

The political fraud of the People's Summit in Chicago: Sanders, unions seek to refurbish Democrats

By Jerry White and Tom Hall
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The Bernie Sanders wing of the Democratic Party is convening a “People’s Summit” in Chicago on Friday through Sunday. Called under the banner of “Building the political revolution,” the three-day event, headlined by the US senator and former Democratic presidential primary candidate, is sponsored by unions that backed Sanders last year and several liberal and ostensibly “left” organizations that operate inside or within the orbit of the Democratic Party.

The summit is being held under conditions of unprecedented political crisis in the United States. Open political warfare has erupted in Washington, pitting the Trump administration against powerful factions of the military-intelligence apparatus and the Democratic Party, centered on issues of foreign policy. Alongside this internecine battle within the ruling class, a different and more far-reaching conflict is developing, between the working class on the one side, and the ruling class on the other.

The purpose of the People’s Summit is to smother, contain and channel mass opposition to social inequality, unemployment, poverty and the Trump administration’s assault on all the rights of the working class behind the Democratic Party. That is, it seeks to subordinate genuine social anger to the right-wing agenda of sections of the ruling class.

This is the second “People’s Summit.” The first was held last year, as Sanders’ Democratic Party nomination campaign was winding down and as the Senator prepared to announce his support for Clinton. This he did less than a month later, repudiating the aspirations of 13 million workers and youth who voted for Sanders because he said he was building a movement against the economic and political

domination of the “billionaire class.”

By backing Clinton, a tool of the “billionaire class” and military-intelligence apparatus, Sanders helped hand victory to Trump, who ran as the sole “antiestablishment” candidate in the race, while millions of working-class voters stayed away from the polls.

Now the political vaudeville act of the “people’s summit” is being reprised, with the same cast of characters, under new circumstances. After performing his assigned role in the 2016 elections, the “independent” Senator Sanders has been elevated to a central leadership role in the Democratic Party caucus of the US Senate, where he is doing everything he can to bolster support for the Democrats.

The faction of the Democratic Party represented by Sanders is acutely aware that, while there is enormous and growing popular hostility to the Trump administration, the Democrats are also broadly hated. Indeed, Democrats have lost popularity even more rapidly than the Republicans since Hillary Clinton’s electoral debacle last year. According to recent polls, 66 percent of respondents thought Democrats were “out of touch” with the population, compared to 62 percent for the Republicans.

To provide it with a left cover, the so-called “Berniecrats” are trying to convince the party establishment to adopt a program of mild reforms, including Medicare for All, \$15 minimum wage, forgiveness of student loans, etc. Their hope is to rebrand this party of Wall Street and war as a “people’s party,” so that it can resume its traditional role of preventing the emergence of a mass working-class movement against American capitalism.

According to a statement on the People's Summit web site, the event is aimed at deepening the "relationship between participating organizations rooted in principled anti-corporate politics, development of community leaders, direct action not based on partisan identification, and strategic organizing to build power."

To call this a "farce" would be too mild. The list of sponsors belies any claims of "principled anti-corporate policies." The two most prominent union backers of the event, National Nurses United (NNU) and Communications Workers of America (CWA,) have long collaborated with the corporations and the Democratic Party with devastating consequences for nurses and telecom workers.

Last year, as they publicly campaigned for Sanders, the NNU and CWA carried out betrayals of striking Minnesota nurses and Verizon workers. Like the rest of the AFL-CIO, which reduced strike activity to the lowest level in history during the Obama years, the NNU and CWA shut down these struggles to prevent a potential political confrontation with the Democratic administration, which spearheaded the attack on health care, pensions and wages.

As for the participating organizations eschewing "partisan identification," the fact is all the organizations and public figures gathering in Chicago identify with the Democratic Party, including the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which endorsed Kerry, Obama and Sanders over the last four presidential elections. The same goes for various liberal personalities attending the event, including actor Danny Glover, author Naomi Klein, filmmaker Michael Moore, *Nation* publisher Katrina vanden Heuvel, *Democracy Now* host Amy Goodman and CNN journalist and former Obama special advisor Van Jones.

Several current Democratic Party office holders are listed as speakers. Also making an appearance will be Black Lives Matter activist and "social entrepreneur" Shaun King and International Socialist Organization leader Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor (who is listed without party affiliation), who promote the identity politics of an upper-middle-class social layer that constitutes a central base of the Democrats.

To one extent or another, they all promote the myth that the Democratic Party—a capitalist party whose

standard bearer Obama just oversaw eight years of war and a historic transfer of wealth from the working class to the financial aristocracy—can be pushed to the left by mass pressure. This was summed up by Winnie Wong, the cofounder of People for Bernie, who told CNN, "The Democrats will be forced to move left. Whether they will be effective in augmenting the strategic political work we do moving into 2018 remains to be seen. People will leave the summit with a sense of purpose. This is a promise."

There are significant divisions over the direction and electoral strategy of the Democratic Party. The Sanders wing of the party is concerned that the Democrats' overt hostility to the concerns of the working class will produce another electoral disaster in the 2018 mid-term elections and beyond. The Obama-Clinton faction, represented by Nancy Pelosi and Charles Schumer, are fixated on attacking Trump from the right and using their anti-Russian campaign to push for a military confrontation with the nuclear-armed power.

There is no genuinely left faction within this debate, however. The concerns of both the Obama-Clinton and Sanders wings are over how best to market this party of Wall Street and American imperialism and to contain and strangle social opposition. It can be said with certainty that there will be no criticism from this weekend's speakers about the right-wing, pro-war campaign being carried out by the Democrats in Washington.

The basic political conclusion that can and will be drawn by millions of workers is precisely the one that the organizers of the People's Summit are doing whatever they can to obscure: that opposition of the working class to the Trump administration must not be contaminated by any association with the Democratic Party and its various affiliates, that the working class must be organized independently on the basis of its own, socialist, program and strategy.

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