

“The US has one of the most undemocratic electoral systems in the world”

SEP candidate denounces exclusion of Libertarians, Greens from debates

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As the presidential candidate of the Socialist Equality Party, I denounce the decision of the US Commission on Presidential Debates to exclude Libertarian presidential candidate Gary Johnson and Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein from the first presidential debate scheduled for September 25 at Hofstra University in New York.

Regardless of our political differences with the Libertarians and Greens, we unequivocally support the right of their candidates to participate in the debates. All candidates in these elections, including my running-mate Niles Niemuth and I, should be able to debate the critical issues facing the population of the United States.

Recent polls show Johnson and Stein—who first had to overcome onerous ballot access laws to get on the ballot in a majority of states—would receive 8 percent and 4 percent of the national vote, respectively, in a four-way race with Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. If the US had a European-style parliamentary system, this would be enough to assure the two parties a significant number of seats.

The latest *New York Times* /CBS News poll showed 36 percent of voters under 30 planned to vote Johnson, Stein or another third-party candidate. A recent *USA Today* poll, moreover, showed that 76 percent of respondents want third party candidates to be included in national debates.

The United States government often postures as the proponent of “free and democratic elections” when it comes to preparing military violence or some other provocation against a geopolitical foe. In reality, the

United States has one of the most anti-democratic election systems in the world, which is designed to uphold the monopoly to two right-wing, militarist and big business parties.

Impossible hurdles are placed on third parties and independent candidates to even get on the ballot, often requiring tens of thousands of signatures of registered voters. This is accompanied by a virtual blackout by the corporate media of opponents of the Democrats and Republicans. In particular, there has been a blackout of the SEP presidential campaign, which alone has fought to expose the danger of a vast expansion of US military violence, whether Trump or Clinton wins.

The US Commission on Presidential Debates is not a neutral body. It was founded in 1987 by the two chairmen of the Republican and Democratic national committees and is today co-chaired by Mike McCurry, President Bill Clinton’s former press secretary, and Frank J. Fahrenkopf, Jr., the former chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Its board of directors includes former Republican US Senators John Danforth and Olympia Snowe; former US Congresswoman Jane Harman, a leading war hawk; Howard Graham Buffett, the son of billionaire Warren Buffett; and Richard Parsons, former chairman of Citigroup and Time Warner. Leon Panetta, Obama’s former CIA director and Secretary of Defense, recently retired from the commission’s board.

The alleged reason for excluding Johnson and Stein from the debates is that they did not reach the 15 percent threshold in the national polls used by the commission. The Green Party has pointed out that not

all of the polls used by the commission even include the Greens as an option.

More significantly, however, is the thoroughly anti-democratic and self-serving argument used to exclude any challenge to the two-party system. Third parties, they claim, do not have enough popular support to merit media attention or to participate in the debates with the major parties. Of course, if the public had access to oppositional views, in particular from socialists, such ideas would be far more popular. Moreover, such arguments only show the contempt of the two parties for the most elementary precepts of democracy, i.e., that the people should decide whose policies and ideas most closely align with their interests.

The degeneration of the electoral process and steady decay of democracy is the result of the enormous growth of social inequality in America. The US is a plutocracy ruled by a corporate-financial aristocracy that is siphoning off trillions from society to further enrich itself. The ruling class is well aware that there is broad opposition to endless wars, police killings, government spying and other forms of state repression, and the relentless attack on working-class living standards, and does not want any further “interference” from the masses in the elections.

Regardless of which one of these hated candidates wins the election—Clinton or Trump—the next administration will face a rising tide of social opposition. The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to build a mass political and socialist movement of the working class for the struggles against war, repression and inequality that will follow. The aim of such a movement is to end the economic and political dictatorship of the super-rich through the establishment of a workers’ government and the collective and democratic ownership of society’s wealth and productive resources by the working class.



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