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City progressives should no longer trust Dems

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We in the New Haven Green Party certainly applaud Shonu Gandhi's '03 call ("Student leadership in Ward 1 invaluable to both city and Yalies," 1/25) for a return to a politics of basic decency in New Haven and in the nation.

But there is a problem if she, or any progressive, expects the Democratic Party to be part of the solution. It is not just the tradition of corruption of machine Democrats which has imposed real suffering on New Haven. Much of what we see before our eyes in New Haven is the direct responsibility of the policies which Democrats in Washington, D.C., many of them once well-intentioned Ivy League liberals, enthusiastically endorsed.

If progressives are serious about addressing poverty in New Haven, clearly they cannot expect much from a party whose standard bearer in the White House presided over two terms of increases in homelessness and income inequality.

And it would be equally mysterious why any progressive would expect the party which explicitly endorsed "ending welfare as we know it" to rethink its commitment to what Gandhi correctly characterized in her column as "Connecticut's draconian welfare reform."

If progressives are serious about declining rates of unionization, clearly we can't expect solutions from a party which has, for nearly a half century, made no attempt to repeal Taft-Hartley, the act largely responsible for forcing labor to compete with business on an unequal playing field.

Nor would we expect the party which rammed through NAFTA and GATT in the face of the universal opposition of organized labor to have much credibility when it offers solutions to job loss resulting from employers' going south for sweatshop wages.

If progressives are serious about peace and committed to non-violence, we certainly can't hold out much hope for a party whose leadership -- including the junior senator from Connecticut, former Democrat Joseph Lieberman '64 -- has consistently supported proposals like Star Wars and Plan Colombia.

Nor should we look forward to anything other than unchecked militarism from a party whose likely nominee is currently calling for an expansion of the bombing in the Middle East beyond that being pursued by the current Republican administration.

If we are committed to social justice, we would be fooling ourselves if we were to expect anything of the kind from a party which has presided over the ballooning of the nation's prison population to over 2 million. And if we are serious about the scandal of the one-quarter of African-American New Haveners currently in prison or on parole mostly for low-level drug offenses, we can hardly expect a party that endorsed and implemented the cruel and senseless "war on drugs" to offer solutions.

Clearly, progressives can only give up hope for a party that has consistently demonstrated its contempt for us by signing on to all of the above while unconditionally carrying out the orders of the lobbyists, corporations and white-collar law firms that bankroll it.

Fortunately for progressive members of the Yale community, there is a party in New Haven which takes its commitment to social, economic and environmental justice seriously.

Already, members of the New Haven Greens have taken the lead in keeping the English Station power plant closed, opposing the cross-sound cable, supporting an expansion of New Haven's living wage, opposing illegal dumping, and questioning corporate welfare giveaways.

The Greens can be in the forefront of social, economic and environmental justice because, unlike the Democrats, we don't take contributions from corporations, real estate interests and contracting firms that make their profits on the backs of ordinary New Haveners.

It may be a hard pill for loyal Democrats to swallow, but the day that they can claim to be a legitimate voice for progressive politics is by now long in the past. It is time for all progressives to build a new party from the rubble of the old in New Haven.

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