuts will begin.

This leads to the third reason why a Socialist electoral campaign is vitally necessary. By speaking against austerity pre-emptively we can help to prepare people for what will come after the elections. By encouraging broader and more militant actions against the current cuts, we can help to connect with local movements and initiatives—offering a socialist program to them and learning about local conditions and innovative forms of organizing from them. And, by proposing the idea of workers' control of the means of production—in its many forms from worker owned and run cooperatives, to democratically managed public services and to militantly democratic takeovers of large-scale corporations—we spread the message that another world is indeed possible, and that our ideas, our commitment and our actions can play a role in creating it.

Socialist electoral candidates in the US are certainly not alone in this effort. We see ourselves as being part of a growing international effort to represent socialist ideas in the electoral arena in direct defiance to the politics of austerity. The most recent effort to do so came in France where the Left Front – an electoral coalition of far-left organizations – candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon gained 11% of the national vote. Melenchon ran on a militant platform that included a 100% tax on all income above \$470,000. The Left Front's success proves that we need broader collaboration during the elections. The great weakness of the American Left is the continued separation of small organizations. Hopefully, this election cycle in the US will demonstrate the need for a discussion amongst left organizations about a unity candidate in the future.

The very existence of the Occupy Wall Street movement proves that the political terrain of American politics has shifted. The goal of our Socialist Party Presidential campaign is to argue for a democratically run society in which people gain control over their lives and their future. This is

something that capitalism can never deliver. We think that more Socialists, radical Ecologists, radical Trade Unionists and other left-wing people should consider running for elected office at the national and local levels. This would be a great accompaniment to our growing protest movements. Plus, we know what to do the day after the elections end—Resist!

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[This article is part of a [symposium on the elections](#) organized by *New Politics*.]