



Winona LaDuke Speaks on Why She's Running on Green Ticket

By **Winona LaDuke**

I want to talk a little bit about why I'm doing this [running for Vice President on the Green Party line], and what has brought me to it. A lot of you probably don't know much about my history or what we do in my community, but I've worked for about 20 years on environmental issues from pretty much a Native perspective. During the course of that time I've tried just about every single recourse to try to solve these issues. I've been in court, I've been to Congress, I've been to the United Nations, I've been to almost every single administrative hearing process in this country that you could go to. In the course of that work I've discovered that most of those processes don't work, or sometimes they work and we'll stall something, but the thing that comes up time after time is the issue of the electoral process, the fact that bad people have been elected, and bad people beholden to corporations make bad decisions that affect all of us.

So the question is posed to people like you and I, what are we going to do? I'm probably like a lot of other people; I've not been a big participant in electoral politics, largely because, if you think of it from a Native perspective, if they had one person one vote, 100 years ago, things would look quite a bit differently in the United States

than they look now. But they did not actually give Indian people the right to vote in this country until we were less than 1% of the population. That's indicative of how disenfranchised our community is from the American system. Obviously that's intentional, and obviously there are a lot of pieces to that, including that we have our own sovereignty.

In addition, if one considers the circumstances which we are in, I'm someone who believes that we as progressive people, or as people from these rural communities, or people from communities like mine who see the back end of bad public policy—we have to rise to the challenge and go through the process of recovering democracy so that decisions and public policy are written not for the richest people in this country, but for the poorest. So if I believe that, then I actually must put my own arm into that process, and struggle with that as each of us do. As my friend Ralph will say, it's to rise from being a private citizen to being a public citizen.

As I've traveled around there's an excellent response as I go to different places. Now first, I have to issue a disclaimer. I have a four-month old newborn, I'm definitely the only Vice-Presidential candidate who is nursing, which means that I do not travel as much as my colleague Ralph, who is not

nursing in this election year. But as I go around the country I find what I'm sure a lot of you find, that a lot of people are frustrated with the options, a lot of people don't think that there's much that they can do, a lot of people have disempowered themselves. The encouragement that I try to give in my talks as I go to these different places is that change is made by people like you and me. Change is made by common people; it is not made by someone who comes from someplace else and fixes it. There's nobody who's going to fix it but us.

The work that we do on my own White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota, the people who are resisting plans to suck out all the water from an aquifer up in northern Wisconsin, the people who resist those things are people like you and I. The words I give are usually to encourage people towards that, and I find that it really resonates with people all around the country. They want to feel like there is something they can do.

We all will agree that electoral politics is an important part of an overall piece of how you change things, but it's not the only thing that you do. You engage in your political work in every arena you can, whether it's rebuilding your community, whether it's litigating, whether it's seeking some kind of administrative redress. You need to continue all those pieces of work, but you move towards elec-

toral activity. People would like to feel, in my experience, that there's somebody they can vote for who meant something to them. I hear that a lot of places. This one farmer came up to me last year and he says, I must tell you that I'm a violent and secret supporter of you. I think that there are a lot of people out there who are like that, who are just common people who would like to believe in something, who know that people died for the right to vote in this country and they'd like to cast their vote for something that they believed in.

So I would say that there's an increasing interest in this, and I will try to do my part to keep encouraging this process, to encourage people to engage in it.

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you'll get the same answer ten times: it is safer for the campesinos or workers in the field; safer for the workers who consume, and safer for the workers' families. It is, after all a socialist country. "Agriculture of the humble, by the humble and for the humble" said one government functionary.

But all ten will admit, not even pressed, that the real incentive was the loss of the Soviet support.

When the Soviets were supplying chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, and tractor driven equipment to apply them, "we used to spray the crops every six days," said INISAV engineer Esperanza Rijo-Camacho "whether they needed it or not."

"Luckily, and I choose my words carefully, luckily, the roof caved in 1989," said Mavis Alvarez of the Cuban Small Farmers' Association (ANAP) which has decided to go as organic as possible because the system is sustainable. "It made us pay attention to that which was already there - more rational methods."

"We like to call it 'ecological agriculture'," Alvarez said. "It is a much wider concept which involves harmony with the land, and the environment. If we don't save our natural resources, we are without a basis for development."

"The campesino in the land is much more able to cooperate with the environment" than large scale farms, she said. "He has traditionally been conservative because of the impact on his land."

And in Cuba the small farmer is no small potatoes. "We have about 250,000 members and with their families that averages out to about a million people working the land," she said, "And we are not a non-governmental organization. We are part of the revolution and support it."

"It is not a matter of convincing anyone like American organic farmers sometimes try to do," she said, "the state is committed to ecological farming."

Yes it is, said Juan Jose Leon Vega, the director of external relations for the Agricul-

ture Ministry. "I don't believe many people know how big organic farming in Cuba really is," he said. "The day the market opens Cuba will be the most important source for America for organic products. Americans want clean food. We grow the cleanest food on the continent. No other country on the continent has the capacity, the possibilities, and the initiative. Also, we are close."

The Crop Protection Institute has some 222 local Centers for the Reproduction of Entomophages and Entomopathogens (CREES) which produce extremely inexpensive biological agents made up of bugs who

eat pesky bugs, virus that combat bad viruses, larvae that kill other pests, and all manner of natural weapons to combat what campesinos universally call "the plague," be it animal, virus or fungus.

In some cases the sprays are made up of sliced up bodies of the pest themselves, mixed with water sprayed in the often successful theory that no species wants to hang around with the smell of its own dead. In all cases the stuff is made down the road - and, if all goes well, at a time when it is needed locally. When farmer Cirrillo Rodriquez, 65, has a problem, seven technically trained members of the local government committee are available to talk to him.

They know the signs indicating which "plague" is hitting his rice, corn, root crops, pigs, chickens and vegetables, and what biological products can be applied to help. He gets the sprays from the local CREE.

Castro's government has banned the use of any chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides within the borders of any Cuban municipality - to protect the workers, their families and the water they drink.

This is not an inconsiderable factor. According to minister Leon-Vega there are exactly 2,600 large scale organic gardens in cities throughout the island, 3,600 smaller, intensive gardens, and 93,948 little parcels

run by families for their own use, and every single mother's son of them is an organic farmer. "We sell them their seeds, and their fertilizer and their pest controls, and it is all organic."

The result, by and large is clean food for Cubans. Marty Bourque of Food First, an Oakland California think tank specializing in food policy worldwide, said "because of the drastic reduction of pesticides and fertilizers overall in Cuba, it has to be much cleaner than any other country, in general terms. And in particular terms too. In fruit and vegetables, for example, and these are very important

areas because the stuff comes in fresh off the fields. "In the large-scale production of such things as sugar, rice, and potatoes, they use very little insecticide, and only where

they absolutely have to, and then only on the areas that absolutely need it, unlike some places in the United States where they, whether they admit it or not, use pesticides by the calendar, whether they need it or not.

"The food is not labeled organic, or certi-

fied organic, it just is organic. And it is not a two-tier market with organic food only for those who can afford it. It is organic food for everyone." "What are the chances of it reaching American shores? Very remote. One entry to the American market might have been through setting up a joint venture with some European countries to produce the biological pest control solutions.

"We had a lot of interested parties," said Dr. Emilio Fernandez of the Crop Protection Institute, "but they were afraid if they did business with us, their own exports (to the United States) would be cut off." So today it is Cuba. The world tomorrow, and the United States maybe a little after that.

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