

USA: Vote for the lesser evil? NO ? form a working class party!

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The timing of Bernie Sanders' decision to back Joe Biden, calling him "a very decent man", may seem strange, coming at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic when the need for Medicare for All was never more obvious and never more popular. But the decision comes as no surprise for revolutionaries in the United States or around the world. America's most famous "democratic socialist" is leading his enthusiastic young campaigners into the Biden trap just as he did for Hilary Clinton last time around.

In fact, it was clear from the get go that Sanders would never break with the Democrats whatever the Democratic National Committee did to block him. And this time it didn't have to do much. As Bernie's crushing result in South Carolina showed, his campaign was shipwrecked on the rocks of community /church organized, southern black voters, one of the most socially conservative and loyal forces for the Democrats in US politics. Black under-30s preferred Sanders, but this demographic is the one that suffers the most from voter suppression and Sanders made few concrete commitments to remedy this, or to do anything about the killer cops that Black Lives Matter mobilizes against.

Sanders is a "socialist" on the outside but, when the chips are down, he always hands those willing to support his cause over to the ruling reactionary wing of the Democratic Party. We already dealt with his long record on this score at <https://www.workerspower.net/us-politics/bernie-sanders-a-path-to-victor...> [1] where we predicted his weaknesses would lead him to, "failure in the primary. In this, he will be forced to concede to Biden and betray his own working-class supporters that see him as an independent, anti-establishment candidate".

As for Joe Biden as the lesser evil to Trump, we have already described his hopeless conservatism and reactionary positions on race and US imperialism's actions around the world.

<https://www.workerspower.net/us-politics/joe-biden-2020-the-anti-populist> [2].

The Debate ? Post Sanders

Here, we will join the developing debate on what to do after Sanders. The Democratic Socialists of America, DSA, are doing this online ("Our Fight Beyond Bernie") and on Jacobin Magazine's website.

There, Dustin Guastella, Director of Operations for Teamsters Local 623 in Philadelphia, argues against "third party fantasies". Instead he argues;

"What Bernie's two campaigns, and those of left-wing insurgents like Ocasio-Cortez, have proven is that there is a sizable constituency for a democratic-socialist program and that accessing that constituency requires competing on the Democratic Party ballot line."

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/03/bernie-sanders-democratic-primary-res...> [3]

And

?The Democratic ballot line affords us legitimacy and access to a mass base, and we cannot afford to abandon the tactic of using it because we are upset with the party. We will always be upset with the party because it is not our party.? About all we can agree with here is Guastella's last sentence and especially his last phrase in that sentence. The Democrats are definitively not ?our party?.

Instead, he urges Sanders to create a movement around a democratic socialist (a.k.a reformist) platform within the Democrats, and to, ?congeal a number of left-wing unions with the membership organizations that supported his candidacy around a shared strategy?.

To do this means, ?shedding the fringe parts of our program?, he says, i.e. making it less radical and no doubt less oriented to ?minorities?. The core aspect of electoralism is that you shed those parts of your program which will likely lose you votes.

In fact, this sort of argument, just a tad more sophisticated than the vulgar ?Anything is better than Trump?, is based on a view of politics as elections and that winning elections is the beginning and the end of both our tactics and our strategy. The logic of this will lead US ?socialists? back, time and again, into being the wretched tools of the Clintons and Bidens.

Let?s be clear, Joe Biden does not deserve the vote of a single American socialist or trade unionist or of any of the activists in the women?s, Black, Latinx, LGBTQI movements either. Nor is supporting a third party candidate, like Howie Hawkins from the Green Party, any use. The reason is that none of these options take a single step forward to building the sort of party we need, not just on polling days, but in all our everyday battles, a party committed to fighting the class struggle on all its fronts. This means a working class party based on an anticapitalist and socialist program completely independent of all the parties of the US capitalist class and also independent of multi-class or ?classless? parties, what Marxists call petit bourgeois parties.

After the first years of Trump?s presidency, we had a wave of mass demonstrations and social movement protests and then a strike wave but, more recently, the left has turned its energies once more to electoral tactics as the prospect of voting Trump out rose on the horizon. The idea that this is the only way to get rid of him gathered momentum. For many on the left, the initial success of the Sanders movement proved that it might be possible, after all, for the Democratic party to be transformed into a democratic socialist party on the European model or, at least, to support a socialist president. We just needed to campaign at the grass roots of the party, then in the primaries, to select candidates with the policies of Sanders or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib. But, whilst there have been limited successes for this strategy at city and state level, it will never work at a national level.

The Democrats ? Not ?Our Party?

The fundamental reason is that this perspective ignores the fundamental political character of the Democrats, a party that historically was, is and always will be, a bourgeois party, representing the political interests of a specific fraction of US capital. By its nature, it can never become a party for the working class. Hence, all efforts to transform it into a political organ for us is wasted time and money.

The reason for the illusion is that, under pressure of the world and US Great Depression, then a world war, then the Cold War, or the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s, Democratic presidents have adopted policies that would be Social Democratic, Socialist or ?Labour? on the other side of the Atlantic. There, the workers? movements created their own parties at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of

the twentieth centuries. In Europe, these parties played a major role in legislating for welfare systems, public funding of education, and state-owned utilities.

Even in Europe, however, the great corporations in industry, commerce and banking remained firmly in the hands of the capitalist class and made sure any concessions never undermined capitalism or took on a genuinely socialist character. In addition, whenever conservative parties took power, they began a process of running down social services, denationalization, privatization, and legal restrictions on the trade unions. The reality is that so-called "democratic socialism", in Europe, just like it would be in the US, is quite simply not socialism. Socialism is not welfare capitalism. It is taking the means of production, exchange, and finance into social ownership and managing them by and for the working class as producers, consumers and users of services.

We need a political party for ourselves.

In the years since the last financial crisis in 2007/08, the US saw some quite strong and impressive movements that were tied to political developments around the globe. The most recognizable and visible protest to the financial crisis came with the Occupy Movement and its call for a politics of the 99% against the 1%. Although it did represent a spontaneous reaction to the capitalist crisis, it was politically very weak. It denied the need for a political organization that is able to fight for our rights in a way that could also challenge for political power. And, potentially, even take power and control into our own hands.

Then came the Sanders' movement that sparked strong enthusiasm in leftist and even liberal circles. Socialism came back in style and was discussed in a way that had previously seemed impossible in the United States. Although the Sanders' movement gave voice to a broad movement that embodied parts of the population that were searching for a progressive solution for the effects of the financial crisis, it was politically still very limited. It was not set up to engage its base in political discussions about a political program for the movement. The supporters were just supposed to be going from door to door and working the phone banks, while Sanders and his staffers were working out the political agenda of the campaign.

The Sanders movement, however, also sparked something else; most of the social movements before it were limited by a non-political organization principle, separated one from another by a strong focus on identity politics, or campaigning only for one specific candidate without any influence on their platform or program. The influx of tens of thousands of enthusiastic young activists into the DSA embodied something new, a recognition that all of those struggles required a society-wide answer, in other words, a political organization.

A Working class party ? but where to start?

These newly politicized activists quickly changed the balance of forces and the internal debate inside the DSA. At its 2017 national convention, resolutions that pushed the organization to the left were passed and nearly led to an open break with the Democratic Party. This leftward shift opened up an opportunity for revolutionaries to enter and work inside the DSA to try to influence its development and further strengthen the revolutionary forces in the US.

One big question was posed by the resolution to break with the Democrats: what would come after that? An independent third party? A party of the 99% or a labor party? This remains a fundamental question. In our opinion, the DSA is a vehicle for promoting and discussing the urgent need for a party of labor. Especially at the time of a serious uptick in labor struggles, this issue also has to be taken into the unions. Although they will not be the sole basis for building such a party, as mass organizations of workers' struggles, they should be serving the politics of our class not those of the bosses who exploit us.

What should we do right now?

This question is something that a lot of Bernie supporters are asking themselves right now. Regardless of their view of the DSA and the need for a new party, they are asking themselves what's next. In our opinion, the first step should be to call Sanders' action what it is: a betrayal of the movement and we should not side with him in supporting Joe Biden.

Secondly, the movement should call on Sanders to give the \$180 million he collected in small donations from our pockets back to the movement. This money would be better spent supporting the workers courageously fighting the corona virus pandemic and supporting the formation of an independent working-class party.

Based on its 'Bernie or bust' resolution, the DSA needs to spearhead such a call on Sanders. The current DSA leadership needs to be reminded of the resolution and should also call on AOC to renounce her endorsement for Biden. No self-proclaimed socialist can openly support Biden and an open bourgeois party. If she does not recall her endorsement for Biden, she should be kicked out of the DSA.

The ties with the Democrats weren't helpful for our movement in the last 4-5 years and they are most definitely not working in our favor right now. So, the DSA should pull the plug and break with the Democrats completely. It should invite other organizations like Labor Notes, left unions like the UEW, the ILWU, the Flight Attendants Union, the IWW and the United Nurses Union, as well as the rank-and-file committees that are being established during the corona pandemic, to work together on forming a worker's party for the US working class.

A workers' party or a revolutionary workers' party?

Revolutionaries would welcome such a development and any steps towards it. They would be aware, however, that the character of such a party would not be fixed from the start. On the contrary, it would be in flux, there would be a struggle from the very beginning. In such a situation, revolutionaries would have the duty to enter such a formation and form a revolutionary tendency on a revolutionary program for the party. Armed with such a program they could fight for a revolutionary leadership inside this newly forming workers' party pushing it towards adopting a revolutionary character.

Clearly, such a struggle would have two possible outcomes. Either, the revolutionaries win the leadership and build this newly created formation as a revolutionary labor party or they lose and the more reformist, more backward, parts of the party gain the leadership and control. Even if that were the case, a coordinated struggle would have prepared a much stronger and firmer nucleus of a revolutionary organization that would eventually break out of this new formation and continue working on its own to form a revolutionary working class party in the US.

To restrict ourselves to calling only for a revolutionary party, would miss the boat of the developing levels of class consciousness currently taking place in the United States. Whether to call for a workers' party or a revolutionary working class party is a tactical question, not a strategic one. If the class struggle intensifies and the spontaneous reaction of the US working class heats up and goes full steam towards a revolutionary working class party then revolutionaries should obviously support such a development and not hold it back. However, in the current situation, even the formation of a European style socialist or labor party would be a step forwards and revolutionaries should participate in it. To do anything else, as some US Marxists did in earlier attempts over the last century or so, would be a huge sectarian mistake.

Fight for a revolutionary orientation inside the DSA!

We know that our proposals for what DSA should and should not do are unlikely to be adopted any time soon. But Workers? Power believes our revolutionary duty is to argue not only for the strategic goal that US workers need, a revolutionary party on a transitional program, but also what tactical steps it, and the socially and racially oppressed, should take right away.

Having said that, we also think that all organizations that call themselves revolutionary and socialist should join our fight inside the DSA and form a revolutionary caucus with us. Such a caucus should act in the same way as we describe above; loyally building up the organization, working on putting together a revolutionary program and fighting for leadership, i.e. for its revolutionary orientation.

Groups or individuals who stand aside from this struggle, either from a desire not to get their fine principles wet by swimming, as Trotsky once said, or who just go with the flow, voting for Biden to get rid of Trump, will be of no use to US workers at a critical conjuncture in politics and in the class struggle.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/usa-vote-lesser-evil-no-%E2%80%93-form-working-class-party>

Links:

[1] <https://www.workerspower.net/us-politics/bernie-sanders-a-path-to-victory-for-the-working-class>

[2] <https://www.workerspower.net/us-politics/joe-biden-2020-the-anti-populist>

[3] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/03/bernie-sanders-democratic-primary-results-joe-biden>