

Pseudo-left to lay foundations for Syriza-type alliance at upcoming Chicago conference

Eric London
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On May 2-3, a number of pseudo-left and organizations around the Democratic Party will converge in Chicago to discuss the possibility of forming an electoral alliance based on an anti-working class orientation to the Democrats.

The event, which is hosted by Solidarity, Socialist Alternative and the International Socialist Organization, is called the “Electoral Action Committee: Future of Left and Independent Politics.” Those on the list of official event endorsers are either (1) Democratic and Green Party elected officials, (2) trade union bureaucrats, or (3) those who aspire to be in categories (1) and (2) themselves, or to have high-paying positions in their service.

The content of the conference’s agenda, which is displayed on the event’s website, makes clear that the organizers’ goal is to build a political vehicle that will integrate the pseudo-left into the American governmental apparatus at all levels.

Of the 14 panel discussions scheduled for the conference, none deal with questions of war, social inequality, poverty, or the attack on democratic rights. The role of the Obama administration is not addressed in the agenda, and the Democratic Party is ignored outright except for one neutral reference.

Thirteen of the 14 panels relate to how best to elevate representatives of the pseudo-left groups into positions of official power. The event’s participants have their eyes on the prize: city council seats, mayoralties, even the leadership of police departments. The upper-middle-class radicals are gathering in Chicago not to oppose the government, but to become part of it.

“In order to begin building a viable electoral alternative, we first need to forge unity between our disparate campaigns,” the conference’s official page reads. The conference organizers propose “to discuss the ‘why’ goals of running and winning in elections,” and “to share challenges after being elected to office and strategies for opening political space for social movements.”

The meeting will include “inspirational talks” which will “gather experienced candidates” in order “to seek

representation from people of color, youth, women, LGBTQ, and disability activists.”

Nowhere does the conference address the fundamental question of the purpose of electoral activity. Genuine revolutionary socialists do not reject, on principle, participating in bourgeois elections. Under certain conditions, electoral campaigns can advance the struggle for the development of the political consciousness of the working class.

But such campaigns are never undertaken with the idea of “capturing” the capitalist state and using it to undertake “progressive” tasks. The state is a machinery of repression that arose historically out of the division of society into classes, to defend the wealth and privileges of the tiny minority of rulers against the exploited majority. The task of revolutionary socialists, if elected to office, is to use such positions to further expose the nature of the state and assist the efforts of the working class in a revolutionary struggle for power against it.

Those who have called the Chicago conference are implacably opposed to such a perspective, since their goal is to obtain positions of influence—and income—with the capitalist state, not to put an end to capitalism.

Tellingly, the agenda notes that these subjects will “intersect a broad range of non-sectarian left-independent organizers.” The term “non-sectarian” has a specific political significance here: it means that these “organizers” have no principled opposition to working with the Democratic Party or the trade union bureaucracy, or any other agents of big business.

“Sectarian,” in turn, is their term of abuse for the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site*, who fight intransigently for the political independence of the working class from the Democratic Party and all other varieties of bourgeois politics.

The careerist aspirations of those who will be in attendance in Chicago are underscored by the title of one panel event, titled “You’re elected! So now what?”

The answer to this question can be found in the example of the Greek Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza), which won elections in January and formed a coalition government with the far-right, xenophobic Independent Greeks (ANEL) party. Within 30 days of entering government, Syriza repudiated its campaign promises and began implementing the austerity demands of the European banks. A panel at the Chicago conference will be held on the subject of how best the participants can emulate the model of Syriza and its Spanish counterpart, Podemos.

Those Chicago convention supporters who already hold elected office provide further proof of the anti-working class record of the pseudo-left. Former Richmond, California mayor and sitting City Councilperson Gayle McLaughlin will be attending the conference and exemplifies this right-wing record.

McLaughlin is the founder of the Richmond Progressive Alliance, a group that is explicitly aligned to sections of the Democratic Party. In 2010, McLaughlin ran for re-election on a platform of adding hundreds of police officers to the department in the heavily impoverished city. Under her mayoralty, the city made a corrupt deal with the Chevron Corporation where the city agreed to halt an effort to remove a loophole in the tax code that allowed the multinational company to avoid utility taxes. In 2012, McLaughlin supported 1 percent salary cuts for workers earning between \$40,000 and \$100,000, noting that “belt tightening” was required.

The panel will also feature Angela Walker, who ran for Sheriff of Milwaukee County in 2014. In other words, while the police rampage through the country killing civilians on a daily basis, the pseudo-left gives platform space to individuals who either support increasing the size of the police or who want to don the uniform, strap on a pistol and run the police department themselves. Another supporter of the conference, Seattle City Councilperson Kshama Sawant, will send her greetings to another panel, titled “Elections, Labor, and the Social Movements: Why We Need Independent Political Campaigns.” Sawant, a member of Socialist Alternative, attended a fundraiser for Democratic Party leader Larry Gossett in February after the latter endorsed the building of a youth prison with 150 jail cells in Seattle. Her term in office has demonstrated her orientation toward a cabal of former Wall Street speculators and Democratic Party leaders in Washington state.

In other words, the answer to the question “You’re elected, now what?” is to take one step after another to cement relations with the Democrats and Republicans and continue their policies. Additional panels will address every detail about how to raise money for city council campaigns, how to run for local nonpartisan office like sheriff or judge,

how to win ballot access, and how to pressure the Democratic Party into raising the minimum wage.

The content of the agenda makes clear that the leaders of the participating organizations see themselves in the professors, petty officials, trade union bureaucrats and “activists” who now direct the Greek state and oversee not only the imposition of austerity on the Greek working class, but also the police crackdown on social opposition.

Many of those leading the roundtable discussions in Chicago doubtless aspire to occupy high positions in the US government. They look to Greece and wonder whether there will someday be a “Secretary of State McLaughlin,” “Secretary of Defense Walker,” or even a “President Sawant.”

The pseudo-left sees both an opportunity and a danger in the growing hostility amongst the working class and young people to the political establishment. On the one hand, they hope to “open up political space” to secure for the upper middle class a more privileged position in academia, the trade union bureaucracy and government.

On the other hand, this layer—tied by their mutual funds and stock portfolios to Wall Street—is terrified that an independent movement of the working class for social equality would threaten their privileged existence.

In the final analysis, whatever program is put forward by the pseudo-left at the Chicago conference will be defined by this layer’s hostility to the working class. It is this objective fact that drives the conference organizers to seek to create an electoral platform that will tie leftward moving working people and youth to the Democratic Party and the nationalist trade union bureaucracies.

The political antipode to the Chicago pseudo-left unity conference will also be taking place the same weekend. On Sunday, May 3, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International will be hosting our second annual International May Day Online Rally to unite the international working class against war, dictatorship and social inequality on the basis of a revolutionary socialist perspective.



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