

The “Independent National Convention ’23”: A reactionary political freakshow, part two

Jacob Crosse
9 April 2023

Many of the same political forces behind February’s “Rage Against the War Machine” rally reconvened at the “Independent National Convention,” held April 3-5 in Austin, Texas. Participants included the Libertarian Party, the People’s Party, 2020 Democratic Party presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard and journalist Chris Hedges.

Promoted by its founder, Christopher Life, as a venue to “unite” the “independent political sector,” the INC did not appear to draw more than 100 people and was constantly plagued by technical difficulties. It was, overall, a thoroughly right-wing and degraded affair.

Like the “Rage” rally, far-right libertarianism was by far the most dominant political and social element present at the convention. Nearly every panel featured a self-professed “entrepreneur,” libertarian, cryptocurrency promoter, anti-vaccine zealot, Republican politician or Texas Nationalist.

Life, one of the four moderators, opened the event by explaining that “our independence is what unites us.” He founded the “One Nation Party USA” in 2018 on the basis of a program that includes supporting Trump’s tax cuts for the rich and backing the far-right Supreme Court justices that he nominated.

This is the second time Life has organized a “coming together” of “independents” in Austin, Texas. On March 14, 2022, he sponsored the first Independent National Union conference, which featured as its main speaker Robert Kennedy Jr., who is now primarily associated with the most intense opposition to vaccines. Kennedy Jr. has said that limited mitigation measures aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19 are worse than the conditions faced by Anne Frank, the 15-year-old Jewish girl and famed diarist who died in a Nazi concentration camp in May 1945.

While Kennedy Jr. was not at this year’s event, anti-vaccine and COVID-19 denialism was present throughout. In addition to sponsoring the main panel of

the event, Angela McArdle, the chair of the Libertarian Party, provided the “INC Keynote Morning” address.

McArdle is an anti-Semite who has worked to integrate the Libertarian Party with fascistic militias. Just last month she promoted “German New Medicine” (GNM) on right-wing commentator Tim Pool’s podcast. GNM was devised by German ex-physician Ryke Geerd Hamer as a “Germanic” alternative to mainstream medicine, which he claimed was a “Jewish conspiracy.” The now-deceased Hamer asserted that diseases were not real, and in a 2009 interview said that “almost all Jews survive cancer” without chemotherapy, and that AIDS is a “Talmudic fraud.”

In her short speech opening the event, McArdle denounced the “deep state” and, in an attack on COVID-19 mitigation measures, “un-elected bureaucrats.” McArdle repeated the mantra that the event transcended “left-right” politics.

The first major panel after McArdle’s speech was titled “Independent Parties Working Together.” It again featured McArdle, as well as Nick Brana, founder and chair of the People’s Party. In their comments, both McArdle and Brana pointed to the “Rage Against the War Machine Rally” as an example for others to follow.

“Just a month ago, we came together” Brana said, referring to himself and McArdle, “a party on the ‘left’ and the ‘right,’ and held the largest anti-war demonstration since the Iraq war.” In fact, the rally was sparsely attended, attracting primarily an assortment of libertarians and far-right elements.

The entire event served as Trojan horse for far-right politicians and operatives to push their agenda on an unsuspecting, and mostly non-existent, audience.

On Monday’s main stage, the afternoon seminar, titled “Education/School-Choice Reform,” featured Corey DeAngelis, an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute and a senior fellow at Reason Foundation, a Libertarian Party

think tank. DeAngelis heads the American Foundation for Children, an organization that is bankrolled by former Trump education secretary and billionaire Betsy DeVos. Its aim is to defund public schools and transfer money to for-profit charter and religious schools.

At the same time as DeAngelis was hawking “parents’ rights,” the “upstairs stage” had a panel titled “Texit & State Sovereignty,” which featured three members of the Texas Nationalist Movement (TNM). Speakers for TNM, a far-right secessionist movement, included Kyle Biedermann, a former Republican member of the Texas state House; Daniel Miller, the president of TNM; and Matt Frazier, another member of TNM and cryptocurrency snake-oil salesman.

Biedermann attacked Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton from the right, denouncing them for not “declaring an invasion” along the Texas-Mexico border. “That should be done right now,” Biedermann said, adding, “Texit would make that happen... As a sovereign state we will take care of that border. Texas could take care of that border.”

Miller agreed with the former Republican state representative, adding, “We obviously know there is an open border crisis. The source of the border crisis is the federal government. The best people to govern Texas are Texans, not the 2.5 million people that make up the Washington District of Criminals. The only way to secure the border, have a sensible immigration policy, is to become a self-governing nation and set our own policy.”

One of the moderators of the event, Trent Pool, praised the “border policy” of Israel as an example to be followed.

At another panel, Diane Sare, an adherent of the fascist Lyndon LaRouche cult, talked with Christopher Life and his sibling, Benjamin Life, about “Art & Movement building.” Sare referred to the ongoing political kinship between herself, McArdle and Brana, noting that together they were offering classes on “political interventions.” Sare, backing Trump’s false claims that the 2020 election was stolen, said the interventions were needed because, “In these times, when we can’t be certain that votes are being counted fairly, how do you get your Congress to change?”

Journalist Chris Hedges was brought in as the featured speaker on the second day. As was the case in the “Rage” rally, Hedges’ function was to represent the “left” in the ostensibly “left-right” coalition.

In a panel on “Ending the Forever Wars,” Hedges reiterated many aspects of his “Rage” speech, reflecting

on the costs of war and the obliteration of civil liberties. Seeking to ingratiate himself to the right-wing audience, Hedges claimed that the “media silences opinions on both the left and right that challenge capitalism.”

The faux “unity” continued into the evening during the keynote address delivered by Hedges.

In his speech, titled “Reclaiming our Country,” Hedges called for a “left-right coalition” to “wrest power back from corporations and the billionaires.” Hedges said this could be done by organizing workers and supporting mass strikes, “the one weapon workers possess that can cripple and destroy the billionaire class’s economic and political power.”

While Hedges took a left tack in his speech, what was more significant than what he said was the forum in which he said it. Hedges’ homily, delivered to a crowd of far-right nationalists, right-wingers and libertarians, had the character of a Salvation Army preacher delivering a sermon to a brothel.

When Hedges first made his turn to the far-right prior to the “Rage” event, he justified his new orientation as a “temporary alliance” made under extraordinary circumstances due to very real threat of nuclear war. He wrote before the February rally that he was participating in the event because the rally was not focused on anything but ending the war, and should “these right-wing participants organize around other issues, I will be on the other side of the barricades.”

Hedges’ appearance at the Independent National Convention, a thoroughly right-wing affair aimed at promoting a “unity” of the far-right, reveals his previous demagoguery as empty, and his new orientation to the right wing as more than a fleeting arrangement.



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