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USA

# For Jill Stein and Independent Politics

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**Bernie Sanders' campaign for a “political revolution” lit up the 2016 primary election season like a meteor across the sky. Contrary to conventional wisdom that he’d peak and fade early, Sanders’ challenge to the Democratic party machine lasted throughout the primaries. Surpassing all expectations, he won 23 primary and caucus contests, raised an astonishing \$222 million almost exclusively in small donations, and gathered over 1800 pledged delegates.**

Sanders and his army of supporters promised to carry on to the Philadelphia convention, fighting for “progressive planks” in the party platform. But with his long-awaited (and ultimately inevitable) endorsement of Hillary Clinton for president, Bernie Sanders has folded up his challenge in the name of “doing everything possible to defeat Donald Trump.”

The Sanders campaign always embodied a contradiction. Within the parameters of a rigged two-party system, running for the Democratic nomination gave this avowed “democratic socialist” ballot access and a place in the debates. Yet it also meant, as Sanders openly stated from the outset, that he would support the party nominee—and there was never any doubt about who that would be. Although we understand why many of his supporters are disappointed, this is not a surprising outcome, and it poses the question, what next?

Like many on the left, Solidarity welcomed the energy and hope for change that the Sanders campaign inspired. If you’re not familiar with Solidarity, we’re a socialist, feminist, anti-racist organization. Our members in a number of unions and cities have participated in the Labor for Bernie project, which we see as an important vehicle for making political discussion the property of union members, not just the top leadership.

Now, however, the hard fact is that the inspiration of the presidential primary campaign is giving way to a sordid race between the cynical corporate centrism of Hillary Clinton and the ugly, racist economic nationalism of Donald Trump. In today’s particularly vicious climate, it’s essential for all of us to unite in defending Black Lives Matter against the racist slanders and assaults that the right wing is promoting. The attack on BLM is effectively a license for the continuing brutalization and murder of African American people and communities.

Certainly, part of the strategy for keeping the “political revolution” moving is keeping the movements active—the struggles for racial and reproductive justice, the Fight for \$15, solidarity with immigrant communities, and resisting homophobia, transphobia, and Islamophobia. The important gains that the LGBTQ struggle has made need to be defended and extended.

Despite the best efforts of Sanders’ supporters, the Democratic platform includes almost none of this. The drafting committee has rejected the calls to block the Trans Pacific Partnership (which a majority of the population hates), to end fracking (even on federal land!), and to support the Palestinian people’s struggle under Israeli occupation. There was no reason to expect anything different from a party of corporate capital and imperialism. To put a brave face on these defeats, much is being made of “the most progressive Democratic platform in history.” To put it bluntly, most of this language—except perhaps for raising the minimum wage, in stages—consists of vague generalities that will be rapidly forgotten.

Cornel West and Jill Stein; Dr. West endorsed the Stein campaign after Bernie Sanders conceded and endorsed Hilary Clinton.

If you believe that a better choice is possible, a movement for political revolution also needs an electoral expression. In this election, the best expression at the national level of what all of us have been fighting for is the Green Party campaign of Jill Stein. Solidarity supports that campaign as a way to support the political revolution in 2016.

Looking not only toward November but also beyond, especially to Bernie Sanders' supporters who reject the dead-end option of Hillary Clinton, we urge you to consider that you need more than a different candidate: you need a different party. Hillary Clinton, after all, did not "hijack" the Democratic Party. She represents exactly what the Democratic Party really is: Wall Street connections, militarism, and all. There was no way that Bernie Sanders was going to be the Democratic nominee.

This reality explains why Jill Stein's support has been growing. So are local independent political organizations, campaigns and ballot initiatives. We urge a vote for Jill Stein, but more than a one-time "protest vote," solid independent political organization is a necessity. It's going to be a long road, and there isn't a magic success formula for creating a working class-oriented party in the United States that can be the voice of social movements. But at this point one thing should be clear: the trap of voting for one after another "lesser evil" corporate candidate will only leave us with worse and more barren choices.

The Democratic Party wants Sanders' supporters' votes – not their demands to break up the banks, get rid of superdelegates, dump the TPP, and end the obscene one-sided U.S. support for Israel's war against the Palestinian people. "Vote and shut up," is the Clinton campaign's message to Sanders' base. There has to be a better way, or else we'll never see anything better than the miserable non-choices the corporate party "duopoly" has to offer.

If you want a "political revolution" that goes beyond empty promises, the time to break with the capitalist parties is now. As the Jill Stein campaign states:

"A movement for democracy and justice is sweeping the planet – from Occupy Wall Street to the Arab Spring to the Black Lives Matter movement. People are rising up to halt the neoliberal assault, calling for an America and a world that works for all of us. While our movement is winning important victories – notably for living wages and against fossil fuel infrastructure – the economic elite have only tightened their grip. People are realizing that if we want to fix the rigged economy, the rigged racial injustice system, the rigged energy system etc., we must also fix the rigged political system..."

"Jill Stein's Power to the People agenda reflects many of the domestic policies of the Sanders campaign – income equality, climate justice, free public higher education, Medicare for All, immigrant rights, racial justice and an end to mass incarceration. In other areas, Stein goes much further than Sanders, calling for the cancellation of student debt, full public financing of elections, and the creation of public banks.

"The groundswell for Donald Trump was created by the economic misery of NAFTA and Wall Street deregulation – policies promoted by both Clintons. Neoliberal Clintonism caused the rise of Trump.

"The clock is ticking – on the next Wall Street collapse, the climate meltdown, the expanding wars, the slide towards fascism, nuclear confrontation and more. This is the time to stand up with the courage of our convictions, while we still can. Forget the lesser evil. Fight for the greater good – like our lives depend on it, because they do. The corporate parties will not fix this for us. We are the ones we've been waiting for."

We agree, and it's all the more reason why today is the time for building independent politics.

*July 19, 2016*