

“Socialist Convergence”: A gathering of political bankrupts in Philadelphia

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The Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania began yesterday and will conclude later this week with the formal nomination of Hillary Clinton to be the party’s presidential candidate. This will set up a contest between Clinton, who will run a right-wing, pro-war campaign, and Donald Trump, the billionaire businessman nominated by the Republicans last week.

The conclusion of the nominating process for the two main parties of American capitalism will not resolve the deep political crisis in the United States. The widespread support for the campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, who called for a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class,” was the initial expression of a political radicalization of workers and youth throughout the country. Sanders is now attempting to convince his supporters to back Clinton, for which he was booed even by his own delegates in a speech on Monday morning.

The Vermont senator, who even as an “Independent” worked closely with the Democrats, understood from the beginning that his task was to exploit the political naïveté of his supporters to direct opposition back into the Democratic Party, a party of war and social reaction. In carrying out this task, Sanders has had the assistance of a network of organizations and groups that operate around and within the gigantic gaseous planet that is the Democratic Party.

Many of these same organizations are now gathered in Philadelphia this week for their own “Socialist Convergence” meeting held simultaneously with the DNC. The main sponsors of the event include the Democratic Socialists of America; the Green Party; the International Socialist Organization; Socialist Alternative; Solidarity; the Party for Socialism and Liberation; and others. Speakers at the event will include Jill Stein, the likely Green Party candidate for US president; Bhaskar Sunkara, editor of *Jacobin* magazine; Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative’s representative in the Seattle City Council; and various members of the sponsoring organizations.

Adopting the phraseology of the Sanders campaign, the conference is organized under the headline: “Carrying forward the political revolution: What’s next for the movement?” If the organizers were honest, they would instead have adopted the slogan, “Now that Sanders has endorsed Clinton, how do we forge a new political trap for the working class?”

Much of the discussion within and between these organizations is over whether or not to endorse Jill Stein and the Green Party.

One of the organizations that has openly backed Sanders over the past year is Solidarity. In a statement posted on the International Viewpoint web site, published by the Pabloite International Secretariat, Solidarity now calls “For Jill Stein and Independent Politics.”

The statement begins by gushing that Sanders’ “campaign for a ‘political revolution’ lit up the 2016 primary election season like a meteor across the sky” and notes that many of its members “participated in the Labor for Bernie project,” an initiative by a section of the union bureaucracy to support Sanders during the primaries. Yet it goes on to assert that Sanders campaigned “within the parameters of a rigged two-party system” and that “there was never any doubt” about the outcome: Sanders backing Clinton. If in fact the entire process was rigged and known from the beginning, why did Solidarity so vigorously promote Sanders’ campaign, and why does it continue to hail his “political revolution”?

Groups like Solidarity never give an accounting for their previous positions. For decades they have backed one “revolutionary” capitalist party or organization after the next. When these organizations inevitably betray whatever promises they made, it is treated as an unexpected and unfortunate turn of events. They are absolutely opposed to defining the class character of forces they are backing. While they make references to Marx at various times, their method bears no relationship to Marxism, which evaluates political tendencies not by what they call themselves but by the class content of their program and the historical experiences of the working class movement.

In 2008, they hailed the election of Obama as a “transformative” and “historic” event on the basis of the fact that he was African-American. One writer for Solidarity declared that “Obama’s election is first and foremost an unprecedented victory—a blow against 400 years of Black slavery, legal segregation and institutional racism.”

The actual outcome of eight years of the Obama administration has not led Solidarity, or any of its co-thinkers, to consider why they got it so wrong. Instead, with the campaign of Bernie Sanders, they saw a new opportunity to inflate illusions in the Democratic Party and bourgeois politics as a whole. With Sanders’ endorsement of Clinton, it is on to the next political maneuver: support for Jill Stein.

According to Solidarity, the “political revolution” will now be continued by the Green Party. “If you want a ‘political revolution’

that goes beyond empty promises,” they write, “the time to break with the capitalist parties is now” by supporting the Green Party campaign.

There is in fact nothing anti-capitalist about the Green Party. It is a capitalist party with a capitalist program. Where the Greens have come to power, particularly in Germany, they have quickly abandoned their pacifist and reformist slogans to support war and the assault on the working class.

As for the “independence” of the Green Party campaign, this was clearly exposed when Stein offered to cede her position as the likely head of the party’s ticket to Sanders, a Democrat who had just finished campaigning in the Democratic Party primaries. Stein responded to Sanders’ appeals for all his supporters to vote for Clinton by urging him to join forces with the Green Party instead. In a statement released late last week, she urged “Bernie” to “sit down with me to explore potential collaboration with the Green Party to ensure that the political revolution will prevail.”

The International Socialist Organization, the US representative of the state capitalist tendency, takes essentially the same line as Solidarity. For most of the primary process, the ISO has called for a Green Party vote, criticizing groups like Socialist Alternative and Solidarity for campaigning for Sanders. This was not out of any principled differences with the promotion of the Democratic Party. Rather, the ISO has been concerned that by campaigning for Sanders, the rotten politics that all these groups share would be exposed once Sanders endorsed Clinton.

Along with the rest of the participants in the “Socialist Convergence,” the ISO now hopes that these tactical differences can be laid to rest. In “Why you should converge on Philadelphia,” the ISO’s Todd Chretien (a one-time Green Party candidate for US Senate) writes, “[N]ow that Socialist Alternative and Solidarity have come out squarely for Stein, organizers from groups supporting her campaign can compare notes and, hopefully, come out of the Convergence all pulling in the same direction.”

In fact, the ISO is perfectly willing to “pull in the same direction” with groups that are now calling for supporting Clinton. It cites favorably a statement by the Young Democratic Socialists (the youth movement of the Democratic Socialists of America, a faction of the Democratic Party), which states: “Regardless of our agreements and disagreements with the Sanders endorsement, or continuing to debate the presidential candidate to vote for, now is the time to consider what we as a movement will do to make real change happen.”

The ISO goes on to state that “Convergence organizers want to welcome participation from any activists, whether they support Stein or believe that voting ‘against Trump’ and therefore for Hillary Clinton is a necessary evil at this stage.”

Beyond support for Stein in the election, the pseudo-left outfits gathered in Philadelphia are discussing the possibility of forming a new political organization, in part modeled on the “Coalition of the Radical Left” (Syriza) in Greece.

In “A Socialist Convergence in Philadelphia,” Solidarity writes, for example, that it hopes that all “non-sectarian socialists” can talk about the “prospects for a ‘Next Left’ from below, as the latest experiment of a longstanding orientation to left regroupment/refoundation and the need for a ‘big tent’ multi-

tendency pole of attraction.” “Non-sectarian socialists” means, in general, anyone except those with political principles, and, in particular, the Socialist Equality Party.

Similarly, in its recently adopted perspectives document, Socialist Alternative—which during the primaries set up the Movement4Bernie organization to support the Democratic Party candidate—calls for the formation of a “party of the 99%” that will have a “populist multi-class character” rather than “a clearly pronounced working class character.”

Again, no conclusions are drawn from previous political experiences. Socialist Alternative states vaguely that “Syriza, Podemos [in Spain], the already forgotten NPA [New Anti-Capitalist Party] in France or the SSP [Scottish Socialist Party] in Scotland had only a short time of ascending hopes.” This is presumably a reference to the fact that after coming to power in 2015 on the basis of mass opposition to austerity, Syriza implemented measures that go further in attacking the jobs and living conditions of Greek workers than any of its predecessors. This nevertheless remains the model for Socialist Alternative and countless similar organizations.

The operations of the groups gathered in Philadelphia are not simply the product of stupidity and shortsightedness, though of this there is plenty. All of these organizations are part of the structure of bourgeois politics, representing more privileged sections of the upper middle class.

Whether it is through the Sanders campaign, the Green Party campaign or the creation of some new political outfit, the aim is the same. On the one hand, they hope to create more favorable conditions for upper middle class elements within the state, the trade unions and academia, generally through the promotion of identity politics. On the other hand, they are working desperately to prevent the working class from organizing as an independent political force in opposition to the capitalist system.

The exposure of Sanders and the perspective of reforming the Democratic Party is at the same time an exposure of the political bankrupts gathered this week at the “Socialist Convergence,” and reveals the vast gulf between the politics of the pseudo-left and that of genuine socialism.



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