

Who I Voted for and Why
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On the first Tuesday of last November, I voted for Kirsten Gillibrand, a Democrat who won an upset victory in New York's 20th Congressional District.

Gillibrand is a partner at Boies, Schiller and Flexner, a firm which represents some of the most notorious multinational corporations and their principals in civil and criminal litigation. For these labors, Gillibrand is paid handsomely, in the high six figure range, lucre funneled into a bank account already bloated with assets derived from her husband, the son of a CEO of major defense contractor. Despite belonging to the upper reaches of the plutocracy Gillibrand, in her campaign materials, bizarrely insists on placing her family within the ranks of the "middle class."

Based on this profile and, more significantly, her stated positions on trade, military spending, and "fiscal restraint," Gillibrand can be counted on to be a good soldier within the Clintonite DLC wing, continuing in a slightly altered capacity to carry water for the large industries and their lobbyists whom she has served for most of her career.

So what was I, a third party advocate, doing voting for such a candidate? I could rationalize my decision by noting that there were no third party candidates on the ballot, but that would be disingenuous. Given that it was a close race, I would have suppressed the gag reflex which usually prevents me from voting Democratic.

Nor was the reason that Gillibrand was the "lesser evil" though that she demonstrably was. The Republicans yet again managed to produce a candidate less palatable than the most cynical corporate Dem in this case a standard issue pro-life, gun toting, homophobic, race baiting, reactionary who, to top it off, according to press accounts, beats his wife.

The reason has to do with what I and many others have taken as a necessary goal for some years-namely for the Democratic Party to join the Whigs on history's dustbin with a genuine progressive party, more or less along the lines of european social democratic parties moving in to fill the void left in its absence.

It might seem paradoxical that the undermining of the Democratic Party involves voting Democratic, but it should be apparent that that is the case. It follows from the fact that the only way a progressive third party can seriously compete for power is when the political center of gravity has shifted so that it is effectively the second party, as it has in many cities and increasingly in many states.

Aside from common sense, the main evidence we have for this on the ground are the electoral results of the one currently active alternative party, the Greens, and this is pretty much unambiguous: Green victories have occurred exclusively in Democratic machine cities, including Santa Monica, Minneapolis, New Haven, Portland, Maine, with the most dramatic the Green upsurge in San Francisco culminating in Matt Gonzalez coming

heartbreakingly close to becoming Mayor (for which he received the overwhelming majority of Democratic votes). The Greens' one important result from 2006 was electing the Mayor of Richmond, California, a predominantly black post-industrial city of 110,000 in the northern Bay Area, governed by Democratic administrations for as long as anyone can remember.

While the 2006 elections showed third parties, at best, in a holding pattern, they did contain the good news that the Republican descent into pariah status is accelerating. Democratic single party rule, previously established only on the local level, is now being consolidated on the state level with blue states becoming deeper blue. For example, having imposed a fundamentalist Mormon governor on the citizenry of Massachusetts the Republican party there is now in shambles. The Green Party ran more serious candidates for statewide office, two of which acquired over 350,000 votes, confirming their status as the second party in Massachusetts, according to the Boston Globe. A nearly unbroken series of scandals have hollowed out the core of the Illinois Republican Party allowing a Green Gubernatorial candidate to receive nearly 350,000 votes while still providing a safe margin for an ethically challenged Democrat to coast to victory. Having lost three congressional seats, the governorship, several seats in the state legislature, the Republican party in New York state is on life support. While the presence of the Working Families Party combined with Green Party dysfunctionality has prevented a serious, progressive alternative from emerging here, the conditions are ripe for one developing. These will increasingly present themselves as the Republicans sink into irrelevance in more areas outside of their bible belt strongholds.

What is needed are candidates who are serious about building an organized opposition by running winning campaigns on whatever level these are possible. The key word here is building for what has characterized many self identified third party advocates is a juvenile obsession with, in their words, "fucking up the system" through losing spoiler campaigns. These not only are explicitly hostile to the notion of building anything but prevent the single party dominance that is necessary for a serious opposition to arise. Once the movement recognizes the reality of the openings which the political system, even in its profoundly corrupt and anti-democratic form, is increasingly making available, there is reason to hope for a change: ultimately in the political landscape but, prior to this, a change in the demobilizing cynicism which has preventing the left from pro-actively participating in power and consigned it to the marginal role of protesting power from the outside rather than participating in power from within.