What Kind of New Party Do Working People Need?: Some Thoughts on the Movement for a People’s Party

An encouraging and potentially ground-breaking development has just taken place with the launching in early November of the Movement for a People’s Party (MPP). It was formed by “Draft Bernie for a New People’s Party,” and has the support of Cornel West and National Nurses United President RoseAnn DeMoro, among other prominent unionists and activists.

“Draft Bernie” was founded last February by Nick Brana, who was Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign outreach coordinator, and by tens of thousands of Bernie staffers and supporters who, having felt betrayed by the Democratic Party, which they accuse (correctly) of rigging the Democratic primary in 2016, reached the conclusion that Bernie and his supporters must break with the Democrats and form their own independent mass political party.

And now, no longer willing to wait for Bernie to break with the Democrats, they have gone ahead to launch this new Movement for a People’s Party.

Their November 9 press release explains the reasons for this initiative. It reads, in part:

“The past few weeks have made clear a conclusion that progressives have long fought to avoid: There is no path to power inside the Democratic Party. [Note: The authors are referring here to the proof contained in DNC Interim Chair Donna Brazile’s new book, “Hacked,” that the Democratic National Committee had rigged the 2016 Democratic Party primaries in favor of Hillary Clinton. – Ed.]

“As the Democratic Party shuts the door on progressives, Gallup shows that more Americans — 61%, up from 46% five years ago — are calling for a major new party than ever before. (Newsweek, Sept. 27, 2017)

“When ‘Draft Bernie’ was founded, few progressives were talking about starting a new party. In just a few months, ‘Draft Bernie’ has flipped the script, and the idea of building a people’s party has gone viral. Senator Sanders holds out hope that the Democratic Party can be reformed, but the American people have made their preference clear: The electorate is fed up with both establishment parties and desperate for a political alternative.

“Public anger and frustration has reached a boiling point, and neither major party is giving voice to policies that would alleviate the hardship that working people face.

“Last year, voters in both major parties tried to nominate presidential candidates who weren’t truly members of their party before the election. They succeeded on the right and were blocked on the left.

“A new party that supports free public college, universal health care, a living wage, higher taxes on the wealthy, getting big money out of our elections, and much of Sanders’ 2016 platform, will give Americans a party to vote for and inspire millions back to the polls.

“The major parties are crumbling. The question is not whether there will be a new party in America.

“The question is what will the new party stand for and who will offer the country the alternative it so desperately craves? Will it be a right-wing populist party, the kind that Trump, Bannon and Mercer foreshadow? A new neoliberal party masquerading as third way, the kind that French elites used with [current French President Emmanuel] Macron?

“Or will progressives come together to offer working people a genuine alternative? There is a new political reality in America. If progressives don’t offer an alternative that fills the anti-establishment void, someone else will, just like Trump did last year.”

Need for a Clean Break with the Democrats

This all true and good.

Yes, the establishment parties — like all the political institutions in this country — are in deep political crisis, reflecting the more fundamental crisis of global capitalism. Growing numbers of people feel disaffected, disenfranchised, left out — and there’s a reason for this: The Democratic Party and the Republican Party are both run, financed, and controlled by Wall Street and its cronies.

And, yes, there is a political void that will be filled by the far right — as it did already in the 2016 presidential election with Trump — if an alternative that responds to the needs and aspirations of the working-class majority and all the oppressed does not come forward.

But this raises the question of what kind of party is needed, and how do we get there from here.

One lesson from the past is that we need a party that makes a clean break with the Democrats and challenges for political power — not a third party that functions mainly as a pressure
group on the Democratic Party. And there is reason for concern on this score in the approach taken so far by the MPP.

Interviewed on the Jimmy Dore Show (jimmydorecomedy.com) to announce the launching of the MPP, Nick Brana, national director of the new formation, explained that what we need today is an “external third force” that pushes for progressive social change. Dore immediately chimed in to express his agreement. “Yes, the best way to reform the Democratic Party is to form a third party,” he said. Brana did not disagree.

When Brana went on to list the political formations that he is now targeting to join the “coalition of progressive groups” for the MPP, one cannot help but notice that many of the major organizations mentioned (Our Revolution, DSA, Working Families Party) are “inside-outside” — in fact, mainly “inside” — parties.

The issue of making a “clean break” with the Democratic Party cannot be dodged. It needs to be discussed and confronted head-on if there is to be any real motion toward building a truly independent political party of the working-class majority.

Need for a Party Rooted in the Working Class and Its Organizations

In his interview with Jimmy Dore, Brana noted, correctly, that the quest to build mass, anti-establishment independent parties is an international phenomenon, not just a national one. But he then pointed to three “examples of success” in forging “coalitions of progressive groups” — Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, and France Unbowed in France — that are not at all examples of independent politics.

All three political formations erupted onto the political scene overnight with support of the youth and the unemployed who were sick and tired of being misled by the ruling Socialist parties and the main trade union federations linked to them. Millions of people turned to these parties for solutions, but the three formations cited by Brana have turned their backs on their base, and on the working class as a whole, as they implement all or parts of the ruling-class austerity plans.

Syriza was swept into office, where it has implemented the European Union’s anti-working class “debt repayment” agenda, leading to millions more laid-off public sector workers and the dismantling of all social and trade union gains.

Podemos has turned its back on the struggle of the Catalan people for self-determination and independence, bending to the pressure of the ruling Socialist Party and the institutions inherited from the Francoist regime. It has conflated the trade unions with their misleaders, and thrown the organized working class and its organizations under the bus.

And France Unbowed has jettisoned the very concept of the working class as it moves more and more toward a “populism” that gives the green light to many of Macron’s anti-working class directives.

What all three formations have in common is that they are not rooted in the working class and its organizations. And as such, they all have bowed, to one degree or another, to the dictates of the European Union — that is, to the dictates of global capitalism.

To be fair, Nick Brana does not share the anti-union orientation of the three formations cited above. Quite the contrary. He is excited, for example, by the recent discussion of independent politics that took place at the national AFL-CIO convention [see editorial in this issue] – a story, he told Jimmy Dore, that “went completely under the radar of the mainstream media.”

“Not only did the AFL-CIO not invite any Democrats to speak at their convention,” Brana said, “but they also approved a resolution to break with the lesser of two evils, and they held a meeting of about 50 labor officials to talk about the need for unions to launch their own party — a Labor Party — and God is it time for that!”

We could not agree more fully.

But the Labor Party — and the organized working class — cannot be just one more component of a “people’s party.” What is needed is a working class party rooted in the unions and the communities of the oppressed, a party that is linked, moreover, to the struggle of the Black liberation movement to forge its own independent Black working class political party.

Speaking at the meeting of the 50 unionists for a Labor Party at the AFL-CIO convention, Mark Dudzic, national organizer of Labor Campaign for Single Payer, hit the nail on the head when he said that, “You have to have the labor movement at the table from the beginning” of any effort to build a new political party, “or you’re building sand castles.”

Labor cannot be just one more player. It must be a major converging force.

The task now, therefore, is to get the Labor Party discussion going inside the labor movement. It is a burning necessity.

— The Editors

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DEC 2017 / JAN 2018 - The ORGANIZER 5