Next Steps in the Struggle for Independent Working Class Politics

Advocates of independent working class political action need to seize the opening provided by the October 2017 resolutions adopted by the AFL-CIO national convention.

What are some proposed next steps?

1. Begin the formation a Labor Party Advocates-type committee in the labor movement.

Whatever its name, this committee’s goal would be to advance the discussion in the labor movement about the need to create a “Labor-Based Political Party” — to quote the resolution on Independent Politics adopted by the October 2017 national convention of the AFL-CIO.

In order to create a mass-based party of working people rooted in the unions and communities of the oppressed, we need to get the ball rolling in the labor movement; we need to raise the need for the unions to break with the Democratic Party.

To initiate a new Labor Party advocacy group, every effort needs to be made to assemble a core group of labor leaders and activists who have spoken out about the need to build a Labor Party in this country, and who are committed to starting this effort now. Let us join forces to ensure that the resolution on Independent Politics adopted by the AFL-CIO is implemented, not shelved.

Such a core group could organize forums across the country to begin assembling a broader list of supporters.

Labor organizer Mark Dudzic told the forum at the AFL-CIO convention in St. Louis that, “building a new Labor-based party will be a long-range project and needs both community and labor support.” Okay, but it needs to start somewhere, and the time to get the ball rolling is now.

The formation of the MPP, with its large number of supporters across the country, is a game-changer and should inspire labor folks to get on board.

2. Begin the process of forming committees (or coalitions) on a local level in cities across the country to run independent labor-community candidates in 2019 around a platform that embraces the workers’ and communities’ pressing demands, with the explicit aim of advancing the effort to build a new mass party of working people rooted in the unions and communities of the oppressed, with special attention given to reaching out to youth, especially youth of color.

Given that local races are often non-partisan (that is, candidates do not have to declare any party affiliation), any independent labor-community candidate running for public office as part of this effort would need to call for breaking with the Democratic Party as well as for building a new mass independent political party of working people rooted in the unions and communities of the oppressed. That is the very definition of their political independence.

Sacramento sets an example

After the May 29 Poor People’s Campaign action in Sacramento, Calif., a group of trade union and community activists, including top leaders of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA - AFL-CIO), agreed to set up a Sacramento-wide committee with the aim of exploring the possibility of running independent labor-community candidates in 2019, as a step in the struggle to build a new independent mass political party.

All were encouraged by the formation of the MPP and proposed organizing a forum in Sacramento with leaders of the MPP and Labor Fightback Network, among others. Such forums could be organized in cities across the country to build coalitions for independent labor-community candidates.

The platforms of these independent candidates need to be discussed and approved by the labor-community coalitions, and the candidates must be answerable to such coalitions. This is an essential component of the effort to build working class power. Also the candidates and the coalitions themselves cannot be limited to electoral politics; they must be fighting for the issues contained in the platforms, projecting these struggles into the electoral arena. This will help to cement the alliance between labor and oppressed communities.

If the effort to get an LPA-type committee off the ground succeeds, more local unions are likely to endorse and campaign for the local candidates. Building successful coalitions to promote independent labor-community candidates at a local level also could help gain new supporters at all levels of the labor movement to the LPA-type effort. Building locally and gaining national labor support are two prongs of an approach meant to feed off each other and advance our overall goals.

A final word about labor’s alliances with Black and Latino communities: The labor component of these coalitions needs to be sensitive to the fact, especially within the Black community, that a number of Black organizations, including the Ujima Peoples Progress Party in Baltimore, have been running independent Black working class candidates for office, with some success. Labor should support such efforts as well as seeking to involve them in broader labor-community coalitions for a new mass party.

These are proposals that we submit for discussion and consideration to you, our subscribers to The Organizer, and to the other unionists and activists who have supported our campaigns over the years. They are proposals that we submit respectfully to our friends in the MPP. Please let us know what you think. We are opening the pages of our Unity & Independence section to this discussion. We need to hear from you.

— Editorial Board, The Organizer