



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

The movement for Bernie Sanders: Which side are you on?

written by Sharon Black

February 8, 2020



Why revolutionary socialists call for critical support

We have no illusions about the Democratic Party. It is a billionaire and bankers' War Party. Any notion that the Democratic Party represents the working class is a sugar-coated charade. At its core, it remains a neoliberal institution bent on preserving capitalist rule.

Destructive imperialist wars have been waged under Democratic Party

administrations; workers' rights and benefits for the poor have been stripped under every single administration, regardless of party. What is constant regardless of which party prevails is the system of capitalism and imperialism that is the root cause of so much human misery.

So why are we calling for critical support of the Sanders movement?

Bernie Sanders as the candidate is not the pivotal issue. What's critical is the struggle that his campaign has unleashed against the Democratic Party establishment. A struggle which has struck fear in the ruling class.

This campaign is a working-class movement, mostly of young people and increasingly of the oppressed, that deeply distrusts the Establishment of both parties. It is a movement fueled by increasing anger against the rule of billionaires and the growing gap between rich and poor that has left so many workers impoverished.

The fact that the ruling class is so worried and so frantic to cut this movement off at the pass is a clear indicator of their own fear that the movement, galvanized around health care, free education, curbing the climate crisis, etc., may well get out of control. Meaning that it might leave the constricted straitjacket of the Democratic Party.

The increasingly virulent anti-Bernie Sanders attacks have been picking up steam ever since it's become clear that Sanders' campaign might win the primary. Of course, there are a million tricks between now and the July Democratic Convention, and the likelihood of a stolen election looms large.

The Iowa Caucus debacle was a sickening reminder that forces behind the curtain pull the strings. That they would go so far as to wreck the Iowa Caucus in an attempt to slow the Sanders campaign demonstrates their real contempt for their own so-

called democracy.

Billionaires reject even mild reforms — Imperialist war is their answer

The class of billionaires and bankers isn't inclined at this point to give much in the form of concessions — whether it's to provide health care, education, curb predatory landlords or raise the minimum wage—let alone push back police terror and the white supremacist system driving it, shutting down the immigrant detention centers, respecting Indigenous rights, providing justice for women, oppressed genders and the LGBTQ2S communities or saving the planet.

Capitalism as a system is in crisis and because of this it has become harder and harder for it to provide for the needs of the mass of people. Not only has the gap between rich and poor widened, but the next generation faces the threat of planetary collapse.

What the capitalists are driven to is imperialist war in all its many forms, whether by direct intervention or through sanctions. Democrats and Republicans are united in the imperialist attacks on Venezuela, Cuba, Iran, Palestine, Korea, Zimbabwe, China and other countries.

The importance of the movement

Will Sanders take this to the logical conclusion, that is, to openly break with the Democratic Party? While unlikely from his own admissions, it remains an important question. What his supporters do is even more critical.

It is the movement that we are most interested in, and the potential for a larger struggle to push the working class in an independent direction in its own name.

Many of us at Struggle-La Lucha were extremely active in organizing and promoting the “Million Worker March” (October 17, 2004), which was founded and led by Black

trade unionists who called the national march in large part with the goal of developing an independent workers' movement that would break from the chains of the Democratic Party.

Shouldn't revolutionary socialists and communists be in the Sanders movement—especially if it takes a critical turn—so that we can agitate, educate and explain what the next step could be?

Referendum between capitalism and socialism

Both in the time leading up to the Democratic Convention — and also, if for some unforeseen reason Sanders wins the nomination—what, *de facto*, will take place is a referendum between capitalism and socialism.

It doesn't so much matter whether Bernie Sanders is or is not a real socialist or a "New Deal Democrat" — socialism is how the issue is being defined by the bourgeois establishment of both parties. Trump is already defining this, as are many in the Democratic Party establishment.

Appeal to revolutionaries disgusted by the bourgeois elections

The U.S. electoral system is wholly undemocratic. Just look at who can and cannot vote and how many times elections have been rigged, stolen, subverted or bought off in the interests of the ruling class. A good contrast could be made between the Cuban electoral system and that of the U.S. in an argument about which is more democratic.

In addition, the electoral system as it's constituted in the U.S. does not cover the police and military, who are not elected, but their actions can be a matter of life and death. Also unelected are our bosses, who exercise day-to-day power. You get the picture.

Nevertheless, it was the architect of the Bolshevik revolution, V.I. Lenin, who argued for revolutionaries to participate in parliamentary politics, not as an end but as a means.

Elections are a barometer of the struggle, but more importantly in this instance, they are also where that struggle of a large layer of the working class is taking place.

Why is this so? Many of us have a history inside the workers' and union movement.

Any experienced worker or union representative will tell you that most workers do not want to go on strike. Why would they? It means going without a paycheck, taking the risk that you'll lose your job completely and facing major hardships that could impact not only yourselves but your young children.

A strike, a sit-down action, a workplace takeover only materializes around the actual fight — after easier routes are exhausted. Maybe not in stages, but usually not as the first choice.

And it takes painstaking preparation and work by organizers who consistently do the work of distilling lessons and of raising consciousness, as we popularly used to call it.

It should not be surprising then, that the many workers and those in the community, both young and old, would want to go with what they are most accustomed to and what seems easiest, and that is to vote for change at the ballot box.

It is only necessity that drives class struggle forward.

Critical support

Finally, no one is proposing that revolutionaries join the Democratic Party, drop our

call for revolutionary socialism or blunt our criticism of Bernie Sanders.

Quite the contrary. He is not an anti-imperialist; you cannot even claim that he is thoroughly anti-capitalist. On these issues and perhaps others, we will find ways of making clear and effective critiques.

Perhaps the most important criticism of his campaign on the domestic front has been his failure to embrace the call for reparations for the descendants of those enslaved. We can explain why supporting reparations and opposing white supremacy will strengthen the working-class movement and why it is a necessary bridge to building solidarity.

But none of this criticism will be effective or meaningful from the sidelines of the flesh and blood struggle.

We need to be with the working class, who will learn by trial and error, through experience, that we can only win our liberation by being in the streets, by conducting sit-ins and sit-downs, by strikes and ultimately organizing working-class power on a global scale. As Frederick Douglass said, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”

We should remind ourselves that the Russian revolution of 1917 based itself on the call for “peace, bread and land.”

Vice President Mike Pence’s words at a campaign rally in Atlanta, on August 11, 2019, shouldn’t be lost on anyone. He said, “The moment America becomes a socialist country is the moment America ceases to be America.”

For the capitalist class it doesn’t really matter what kind of socialism is under consideration (at least at this moment), whether it’s a revolutionary version, or simply a reform that they believe will cut into their profit margin. Of course, that would all change if they were confronted with these two choices, reform or

revolution. It's our job, to see that the latter choice is ultimately on the table.

