

Socialist Alternative promotes Sanders' “political revolution” without Sanders

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Sanders' endorsement of Hillary Clinton, a degrading spectacle that provoked widespread disgust, exposed Sanders' “political revolution” as an attempt to prevent the emergence of an independent socialist movement of the working class by promoting illusions in the Democratic Party.

The Vermont senator's embrace of Clinton also exposed the various pseudo-left organizations that orbited his campaign. They worked, in one form or another, to promote the illusion that Sanders, who billed himself as a “democratic socialist,” represented a genuine political alternative.

In the wake of the Sanders debacle, the pseudo-left groups give no accounting for their role in promoting a political fraud. They work to prevent left-moving workers and youth who were attracted to Sanders because of his avowed socialism and his call for a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class” from drawing any lessons from his inevitable betrayal.

Many of these groups are coalescing around the campaign of Jill Stein and the Green Party, a reformist bourgeois party that is hostile to the class struggle and socialism.

Arguably the most open and brazen of these organizations in its promotion of Sanders was Socialist Alternative. Over the past year it effectively transformed itself into an arm of the Sanders campaign. This was of a piece with its longstanding cultivation of close ties to the Democratic Party.

The ignominious end of the Sanders campaign has not caused this organization to reassess its previous stance. Instead, Socialist Alternative now calls for the continuation of Sanders' phony “political revolution” without Sanders himself, in the first instance in the form of support for the Jill Stein campaign.

In the service of this tactical adjustment, Socialist Alternative played a role in organizing a walkout at the Democratic National Convention Tuesday night by several hundred Sanders delegates. This protest stunt followed the roll-call vote that officially made Hillary Clinton the party's candidate—topped off by Sanders' personal intervention from the floor to move for Clinton to be nominated by acclamation.

Kshama Sawant, a leading member of Socialist Alternative who sits on the Seattle City Council, released a statement promoting the action. “A Call to Action: Walk Out from the Democratic National Convention!” appeared on Socialist Alternative's website and the website Counterpunch.

As always with Socialist Alternative and the rest of the pseudo-left fraternity, the statement does not evince a trace of class analysis. The words “working class” do not even appear. Instead, Sawant utilizes nebulous terms with no clearly-defined class content such as “left” and “progressive” to mask her organization's orientation to bourgeois parties and politicians.

In the organization's perspectives document released earlier this month, Socialist Alternative explicitly rejects the building of a working class party and calls instead for the building of a “multi-class” (i.e., bourgeois) formation.

“The central issue,” Sawant writes, “is whether we should follow Bernie's lead in supporting Hillary's corporate politics, or continue the political revolution by building our movement independent of the DNC. While I supported Bernie's primary campaign, spoke at Bernie rallies, and initiated Movement4Bernie, I believe we simply cannot follow him in his decision to back Hillary. Our political revolution now risks being turned into its opposite, and funnelled [sic] into support for the DNC's neoliberal agenda.”

Sawant's statement reeks of political bad faith. She provides no accounting for the previous stance of her own organization. During the primary campaign, she completely identified the so-called political revolution with its supposed leader, Sanders. Yet the shift of that leader openly into the camp of the favored candidate of Wall Street and the military/intelligence establishment says, she would have us believe, nothing about the real nature of that “revolution.”

When Socialist Alternative announced the creation of its “Movement4Bernie” group, it gushed: “The momentum behind Bernie Sanders gives us a real chance to gather together everyone who wants to build a real alternative for the 99 percent. We can turn this into the most important election in decades by building an organized political force behind the Sanders campaign... if we get organized in a big way, we can bring millions behind us into Bernie's campaign to win in 2016. We can begin to build a new, powerful and lasting force ...”

Now, Sawant lamely writes, “Unfortunately, Bernie has now walked out on that strategy, and called for a vote for the very establishment we have been fighting against.”

Unfortunately? This suggests there was nothing inevitable or predictable in this long-time Democratic party proxy, who

chose to conflate “political revolution” and “socialism” with the electoral victory of the oldest party of American capitalism, embracing the personification of the political status quo. Socialist Alternative’s cynicism is compounded by the plain fact that Sanders, in announcing his bid for the Democratic nomination in the spring of 2015, declared that he would support the Democratic nominee, whoever he or she turned out to be.

The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*, on the basis of a class analysis, warned from the outset that Sanders’ “political revolution” was a fraud and that Sanders was not a socialist. We launched the campaign of Jerry White for president and Niles Niemuth for vice president to provide a genuine socialist and revolutionary alternative to all of the capitalist parties and politicians, Sanders included.

Despite everything, Sawant in her statement continues to refer to Sanders as a “democratic socialist” and puts herself forward as the continuator of his bogus “revolution.”

During the primaries, Socialist Alternative argued that Sanders could be induced through popular pressure to drop his pledge to back the eventual Democratic nominee and run as an independent or third-party candidate. Even had this occurred, it would not have altered the pro-capitalist character of Sanders’ politics. It would have represented a tactical shift in his effort to block the emergence of an independent and socialist movement of the working class.

“Thousands are joining protests and rallies on the streets of Philadelphia,” Sawant continues, “But the most powerful protest of all will be for delegates and activists to reject the neoliberal Democratic establishment altogether and walk out of the convention in the largest possible numbers later this week.”

Socialist Alternative does not make its appeal to the working class, but to the privileged upper-middle class layers that were in abundance on the convention floor in Philadelphia. The class forces that make up Socialist Alternative itself are not essentially different. Leading members such as Pam Keely were among the assembled delegates and helped organize the walkout from the floor of the convention.

One of the most striking aspects of Sawant’s statement, and Socialist Alternative’s coverage of the convention as a whole, is the complete absence of any reference to foreign policy and the danger of war. This is all the more significant given that the convention itself, whose main task was to nominate a war criminal who bears major responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq, Libya and Syria, was dominated by patriotic fervor, anti-Russian hysteria and attempts to portray Clinton’s Republican opponent Donald Trump as a sleeper agent for Vladimir Putin. Not mentioned openly but lurking behind the scenes were preparations for a massive escalation of American militarism, directed first and foremost against Russia, a nuclear power.

If Socialist Alternative has nothing to say about the drive to war, it is because it supports it. Like most of the American

pseudo-left, it portrayed the US-backed, fascist spearheaded regime-change operation in Ukraine in 2014 as a response to Russian “imperialism” and “expansionism.” In Syria, Socialist Alternative has promoted as “progressive” various US-backed militias.

In joining the Sanders campaign, Socialist Alternative campaigned for a candidate who endorsed the warmongering foreign policy of the Obama administration, which has killed and displaced tens of millions of people and brought the United States to the brink of nuclear armed conflict. Sawant’s hero went so far as to explicitly defend Obama’s program of drone assassinations.

Sawant ends her statement with a plug for Green Party candidate Jill Stein. “Concretely, right now, we need to build the broadest possible support for Green Party Candidate Jill Stein, whose campaign is the clear continuation of our political revolution,” Sawant argues. The Green Party campaign, she claims, can form the basis for building “our own mass political party of the 99 percent.”

Socialist Alternative is now writing about Stein with almost the same star-struck reverence it expressed for Sanders. An article appearing on the organization’s website on Thursday exclaims breathlessly: “Green Party candidate Jill Stein has had an energetic and high profile amongst the protests [outside the Democratic convention]. Protesters have treated her like a rock star.”

The portrayal of Stein as the “continuation” of the Sanders campaign should be taken as a political warning. Socialist Alternative is bitterly opposed to a genuinely independent political movement of the working class. Such a movement can be built only on the basis of a ruthless exposure of Socialist Alternative and the pseudo-left as a whole.



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