Kerry and the Left*

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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 …
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