

After the Sanders debacle

“Socialist Convergence” meets to prepare a new trap for the working class

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Against the backdrop of last month’s Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, a group of pseudo-left organizations gathered at a four-day conference titled “Socialist Convergence.” The avowed aim of the meeting was to carry forward Sanders’ so-called “political revolution” following Sanders’ groveling endorsement of Hillary Clinton, who is running the most right-wing Democratic presidential campaign in modern US history.

The conference, held in downtown Philadelphia a few subway stops from the Democratic convention, ran Monday, July 25, through Thursday, July 28.

The main organizers of the event were the Green Party of the United States, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the International Socialist Organization (ISO), Socialist Alternative, Solidarity, Philly Socialists, and the Party for Socialism and Liberation (a split-off from the Workers World Party).

During the day, participants attended Sanders and Green Party protests outside the Democratic convention. Workshops were held on “the nuts-and-bolts of how to build socialist organizations in your home town.” In the evening, speakers participated in panel discussions.

Speakers at the event included Jill Stein, presidential candidate of the Green Party; Bhaskar Sunkara, founding editor of *Jacobin Magazine* and a vice-chair of the DSA; Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative’s representative on the Seattle City Council; Chris Hedges, journalist and author; Amy Muldoon, a Verizon worker, shop steward in the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and ISO member; and Todd Chretien, a leading member of the ISO.

“Socialist Convergence” was an attempt, in the aftermath of the exposure of Sanders’ “political revolution” as a reactionary effort to channel growing anti-capitalist sentiment into the blind alley of the Democratic Party, to devise new means for keeping radicalized youth and workers within the confines of bourgeois politics. For the most part, this meant support for the campaign of the Green Party and its presidential candidate, Jill Stein.

Sanders’ self-described “socialist” campaign against the “billionaire class” won support from millions of people who feel nothing but contempt for the political establishment. The growing interest in and support for socialism was not produced by Sanders, a long-time ally of the Democratic Party, but by the breakdown of the capitalist economic and political system, with its pervasive social inequality, repression and war.

All of the organizations gathered at the “Convergence” in Philadelphia had supported Sanders’ bid for the Democratic

presidential nomination. Some, such as Socialist Alternative, sought to totally integrate themselves into the Democratic candidate’s campaign. It went so far as to set up a front group, Movement4Bernie, to hustle votes for Sanders in the primary elections.

Others, like the ISO, maintained a tactical separation, promoting Sanders but urging him to run on the Green Party ticket.

That Sanders’ “political revolution” has concluded in all-out support for Hillary Clinton, the very personification of Wall Street and the military/intelligence apparatus, has not given these inveterate opportunists a moment’s pause. One thing their conference in Philadelphia was not interested in was providing any accounting for their own role in the Sanders’ fraud.

The right-wing character of the assemblage was sharply revealed when Chris Hedges told the audience Wednesday night that Bernie Sanders’ “final capitulation, symbolized by his pathetic motion to suspend the roll call, giving Hillary Clinton the Democratic nomination by acclamation, is an abject betrayal of millions of his supporters and his call for a political revolution.” This observation evoked such a chorus of boos and catcalls from the audience that the moderator was obliged to step in and call for order.

Steve Williams, founder of *LeftRoots*, summed up the right-wing opportunism of the proceedings when he replied that “any inclination to denounce Sanders as a sell-out right now seems ridiculous.” As the audience cheered, he continued, “We need to all take up a deep commitment to win; we’re going to have to do some things we don’t want to do.”

Even open support for Hillary Clinton was tolerated as compatible with Convergence’s so-called “socialism.” It could be accommodated within the ample tent of the so-called “independent left alternative” on offer from the various participating organizations.

Before the conference, the ISO stated on its web site *Socialist Worker*, “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.”

Two speakers, Lev Hirschorn, the regional field director of the Sanders campaign in Philadelphia, and Joe Schwartz, national committee member of the DSA, advocated a vote for Clinton. As Hirschorn stated, “We can have a left faction to take control of the Democrats.”

The fake-socialist gathering’s embrace of Democratic Party politicians Sanders and Clinton is not an accident or the product of political naivety. There is nothing socialist or even “left” about these

organizations, despite their occasional use of socialist phrases. Their spectrum of orientation begins with Clinton and ends with Stein—that is, from bourgeois politicians to bourgeois politicians around the Democratic Party.

In many ways, what transpired at “Socialist Convergence” paralleled the proceedings nearby at the Democratic convention.

The Democratic convention presented the ugly spectacle of racial and gender politics being employed to consolidate support among the party’s broader upper-middle class base for a policy of intensified militarism and war. As one black, Hispanic, gay or woman speaker after another was brought onto the platform to portray all of the evils of American society as rooted in pervasive and ineradicable racism and gender bias, the party leadership was carrying out a neo-McCarthyite attack on the fascistic Republican candidate, Donald Trump, *from the right*—portraying him as a agent of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was demonized in much the manner of previous leaders targeted for military attack and eventual murder such as Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi.

To chants from the delegates of “USA! USA!” retired generals denounced Trump as an unreliable candidate for commander in chief and praised Clinton for her readiness to wage war, and billionaire Michael Bloomberg vouched for Clinton’s credentials as a defender of the wealth of the financial elite.

This did not provoke any significant discussion or opposition in the evening panel discussions at “Socialist Convergence.” No wonder, since virtually all of the organizations represented have lined up to support Obama’s neo-colonial wars in the Middle East and his administration’s aggressive actions against Russia and China. They all, moreover, promoted Sanders, who repeatedly in the course of the Democratic primaries declared his support for Obama’s war policies, including his program of drone missile assassinations.

At the Wednesday night session, Jill Stein was questioned by an audience member as to why the Green Party platform called for cutting the military budget by only a half, and why it declared support for “humanitarian” military interventions. Stein replied by citing the platform’s caveat that US military operations conform to international law. “There is a third piece,” she said, “which is international law, which is exactly what we violate by selling weapons to human rights violators like Saudi Arabia.”

By “international law,” Stein means the imprimatur of the United Nations Security Council. So long as this organization—the imperialist-dominated modern version of the League of Nations, characterized by Lenin as a “thieves’ kitchen”—gives its blessing, as with the bloodbath in Libya, the Greens are onboard. In reality, as the record of their sister party in Germany demonstrates, they are prepared to support any and all so-called “humanitarian” wars of plunder and conquest mounted by the American ruling class.

When speakers at “Socialist Convergence” discussed the social and economic crisis within the United States, they echoed the ferocious promotion of racial and gender politics at the Democratic convention.

Ismael Jimenez, a member of the Caucus of Working Educators within the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, told the audience that “racism permeates our whole society.” Similarly, DSA National Committee member Joe Schwartz said that modern American society was an “Apartheid state” divided between blacks and whites. Sundrop Carter of the Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition said, “Anti-black racism is one of the most defining characteristics of our country.”

Amy Muldoon, a Verizon worker, steward in Communications

Workers of America (CWA) Local 1106 and ISO member, argued that the supposed “success” of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strike of 2012—a miserable sellout by the union—was the result of its use of a “different political narrative,” which told the workers that “this is about racism.”

Muldoon also told the audience that she was “elated to say we [the Verizon strikers] won” in the strike of this year. The audience of some 80 people broke into loud applause.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporter challenged Muldoon, noting Verizon Chief Administrative Officer Marc Reed’s statement that the company was “pleased” with the contract settlement and that all of the company’s objectives were met through increased “worker flexibility” and reduced health care and retirement costs. This comment was met with loud boos from the audience. Muldoon responded, to another round of applause, “I don’t think the primary purpose of this gathering is to attack the strategy of the CWA.”

One audience member criticized the fact that all of the gathered groups supported pro-capitalist parties, including the Green Party. This comment was met with jeers and boos. Jimenez responded angrily to the criticism, saying, “Who cares? The average person doesn’t give a f--- about these questions.”

On Thursday night, Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative conveyed her experience of fighting for the \$15 an hour minimum wage bill in Seattle. She emphasized how she was able to get the City Council, consisting of Democrats who disagreed with her when she entered office, to vote for the bill. The conclusion was that Democratic Party politicians could be pushed to the left.

She left out the fact that the bill, which takes effect gradually over a number of years, in no way lifts low-wage workers out of poverty. Moreover, it excludes union members from the \$15 wage guarantee, a provision pushed by Sawant’s allies in the trade union bureaucracy. They see the new law as a means of providing a material incentive, in the form of super-low wages, for employers to utilize their services in suppressing opposition from the workers. In return, the bureaucrats get a bigger income flow from an enlarged pool of union dues, deducted automatically from the workers’ already abysmally low paychecks.

The mass opposition to the political establishment and growing hatred for the capitalist system, which found initial expression in support for Sanders, is not going away. On the contrary, it will continue to deepen.

Transforming a revived struggle by workers and youth into a conscious socialist movement of the working class requires an uncompromising struggle against the Green Party and all the other pseudo-left organizations that promote illusions in bourgeois politics.

The Socialist Equality Party is building a genuinely revolutionary leadership to unite the working class internationally on a socialist basis. In the United States, the SEP is running Jerry White and Niles Niemuth for president and vice president of the United States on this basis. We urge all who agree with our program and perspective to contact us today.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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