

Kerry and the Left*

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS

The outcome of the supposedly critical and democratic elections in the US will be known shortly. In fact, however, the elections are neither critical nor democratic in any sense of the word.

- They are not critical, because they are not going to herald any significant change in the domestic or foreign policy of the US, whichever party eventually wins.
- They are not democratic, because the electoral result is always - particularly in the US - the outcome of the manipulation of the public by the elites and the mass media they control, while almost half the electorate (mainly the lower social strata) usually does not even bother to take part in the voting process not expecting any significant change out of it.

What is interesting in these elections, therefore, is not their probable outcome but the political stand of the American, and generally the reformist, Left with respect to these elections.

I should like to make clear, first of all, that I do not include in the aforementioned Left the 'reborn' (ex Marxists etc.) advocates of the New World Order, who have applauded every war launched by the transnational elite in the last fifteen years or so (the Gulf war, the NATO attack on Yugoslavia, the invasion of Afghanistan, the brutal occupation of Iraq which has already left over 100,000 Iraqis dead so far^[1]). I therefore do not include such analysts as Christopher Hitchens (an ex-Trotskyite!), Paul Berman, Michael Ignatieff, Mitchell Cohen (editor of *Dissent*), Todd Gitlin, Michael Walzer et. al., who have effectively been functioning as the system's apologists and, particularly after the events of 9/11, have not missed a single chance to repeat the transnational elite's propaganda –which has by now been partly abandoned by itself!^[2]

Much more interesting is the reformist American Left's stand (which, in fact, is the target of many of the above reborn apologists of the New World Order) including thinkers like Noam Chomsky and his close associate Michael Albert, Naomi Klein, Tariq Ali et al who support the new current of the US Left under the name 'Anybody but Bush'. The main aim of this new current is, as its name implies, the direct or indirect support of John Kerry, the Democratic party candidate, and the parallel disapproval by many of the independent candidate Ralph Nader. This, despite the fact that most of the members of this new current do not disagree with the view that there are no significant differences between the two main political parties contesting for power.

Thus, as far as domestic policy is concerned, the margins for significant differentiations

between the two parties are almost non-existent in the framework of today's neoliberal globalisation, which neither of these parties questions, as both of them support open and 'liberated' markets and everything that this implies: (proportionately) low tax burdens on the affluent social strata and corporations to provide incentives for saving and investments, minimisation of the public sector's social role in the provision of basic social services like health, education and unemployment benefits—with some marginal increases promised by the Democrats— and a direct or indirect enhancement of the huge and presently growing economic inequality. The inevitable consequence of such policies is that the US, which is characterised by members of this Left like Chomsky and Albert as an extraordinarily free country,^[3] also enjoys a higher degree of inequality than any other advanced capitalist country, condemning 100 million Americans (36 m of them living under the official poverty line) to take home almost as large a share of total income as do the richest 2.6 m, who also own nearly 40% of *all* of the nation's wealth!^[4]

As far as foreign policy is concerned, the differences between the two parties are also insignificant and are mainly confined to the issue of whether the present hegemonic foreign policy (Bush) will be continued or whether a multilateral foreign policy will be adopted instead, which would imply that all members of the transnational elite would take part in the crucial decisions concerning foreign military interventions (Kerry). However, the adoption of a multilateral foreign policy crucially depends on whether the American economic elite would be prepared to share the booty from these foreign adventures with the other members of the transnational elite—the basic cause of the schism that marked the Iraq invasion. In addition, the two parties are in complete agreement in enthusiastically supporting the Zionist position on Palestine: no right of return for the Palestinian refugees and a parallel welcome for an unlimited number of Jewish immigrants from all over the world; support for the illegal West Bank settlements in which the vast majority of Zionist settlers live and –consequently—support for some kind of plan like the Oslo agreement or the Roadmap which would lead to the creation of Palestinian Bandustans; support for the remorseless war against the Palestinian resistance organisations which are characterised as “terrorist”; the ostracisation of Arafat etc.

It is not, therefore, surprising that the more radical elements in this current support Kerry not on the grounds of Chomsky's baseless argument that, as far as presidential elections are concerned, «small differences can translate into large outcomes»^[5], but on the basis that Kerry's victory would help to raise the standard of the Left's discussion beyond Bush's supposed fundamentalism and dumbness.^[6] However, this argument does not recognise the real reasons for the insignificance of the US Left, namely, the general climate of 'possessive individualism' –a fundamental element of the 'American Dream'—which has been further enhanced by today's neoliberal consensus, and the dominance of obscurantist religious beliefs (42% of Americans declare themselves as reborn Christians and mainly support Bush!). The consequence of all this is the present paradox that, despite the incessant growth of inequality in neoliberal globalisation, society is becoming more and more conservative! To my mind, the reformist Left is particularly to blame for this development since, instead of attacking the systemic causes of this growing conservatism and helping to radicalise the lower strata who are suffering the implications of neoliberal globalisation most of all, it is taking part in the system's game of changing statecraft personnel ...

* This is a translation of an article that was first published in the fortnight column of Takis Fotopoulos in the mass circulation Athens daily *Eleftherotypia* on 30/10/2004.

[1] See the study in the Lancet medical journal, *The Guardian* (29/10/2004).

[2] See the perceptive article by Stephen Eric Bronner & Kurt Jacobsen “[Dubya's Fellow Travelers: Left Intellectuals and Mr. Bush's War](#)” in *Logos* 3.4 (Fall 2004).

[3] See, e.g. Michael Albert’s interview with *Eleftherotypia* (22/10/2004).

[4] See Charles Noble’s “[What John Kerry Won't Say about the "Two Americas"](#)” in *Logos* 3.4 (Fall 2004).

[5] Matthew Tempest , “Chomsky backs 'Bush-lite' Kerry”, *The Guardian* (20/3/2004).

[6] Naomi Klein, “Anybody but Bush - and then let's get back to work”, *The Guardian* (30/7/2004).