

Kick-off Thoughts and a few short key readings for our Sat night Political Discussion at Jan 30-31, 2016 NPC

Joseph M. Schwartz

I. **Where does the Bernie Movement Go? And How Should DSA Relate to this Question**

If Bernie doesn't win the nomination, there will be lots of disappointment and a misread by some that this means supporting left wing, even social democratic Democrats is a futile task (despite Bernie pushing political discourse way to the left). On the other hand, many of the folks active in the campaign will probably try to form local political coalitions that try to link social movement activism to building a "Bernie" wing inside and outside the DP. One aim would be to develop viable "Bernie-type" candidates, but ones rooted in their local communities.

On this, please read the Amy Dean article below...Amy is very close to the CWA leadership...the major union backing Bernie and the main funder of Jobs w Justice and also Working Families. Working Families may push this perspective as they try to go national..of course, we would want to participate in the wing of the labor-left who would be less cautious about taking on moderate Dems than is moderate union leadership (see NY and Working Families history..though some in WFP union leadership have second thoughts about not taking on Cuomo).

Where these new electoral/activist formations occur in a serious way (some would be close to the Nurses union) at the local and state level, DSA locals with decent capacity should join the effort. We should bring to this post-Bernie political legacy the perspective that such a coalition needs to go beyond the Sanders base and build multi-racial, Rainbow-like coalitions. At a minimum, the Bernie-base has to do much better, more informed "ally" work with anti-racist movements led by activists of color.

Without denying that the Bernie movement put the issue of fighting corporate power front-and-center, we also have to be forthright in saying that it did not assemble the multi-racial coalition needed to take on not just class domination, but also racism, sexism, and xenophobia (which have a dynamic influenced by class, but which cannot be reduced to economic injustice).

Key brief readings that expand out on the brief points above:

1.Amy Dean, "Life After Bernie Sanders"

<http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2016/1/life-after-bernie-sanders.html>

2. Harold Meyerson, "Can Bernie Sanders' Followers Create a True Leftist Movement"

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/you-say-you-want-a-revolution/2015/10/28/7ed69cfa-7da4-11e5-beba-927fd8634498_story.html

3.Joseph M. Schwartz, "Building the Political Revolution: Bernie Sanders and the Future of the Left,"

http://www.dsausa.org/building_a_political_revolution_dl

4. VERY KEY READING BY KATHLEEN GEIER IN THE JAN 22ND NATION ON HOW SANDERS AND WHITES IN HIS MOVEMENT COULD HAVE BETTER RESPONDED TO RACIAL AND GENDER JUSTICE ISSUES (#BLM, reparations)

<http://www.thenation.com/article/bernies-greatest-weakness/>

II. Beginning to think about what the 2016 elections will mean for the multi-racial left and DSA

The 2016 election at all the federal and state level (many state legislatures will hold elections, too) will likely shape up to be a far right vs. center-left election. There does exist a real threat of a presidential victory by a “white people’s” party committed to nativism, Islamophobia, and white right-wing populist resentment against declining living standards (see the Fletcher and Berlet pieces below). And by a party that is likely to retain control of both chambers of the Congress, the Supreme Court, and all three branches of 25 state governments (and counting) . Labor and communities of color will be mobilized against the possibility that Republicans could control all 3 branches of the federal government, as well as both chambers of Congress for the first time since 1931 (!).

Obama being the “deporter in chief” may somewhat delay mobilization by some elements of the Latino and Asian-American community, but the prospect of xenophobic Republican rule will likely overcome that barrier (and the Obama admin is trying to keep five million undocumented folks with US born children from deportation). In any event, white progressives won’t be able to sit on the sidelines, particularly in closely contested states where the person-driven (not money driven) ground game for even presidential and Senate races make a real difference (see Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, PA, where we have active locals).

We won’t endorse Hillary Clinton (of course, there is some chance Sanders could be the nominee, but only if he makes rapid breakthroughs post Iowa and N.H. with voters of color, older voters, and women). But I don’t think DSA can be neutral about the 2016 electoral outcome. Further gains by right in House and Senate would have horrible consequences for working people, people of color, immigrants and women. We now see that Republican rule top-to-bottom in Michigan, Wisconsin and Ohio are turning them in regards to racial justice, labor and public education public-policy wise into states comparable to the far-right Republican-governed Deep South and Oklahoma and Kansas. If Republicans win the presidency and make just one more Supreme Court appointment (and Ginsburg , Kennedy and Breyer are the oldest members of the Court), we could see the overturning of not just the anti-poverty programs of the Great Society, but even the basic regulatory and wage and labor standards of the New Deal.

(We should look back at our 2008 and 2012 NPC statements on the presidential elections to see how we handled the candidacy of a Black neoliberal Democrat, whose victory had symbolic resonance that

will pertain in a different way to the possibility of the first female president; mainstream feminist groups will heavily mobilize for Hillary).

In short, DSA can't be neutral in the fight against the right, in part because the mass constituencies of the broad left will be heavily mobilized against right-wing nativism (see the Fletcher article below). And while social movements that have illusions about Democratic rule sometimes get complacent after Democratic victories, this is not the norm. As Democratic victories raises expectations within the party's base constituencies, these groups (labor, communities of color, feminists) eventually get pissed at the hypocrisy of the party ruling in their name fails to deliver meaningful reforms. That's why the 30s, 60s, and the Obama administration (Occupy, Fight for 15, #BLM) witnessed the revival of mass social movements. (Clinton didn't because he basically ran as a Republican-lite). But under Republican rule, progressive forces, particularly labor, feminists, and communities of color, end up fighting purely defensive battles to preserve long ago gains and have no hope for victories.

DSA suffered greatly (loss of members, decline in locals) during the Reagan and Bush II years as we got lost in the broad center-left to those administrations; but we grew during Clinton and Obama because a left opposition to moderate Dem admins grew. So some of our cadre may not care who wins the presidency and controls the Congress, Supreme Court and state and local government. But if the far right does, masses of ordinary people suffer; and even from a purely self-interested point of view, building DSA under right-wing hegemony will be much more difficult that it would be under a Democratic presidency (and Democratic Senate and with gains in the House) and mixed or Democratic dominated state governments.

Finally, to do any of the above, we have to become a more anti-racist organization that does effective coalition and ally work in movements built by broad Black and Latino forces in a given city...we need to be a visible DSA presence within whatever Bernie/social democratic wing of electoral politics emerges out of the Sanders campaign. But we should be a vocal advocate of linking that predominantly white progressive sector with local grassroots immigrant rights and anti-racist movements. AS long as the Sanders current thinks of itself as being sufficient to make a "political revolution" it will never become a majoritarian movement.

So in our Sanders work and after we need to think carefully about whether we can develop locals that can help build independent local left electoral capacity, but which broadens its base by doing effective anti-racist coalition and ally work. In short, we have to develop locals capable of carrying out our major convention priorities, but in tune with their local political terrain.

Key short-readings:

Bill Fletcher, Jr., "Standing Against the Right"

<https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/standing-against-the-right/> Chip Berlet, "Corporate press Fails to Trump Bigotry:

<http://fair.org/home/corporate-press-fails-to-trump-bigotry/>

Also, re-read our 2008 and 2012 NPC statements on the presidential elections:

http://dsatesting.info/dl/Summer_2008.pdf

(the statement is on first two pages of the issue)

And here's the npc statement on the 2012 elections (very critical of Obama and neolib Dems, but says because of threat of the right in swing states many of our members will work to defeat Romney..)

http://dsatesting.info/dl/Fall_2012_content/NPC%20Statement.pdf