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USA

A Socialist Convergence in Philadelphia

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The Bernie Sanders campaign represented a breakthrough on the U.S. left—“not because the insurgency within the Democratic Party offered a new opportunity to transform the graveyard of social movements, but primarily because the campaign surfaced a growing desire of millions for a left program and opened a much larger space to talk about socialism, while also exposing the limitation of the Democratic Party.

The last of the Cold War mental barriers against socialism have been breached. The youth of the United States raised in the global downturn have been frustrated with their lack of options under capitalism and oriented to Bernie’s social democratic domestic programs, and are increasingly eager to learn about socialism. At the same time, the U.S. left is far too weak to provide a meaningful pole of attraction for those newly radicalizing or open to socialist politics.

Sanders campaigned furiously in California as his last big chance to build pressure for the Democratic Convention in Philadelphia, but his efforts fell short. Sanders supporters continue to point out the lack of democracy in state-sanctioned elections as well inside the (anti-)Democratic Party. Recent polls indicate that perhaps 25% of Bernie supporters—“including some delegates”—will not vote for Hillary Clinton. This militant minority, often referred to as “Bernie or Bust,” have vowed to write Sanders in, or to vote for a left third-party candidate like the Green Party’s Jill Stein.

Inside the July 25-28 Democratic National Convention (DNC), Sanders’ delegates will be up against the largest barrier they have seen thus far. But the streets of Philadelphia will be full of street protesters orienting not only toward Bernie but also to the social movements, most notably Black Lives Matter, the demand for \$15/hour, and the Climate Justice movement.

Sanders supporters and the broader left will converge on Philadelphia beginning on the eve of the DNC and tens of thousands will attend a number of events, including both permitted and unpermitted marches. The March for a Clean Energy Future will be held on Sunday July 24, followed by protests every day of the convention. The opening day of the DNC already has two marches slated, one by Bernie supporters at 11 AM and another, “March for Our Lives” at 3 PM called by Cheri Honkala and the Poor Peoples’ Economic Human Rights campaign and followed by Jill Stein’s “Power to the People” rally. Many of the marches have yet to receive permits and may see police repression, despite recent calls for the city to issue civil fines instead of arrests in so-called “nuisance” cases.

Because the days will be packed with marches and street actions, those wanting to build dialogue are focusing on building nightly events. “Socialist Convergence: carrying forward the political revolution” will be a four-evening series of panels and discussions after the daytime street actions in Philadelphia concurrent with the DNC. Solidarity has endorsed and is part of organizing the Convergence, which will be held nightly at the Friends Center. Other organizations involved include Philly Socialists, Philly Coalition for REAL Justice (the local Black Lives Matter group), the Philadelphia Green Party, Socialist Alternative, and the International Socialist Organization.

Left Elect, a network that Solidarity helped initiate in 2015 to bring together left third parties and local electoral phenomenon together, led us to our involvement in the Convergence. Left Elect hosted a successful conference of a couple of hundred left and independent candidates and leaders in Chicago in May 2015. Already at that time, Left Elect participants held a variety of perspectives on candidates for the Presidential 2016 election: some critically supported Bernie Sanders’ candidacy within the Democratic Party, while many others came together to support Jill Stein, the Green Party’s presumptive nominee. Still others opted to run their own propaganda campaign. Given those challenges, the Left Elect Continuations Committee (Steering Committee) opted to prioritize three things in 2016:

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outreach and a social event at the Labor Notes Conference, participation at the Left Forum, and a presence at the DNC.

At the "Socialist Convergence" and other spaces in Philly the weekend before and week of the DNC, socialists should argue for an orientation toward movements rather than narrow electoralism. We should point folks to the Jill Stein campaign as the most organized electoral expression of the movements after Bernie, and the most viable left campaign independent of the capitalist class. We should also promote Left Elect and the idea of an "in-gathering" of those supportive of building left independent politics following this election cycle.

The Socialist Convergence is also an opportunity to promote the idea of ongoing and deeper cooperation between existing left groups to create a stronger left pole for those not currently in any left group. Certainly some of the folks organizing the Convergence have some form of ongoing left unity on their mind, but probably many more treat it as but one of many opportunities to put forth their own specific platform and politics. While it is doubtful that a few nights of forums would be the basis for deep ongoing collaboration, optimism is needed. A broad segment of the far left is coming together to discuss ideas and actions. The far left is weaker organizationally and organizational distinctions are more amorphous than just a few years ago—but at the same time, the broad population is more open to socialism than in decades.

Solidarity members and non-sectarian socialists should use this opportunity to meet folks in other formations or none, and to talk to them about prospects for a "next left" from below, as the latest experiment of a longstanding orientation to left regroupment/refoundation and the need for a "big tent" multi-tendency pole of attraction. We should listen keenly to their ideas for, and experiences in, building a socialist movement.

Building a left pole to bring around those not currently in any socialist organization is a tall order, but this is the task of the left. There are tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of people in the United States interested in finding out more about socialism, and the most advanced among them could help the usher in a political renewal. We on the left should be a bridge instead of a barrier to that path.

For more information about the Socialist Convergence, visit [the Facebook event page](#) or [the website](#).

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