

The ‘Peoples’ Summit’ in Chicago: Democrats, pseudo-left groups prepare new trap for workers and youth

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As Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders prepares to formally back Hillary Clinton’s campaign for US president sometime between now and the convention in July, sections of the Democratic Party and its periphery are working to contain and smother the oppositional sentiment that found expression in support for Sanders’s campaign.

On June 17-19, a wide array of organizations around the Democratic Party will meet in Chicago for the “Peoples’ Summit,” which has already attracted national attention in the media. CNN reported that the summit will draw together the “progressive army that stood at the front lines of his ‘political revolution.’” The *Washington Post* writes that some 2,500 are expected to attend the summit, to “talk about many of the same issues Sanders championed.”

Explaining the purpose of the summit, a spokesman for National Nurses United, one of its main sponsors, said, “There’s going to be some genuine discussion and debate about how to unify all these disparate movements, how to take the energy and enthusiasm, and coalition that came together around the Sanders campaign and continue it.”

A manifesto published by the summit’s organizers states: “We envision this Summit as further deepening the relationship between participating organizations rooted in principled anti-corporate politics, development of community leaders, direct action not based on partisan identification, and strategic organizing to build power.”

The claim to non-partisanship is a fraud, since most of those participating are Democrats (though, on the web site, no speakers are identified with their party affiliation).

The central purpose of the summit is to build political support for the Democratic Party even as it moves to nominate its most right-wing candidate in history, Hillary Clinton, beholden to Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus.

The components of this “coalition” are a who’s who of “left” Democratic Party circles, as well as organizations that are nominally independent of the Democratic Party but function as auxiliary and pressure groups.

The main speakers include Tulsi Gabbard, the Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii with ties to sections of the military, who is a prominent supporter of Bernie Sanders; Roseann Demoro, executive director of National Nurses United, which endorsed Sanders; Canadian author Naomi Klein; and Shaun King, a blogger identified with the Black Lives Matter campaign.

Speakers also will include Sanders campaign staffers; local Democratic Party elected officials like Chicago’s “Chuy” Garcia; CNN commentator Van Jones, a one-time advisor for Obama; various union officials; Seattle City Councilperson Kshama Sawant, a member of Socialist Alternative; Bhaskar Sunkara, editor of *Jacobin* magazine; and others.

Supporting organizations for the event include Sanders groups (People for Bernie, Latinos for Bernie, African Americans for Bernie, etc.); unions that endorsed Sanders (National Union of Healthcare Workers, United Electrical Workers); and political organizations that formally backed Sanders (Socialist Alternative, Democratic Socialists of America, the Communist Party USA, the Progressive Democrats of America).

Notable in the list of sponsors are the International Socialist Organization and the Global Greens. The pseudo-left ISO has maintained a formal independence from the Sanders campaign, supporting instead the Green Party and its likely candidate, Jill Stein. The difference between the ISO and groups like Socialist Alternative, however, is of a purely tactical character. All defend capitalism and essentially function as factions of the Democratic Party, as their participation in the summit makes clear.

The holding of the People's Summit corresponds to a definite political logic and function. When Sanders launched his presidential campaign, he did so from the standpoint of bolstering flagging support for the Democratic Party and the political system as a whole after seven years of the Obama administration.

As Sanders used the term, his “political revolution” always meant increasing voter turnout and support for the Democratic Party: “Democrats at the White House on down will win when there is excitement and a large voter turnout, and that is what this campaign is doing,” he explained in October of last year.

The Sanders campaign won far more support than the candidate himself anticipated, however, reflecting the deep anger among workers and young people over social inequality and a political system dominated by the rich. Sanders’s denunciations of the “billionaire class” and his self-identification as a “democratic socialist” contributed to his success, under conditions in which more young people now identify as socialist than capitalist.

As Sanders sees it, his challenge is now to prevent those attracted to his campaign from breaking with the Democratic Party. He has not yet formally endorsed Hillary Clinton in part because he wants to keep the attention of his supporters on the Democratic convention, claiming that he may be able to wrest significant concessions from Clinton on aspects of the Democratic Party platform—a meaningless document that has no impact on policy.

In a speech to supporters on Thursday night, Sanders called for “the political revolution [to] continue into the future.” After referring to many of the indicators of social crisis in the US that have motivated support for his campaign, Sanders went on to explain that this support must now be focused on “defeating Donald Trump,” that is, electing Clinton. “The major political

task we face in the next five months is to make certain that Donald Trump is defeated and defeated badly. And I personally intend to begin my role in that process in a very short period of time.”

Sanders added that it was necessary to take the “energy” expressed in support for his campaign “into the Democratic National Convention on July 25” in order to ensure that the “Democratic Party passes the most progressive platform in its history and that Democrats actually fight for that agenda.” In this way, the Democrats can become “a party of working people and young people, and not just wealthy contributors.” He called on all his supporters and volunteers to run for office as Democrats in local elections throughout the country.

The “People’s Summit” is aimed at providing the organizational framework for this operation. The various organizations that have been gathered around it are seeking to continue the basic work of the Sanders campaign when Sanders is no longer running—that is, containing the anger and opposition fueled by the crisis of American capitalism, and channeling it behind Clinton and the Democratic Party, through November and beyond.



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