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As Sanders ends campaign, ‘Don’t mourn, organize’: Build a movement to fight for socialism!

written by Sharon Black
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People wait in their cars for the San Antonio Food Bank to begin food distribution, April 9.

On April 8, Sen. Bernie Sanders suspended his presidential campaign. More recently, in a move that was widely expected, Sanders endorsed Joe Biden as the presumed Democratic nominee. While this moment is very painful for Sanders' campaign supporters, it's important to examine the larger developments to determine which way the movement should go next.

Let's recognize the Sanders campaign, not for what didn't happen, but for what it did accomplish. It was unprecedented in bringing the issues of health care and education as human rights into the mainstream; and it began to open the discussion on socialism. It tackled issues like mass incarceration and the climate crisis. It

energized a large, multinational, working-class movement of mostly young people who are fed up with the status quo.

No one should forget that the Democratic Party establishment connived, conspired and worked overtime to undermine the Sanders campaign, along with the big business media and every conceivable mouthpiece for the bankers and capitalists. The idea that workers are entitled to even the most basic rights like health care, food, a job, a home or even the right to live was considered heretical.

What these agents for the billionaires and bankers feared was not so much Sanders the candidate, but rather the campaign's potential for raising working-class expectations — expectations that could have gone beyond the narrow confines of the electoral arena.

Several months ago, we took the position of [critically supporting the Sanders campaign](#), not based on the candidate, with whom we certainly have differences, especially on imperialist foreign policy, but based on supporting the working-class movement, especially younger workers, whose aspirations found expression in this electoral arena.

The question is: what's the next step?

“There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks when decades happen.” These words, attributed to V.I. Lenin, the architect of the Russian Revolution, aptly describe the upheaval the world is experiencing during the coronavirus pandemic, the changes that have already taken place and those that are still to come.

The [capitalist economic downturn](#), precipitated by the overproduction of oil and gas, percolating prior to the coronavirus pandemic, is now in full swing. It is a crisis that is global in character, and when the coronavirus pandemic eases, it will be all the

more apparent.

Over [22 million people](#) in the U.S. are newly unemployed. The inability of capitalism to provide even the most basic measures for public health has been exposed to the entire world. In the so-called richest country in the world, health care workers are not provided personal protective equipment (PPE). Testing kits are few and far between.

It is the unplanned anarchy of the so-called free market as much as any government policy that is overwhelmingly responsible for the lack of necessary equipment. It was the [closing of hospitals](#) because they were considered insufficiently profitable that has resulted in doctors and nurses having to make unthinkable choices as beds and ventilators run out.

The staggeringly [disproportionate rate of deaths](#) and the resultant suffering in Black, Brown and other oppressed communities has shown once again the brutal, white supremacist nature of capitalism. Millions of poor and oppressed people locked in prisons and detention camps are facing a virtual death sentence.

Hunger is sweeping the country. In both cities and rural areas, it is becoming increasingly hard for people to afford or obtain food. On April 9, some [10,000 families](#) in San Antonio, Texas, lined up for food.

Revolutionary socialists have found themselves in a completely changed situation, dealing with stay-at-home orders that prevent mass demonstrations, but at the same time rising working-class consciousness and anger at capitalist failures.

It has also changed the electoral arena in a way that weighed against the Sanders campaign, and perhaps most electoral campaigns, at least for now. It is hard and perhaps foolhardy to predict what this will mean for November's election.

This was fully demonstrated in Wisconsin's April 7 primary, when voters were forced

to go to the polls, risking health and safety. In a brutally cynical move, in-person elections in Wisconsin were ordered to go ahead. In Milwaukee, which has the state's largest population of Black and Latinx people, [only five polling sites](#) out of 180 were open.

Exploiting fear and instability

The Democratic Party has been conducting a campaign to exploit fear, fostering the slogan of “return to normalcy” and fueling the argument that Sanders was unelectable and too radical. Its message is aimed at suffocating the entire workers' movement.

Younger activists have roundly rejected this. In a [#YouthVote Letter to Joe Biden](#) penned by a number of groups, including the Sunrise Movement, the signers explained that normalcy meant going back to “endless war, skyrocketing inequality, crushing student loan debt, mass deportations, police murders of Black Americans and mass incarceration.”

If there is one urgent message to the movement at this juncture, it is this: not to be squelched, muffled or herded into the Biden campaign — a path that is as deadly as the virus.

If the movement disbands or follows the Democratic Party establishment, it will become disarmed in the face of bigger crises that cannot be addressed or resolved by the capitalist electoral parties.

Recent events in Lansing, Mich., and other state capitals illustrate the dangerous side of the equation. Hundreds of rowdy, right-wing extremists, waving flags (including the confederate flag of slavery), toting guns and posturing for Donald Trump, marched on the Michigan Capitol calling for an end to stay-at-home orders. Similar protests took place in Kentucky, Minnesota, Ohio, North Carolina, Texas and

Virginia, and more are planned.

There is a deeply racist and anti-working class character to these protests that should not be ignored. The fact that Michigan is home to Detroit, a majority Black city which has suffered a disproportionate number of Covid-19 deaths, should not be lost on anyone.

It will take a vibrant, independent and militant working-class movement to answer the right-wing threat; and more importantly, to take us in a brand new direction if we are to save not only ourselves but the planet.

Sanders' role as the head of this movement has reached an impasse. The next step calls for shifting the struggle away from the Democratic Party straightjacket and fighting for working-class power.

We should remind ourselves how deeply undemocratic the U.S. electoral system is. In other countries, even capitalist ones, the Sanders movement would have had proportional representation.

There are millions of people who cannot even vote, including immigrant workers — documented and undocumented — whose superexploited labor supersedes capitalist profits. Black, Brown and poor prisoners populating the ever-growing, for-profit, prison-industrial complex are stripped of voting rights. Add the overpowering influence of billionaires and fraud aimed at depriving the oppressed of their voting rights, and you get a system that is rigged from top to bottom.



People line up for food assistance in Waltham, Mass., April 11.

Capitalism has no solutions

The capitalist system by definition depends on exploiting labor. It must expand for its very survival. There is a deep contradiction between this need and the health needs of the world's people. Donald Trump may be the crude and at times ludicrous spokesperson for this compulsion to get the capitalist economy running, but bigger systemic forces are driving it.

Regardless of whether it is prudent or safe, there will be a push to get workers back on the job — not because there isn't already accumulated wealth within our society that can feed and support every human being while they shelter in place, but because the present system cannot prioritize human needs.

Capitalists are awash in money, whether it's sheltered in offshore bank accounts or possessions because it currently can't be profitably invested, or channeled into the Pentagon death machine.

The idea of a guaranteed national income no longer seems so radical given the changed circumstances of everyone's lives, which will likely last far longer than the coronavirus pandemic. If anything, the capitalist crisis will tend toward the expansion of the exploitative gig economy, continued high unemployment, and intensification of the globalization of low-wage work.

At this moment, there are dozens of halfway emergency measures, such as temporarily halting some evictions, mortgage foreclosures and utility shutoffs. They are sporadic and vary by state and city. But what happens when they are lifted?

We've already seen workers' actions and strikes all across the country, from Amazon to McDonalds, at hospitals and groceries, by delivery drivers, transportation and postal workers. The lack of regard and planning to defend workers' lives has fueled workers' solidarity.

May Day and the Democratic Convention

May Day — International Workers' Day — is just around the corner. [Cooperation Jackson](#), based in Jackson, Miss., and many other groups have been agitating for a general strike on May 1. The Peoples Power Assembly in Baltimore and the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice in Los Angeles are actively organizing in both the community and at workplaces.

We urge the entire movement to embrace these calls and to organize and promote "No work! No shopping! No rent!" on May Day.

The Democratic Party Convention has been rescheduled from July to the week of Aug. 17 in Milwaukee. So have the planned protests. We have endorsed the [Coalition](#)

[to March on the DNC](#) and are calling on the largest number of people to participate.

Struggle-La Lucha newspaper and the Socialist Unity Party/Partido de Socialismo Unido are planning caravans from the West Coast, East Coast, the South, Southwest and Midwest. We urge the Sanders movement, particularly the youth, to join with the protests at the DNC.

Danger of imperialist war

There is an ever-present danger of imperialist war — but that danger is multiplied during a capitalist economic crisis. Any widening of war will intensify racism, jingoism, anti-immigrant violence, misogyny and bigotry against LGBTQ2S people. The Democratic Party, with few exceptions, is a party of war like the Republican Party. It cannot offer a solution.

The pandemic has revealed that global cooperation and solidarity is a necessity for everyone's survival. But instead, the U.S. rulers and the Pentagon continue to inflict sanctions on countless countries, including Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Yemen and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. These sanctions have prevented badly needed supplies to fight the coronavirus from reaching these countries.

Bernie Sanders is not a revolutionary. But as an insider, he understood the power of the billionaires, and that to realize even a part of his program, it would take a mass movement in the streets, one that included mass resistance in workplaces and communities.

It's time we take the torch and build a movement that can move all of humanity forward toward socialism, not backward toward the corrupt capitalist system. We will make mistakes along the way, but we must embark on that road, sooner rather

than later. ¡Sí, se puede!

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