

## WHY CRITICIZE THE DEMOCRATS?

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*“Why are you criticizing the Democrats when the Republicans are so dangerous?” This is a question I have been asked in one form or another during presidential election years ever since I began writing and editing for progressive and left publications a long time ago.*

The same type of question has been asked in recent days by several readers of the Activist newsletter, which I edit these days and is read by about 3,600 people, mostly liberals, progressives and leftists in New York state.

Here is my answer to them, focusing briefly on two categories: context and principle.

- Context: Of course I criticize President Obama’s record, but I have always made clear that the Republicans are more dangerous for democracy and the well-being of working people and their families than the Democrats. For example, a phrase I use repeatedly is that “Obama is head and shoulders above McCain” (and now Romney). Or “the center right, despite it’s abundant shortcomings, is preferable to the right/far right.”

There are important differences between the two parties, but liberals and progressives as they vote for Obama must also recognize that the Democrats utterly fail to meet the real needs of the people of the U.S. and the world. It takes a mass social upheaval to do so when “the lords of Wall Street own the government,” to quote Thomas Frank in his new best-seller “Pity the Billionaire.”

The American people, including many on the right as well as left, perceive the decisive power wielded by the 1% ruling class. Recent polls show 86% say Wall Street and its lobbyists have too much influence in Washington and that 77% think too much power is concentrated in the vaults of the rich. Both major parties brought this about and neither is equipped to reverse course. Frank, an enlightened liberal, mainly excoriates the right wing, but also offers trenchant criticism of the Obama Administration’s failures, suggesting the president acted more like Hoover than FDR in confronting the Great Recession.

As long as people merely vote “lesser evil” in every election, without at least also making efforts to openly critique the failures of the Democratic Party and the candidate they support, they will perpetually vote for lesser evil candidates.

This is precisely what the two-party system was constructed to accomplish. Our elections are bought and sold like commodities by the power elite that is in essential control of the political system. That’s why most elected politicians easily satisfy the demands of corporations, Wall St., and the wealthy. It is why today’s political system is an aspect of the degeneration of American democracy. What’s different today than just a couple of years ago is that millions of Americans are coming to understand this reality.

- Principle: We all have principles that guide our behavior. I observe several principles and ignore some others. The two most important that guide my political life are: (1) I hate wars of aggression, imperialism and militarism and will never support the presidential candidate of a political party that engages in such cruel and primitive practices. This is an absolute. As a young man I spent nearly a year in federal prison because I conscientiously and openly refused to carry a draft card on my person at all times, as was the law (I had two small children at the time and was technically exempt from the draft). (2) I hate systemic state inequality — racial, social and economic — and cannot vote for a president who will preside over, and perpetuate, such a system.

I began voting in the 1956 and have never voted for a Democratic or Republican presidential candidate because of their wars and inequality. (Local/regional politics is another matter.) I have always voted for the presidential candidate of a progressive or socialist third party for president. I don't tell Activist Newsletter readers for whom to vote, and probably up to 90% of them will vote for Obama in this election, including some on the left. I do try to influence readers to consider the bigger picture, the needs of the people, the immense shortcomings of "free market" capitalism and the serious contradictions in our democracy.

We live in extremely conservative times. Both ruling parties have been gravitating ever further to the right for decades. The GOP is now openly far right, and the Democrats are center right.

America is in decline. The traditional global economic powerhouse — the U.S., Europe and Japan — is systemically enmeshed in long-term economic stagnation.

U.S. military power is a grave danger to world peace, particularly as emerging economies demand a transformation from unipolar U.S. world hegemony to multi-polar global guidance. Our two ruling parties have been at war or planning for the next war without interruption for over 70 years. The Pentagon's plans for World War III are constantly updated as new weapons systems are perfected and new enemies are routinely manufactured. We are now living in a surveillance state as well as a militarist state. The erosion of our liberties is taking place every day. Federal, state and local police violence goes up as our rights go down.

The U.S. political system is incapable of resolving the various crises confronting humanity. I think of the environmental disaster as Washington fiddles while the world burns. I think of nuclear weapons as Washington refuses to even consider general and complete nuclear disarmament. I see the increasing poverty in our country and the immiseration of our working class and middle class while the rich get richer and Washington misleads the people.

I believe a better world is possible, don't you? A better democracy is possible. A more equal, cooperative and peaceful society is possible. But we must struggle for it.

I imagine some of our readers see this too, and that they know things must change, and that significant change depends on whether the people rise up, unite and fight back. That's what it is supposed to mean when we say we're part of the 99%. There's still time. We can still win.

So that's why I criticize the Democrats, too, when the Republicans are so dangerous.

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