

The Left Has Nowhere to Go

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“Either we begin to practice a fierce moral autonomy and rise up in multiple acts of physical defiance that have no discernable short-term benefit, or we accept the inevitability of corporate slavery. The choice is that grim.”

Ralph Nader in a CNN poll a few days before the 2008 presidential election had an estimated 3 percent of the electorate, or about 4 million people, behind his candidacy. But once the votes were counted, his support dwindled to a little over 700,000. Nader believes that many of his supporters entered the polling booth and could not bring themselves to challenge the Democrats and Barack Obama. I suspect Nader is right. And this retreat is another example of the lack of nerve we must overcome if we are going to battle back against the corporate state. A vote for Nader or Green Party candidate Cynthia McKinney in 2008 was an act of defiance. A vote for Obama and the Democrats was an act of submission. We cannot afford to be submissive anymore.

“The more outrageous the Republicans become, the weaker the left becomes,” Nader said when I reached him at his home in Connecticut on Sunday. “The more outrageous they become, the more the left has to accept the slightly less outrageous corporate Democrats.”

Nader fears a repeat of the left’s cowardice in the next election, a cowardice that has further empowered the lunatic fringe of the Republican Party, maintained the role of the Democratic Party as a lackey for corporations, and accelerated the reconfiguration of the country into a neo-feudalist state. Either we begin to practice a fierce moral autonomy and rise up in multiple acts of physical defiance that have no discernable short-term benefit, or we accept the inevitability of corporate slavery. The choice is that grim.

The age of the practical is over. It is the impractical, those who stand fast around core moral imperatives, figures like Nader or groups such as Veterans for Peace, which organized the recent anti-war rally in Lafayette Park in Washington, which give us hope. If you were one of the millions who backed down in the voting booth in 2008, don’t do it again. If you were one of those who thought about joining the Washington protests against the war where 131 of us were arrested and did not, don’t fail us next time.

The closure of the mechanisms within the power system that once made democratic reform possible means we stand together as the last thin line of defense between a civil society and its disintegration. If we do not engage in open acts of defiance, we will empower a radical right-wing opposition that will replicate the violence and paranoia of the state. To refuse to defy in every way possible the corporate state is to be complicit in our strangulation.

“The left has nowhere to go,” Nader said. “Obama knows it. The corporate Democrats know

it. There will be criticism by the left of Obama this year and then next year they will all close ranks and say 'Do you want Mitt Romney? Do you want Sarah Palin? Do you want Newt Gingrich?' It's very predictable. There will be a year of criticism and then it will all be muted. They don't understand that even if they do not have any place to go, they ought to fake it. They should fake going somewhere else or staying home to increase the receptivity to their demands. But because they do not make any demands, they are complicit with corporate power.

"Corporate power makes demands all the time," Nader went on. "It pulls on the Democrats and the Republicans in one direction. By having this nowhere-to-go mentality and without insisting on demands as the price of your vote, or energy to get out the vote, they have reduced themselves to a cipher. They vote. The vote totals up. But it means nothing."

There is no major difference between a McCain administration, a Bush and an Obama administration. Obama, in fact, is in many ways worse. McCain, like Bush, exposes the naked face of corporate power. Obama, who professes to support core liberal values while carrying out policies that mock these values, mutes and disempowers liberals, progressives and leftists. Environmental and anti-war groups, who plead with Obama to address their issues, are little more than ineffectual supplicants.

Obama, like Bush and McCain, funds and backs our unending and unwinnable wars. He does nothing to halt the accumulation of the largest deficits in human history. The drones murder thousands of civilians in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as they did under Bush and would have done under McCain. The private military contractors, along with the predatory banks and investment houses, suck trillions out of the U.S. Treasury as efficiently under Obama. Civil liberties, including habeas corpus, have not been restored. The public option is dead. The continuation of the Bush tax cuts, adding some \$900 billion to the deficit, along with the reduction of individual contributions to Social Security, furthers a debt peonage that will be the excuse to privatize Social Security, slash social services and break the back of public service unions. Obama does not intercede as tens of millions of impoverished Americans face foreclosures and bankruptcies. The Democrats provide better cover. But the corporate assault is the same.

"Obama has the formula now," Nader said. "You give the Republicans a lot of what they want. Many of them vote for you. You get your Democrat percentage. You weave a hybrid victory. That is what he learned in the lame-duck session. He gets praised as being a statesman and a leader and getting things done. Think of all the rewards he can contemplate while he is in Hawaii compared to what they were saying about him on Nov. 5. All the columnists and pundits say that now he can work with John Boehner. But once you take a broader view, it is the difference in the mph of corporatism. McCain is 50 miles per hour and Obama is 40 miles per hour.

"The left has disemboweled itself," Nader said. "It doesn't even have a strategy every four years like a good poker player. The best example is Richard Trumka and the AFL-CIO. Obama has given them nothing. Therefore, they are demanding nothing. They huff and puff. They make tough speeches. But Trumka hasn't even made Obama's campaign pledge of a \$9.50 minimum wage by this year an issue. If you want to increase consumer demand, what better way to do it than to unleash \$300 billion in wages? The card check for unionization, which Obama pledged as his No. 1 sop to the labor unions, is dead. The unions do not even

demand a hearing. And now wait till you see what they will do to the public employee unions. Part of it is their own fault. They are going to be crushed. Everybody is ganging up on them.

You have new class warfare. It is non-unionized lower income and middle class taking it out on the unionized middle-income public employees. It is a classic example of oligarchic manipulation. It will start playing out big time in New York State with Andrew Cuomo and others. They will start saying, 'Why are you getting this? Most workers who pay the taxes, who pay your salaries, are not getting this.' This plays."

The banishment from the corporate media, Nader argues, has been one of the major contributors to the demoralization and weakening of the left. Protests by the left, which get little national or local coverage, have steadily dwindled in strength across the country. The first protest gets little or no coverage and this leads to movements, as well as the voices of activists, being diminished and finally suffocated.

"The so-called liberal media, along with Fox, is touting the tea party and publicizing Palin," Nader said. "There was an editorial on Dec. 27 in The New York Times on the Repeal Amendment, the right-wing constitutional amendment to allow states to overturn federal law. The editorial writer at the end had the nerve to say there is no progressive champion. The editorial said that the liberals and progressives have faded out to let the tea party make history. And yet, for months, all The New York Times has done is promote Sarah Palin and Glenn Beck. They promote Newt Gingrich and the neocons on the Op-Ed pages. The book pages of the newspaper ignore progressive authors and pump all the right-wing authors.

"If we don't raise hell, we won't get any media," Nader said. "If we don't get any media, the perception will be that the tea party is the big deal.

"On one notorious Sunday, Oct. 10, two of The New York Times' segments led with a big story about Ann Coulter and how she will change her strategy because she is being outflanked by others," Nader said. "There was also a huge article on this anti-Semite against Arabs, this Islamaphobe, Pam Geller. Do you know how many pictures they had of Geller? Twenty on this front-page segment. The number of anti-war Op-Eds in The Washington Post over nine months in 2009 was 6-to-1 pro-war. We don't raise hell. We don't say Terry Gross is a censor. We don't say that Charlie Rose is a censor. We have got to blast publicly. We have got to hammer them, because they are the tribune of right-wing fascist forces.

"Three thousand people rallied to protest the invasion and massacre in Gaza two years ago," Nader said. "It was held four blocks from The Washington Post. It did not get a single paragraph. People should march over to the Post and say 'Fuck you! What are you doing here? You cover every little blip by the right-wing and you don't cover us?'

"They are afraid of the right-wing because the right-wing bellows, and they have become right-wing," Nader said of the commercial press. "They have become fascinated by the bias of Fox. And they publicize what Fox is biased on. The coverage of O'Reilly and Beck and their fights is insane. In the heyday of coverage in the 1960s of what we were doing, it was always less than it should have been, but now it is almost zero. Why do we take this? Why do we accept this? Why isn't Chris Hedges three times a year in the Op-Ed? Why is it always Paul Wolfowitz and Elliott Abrams and all these homicidal maniacs? Why are they there? Why is John Bolton constantly published in The Washington Post and The New York Times? Where is Andrew Bacevich?

Bacevich told me he has had five straight Op-Eds rejected by the Post and the Times in the last two years. And he said he is not inclined to send anymore. How many times do you hear Hoover Institution? American Enterprise Institute? Manhattan Institute. These goddamned newspapers should be picketed.”

The timidity and silencing of the left fuels the steady impoverishment of a dispossessed working class and a beleaguered middle class. It solidifies a corporate oligarchy that is dismantling the anemic regulatory agencies that once protected citizens from predatory corporations. The economic system is designed to bail out Wall Street rather than replace the trillions of dollars and millions of jobs lost by workers. And the only hope left, Nader argues, is if the conservatives in the right-wing movement break from the corporatists. If the big banks again start going to the cliff and calling for new bailouts, Nader says, this may provoke a schism between conservative groups embodied by figures such as Ron Paul, and corporate lackeys.

“Every major movement starts with field organizers, the farmers, unions, and the civil rights movement,” Nader said. “But there is nothing out there. We need to start learning from what was done in the past. All over the country people are pissed off. They hate Wall Street. They know they are being gouged. They know they are slipping behind. They know their kids will not be as well off as they were, and they were not that well off. But no one is putting it together. Who could put a thousand organizers in the field, besides George Soros? The labor unions. They have the money. They have a lot of cash. These idiots are going down. The UAW is a paradigm of a suicidal, supplicant labor union. It is disgusting. They are a puppy dog of GM, Ford and Chrysler. They have huge reserves. The labor unions could organize the country, but they are into their own emoluments and high salaries. The union leadership has so distanced itself from the rank and file that it is ashamed to do anything controversial. These union leaders will not go on TV on Labor Day because they do not want someone saying ‘Why are you making \$500,000 a year with a pension that is six times your rank and file?’ There is corruption at the top. The only way the union leaders can continue is to be in the shadows. And you don’t build a strong movement in the shadows.

“The black swan question is whether something will erupt that is rare, extreme and unpredictable,” Nader said. “It is amazing that it hasn’t happened in any pockets of the country. How much more can the oppressed take before they revolt? And can they revolt without organizers? These are the two important questions. You have got to have organizers, and as of now we don’t.”

Chris Hedges is a senior fellow at The Nation Institute. His newest book is [“Death of the Liberal Class.”](#)

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