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organized. And if they do not let down their guard by holding illusions in elections.

Right now almost no one, beyond a marginal few, is for a revolution (of any kind). Most people know that something is wrong with this system but have no idea what to do about it. Yet more people can see the possibility of a general strike in a major city than they can see any hope of organizing an alternative to the Democratic Party. And one such mass strike, shutting down a city, would shake up the political consciousness of millions. The whole of U.S. politics is organized so that ordinary people, the workers of every category, do not realize what a terrific power they have if they would use it. Even now, people can see the use of militant mass actions, if radicals were organized to raise such ideas. This talk about forming new electoral parties is a diversion, something which takes us away from really fighting the power.

In brief, an attempt to build a new national party would be extremely difficult, would be reformist in its program, would be another capitalist party, and would serve as a barrier to independent mass movement. Independent mass actions and struggles are what anarchists advocate, to build a movement which might culminate in a popular revolution.

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their next introduction to the Communist Manifesto. (Marx 1992; 206) Unlike anarchists, Lenin and Trotsky were for running in elections as platforms for revolutionary propaganda. But they denied that it was possible to use elections to take over these states. So they said, many times.

Yet here we have all these Leninists, Trotskyists, and other Marxists who want parties to run in elections without saying that a revolution is necessary. Presumably some of them do not believe that such electoral action can lead to laying hold of the ready-made state machinery and wielding it for the purposes of the working class. Yet they do not say so nor fight to include such ideas in the party's platform. Other socialists and Greens probably believe that the "ready-made state machinery" can be used for the good of all—that is, they are sincere reformists. But what are the supposedly revolutionary socialists doing? Are they deliberately lying to the voters?

To repeat: however democratic it appears, the U.S. government was designed so that the working people could not take it over. In any case, the ruling capitalist class is not so attached to democracy as to let the U.S. population vote in a government which would take away its wealth and power, its factories, offices, banks, mansions, private jets, islands, and politicians. Faced with such a threat, the capitalists will resist tooth and claw, to the bitter end. (As the Southern slaveowners did when Lincoln was elected.) They will whip up race hatred, organize fascist private bands, cancel elections, organize a military coup, or do whatever it takes to "save civilization," as they see it. They must be disarmed and removed from power. The workers and oppressed are the big majority of the population, with their hands on the means of production, transportation, distribution, and communication. The ranks of the military are the daughters and sons of the working class who will not fire on their families if approached by the people. A revolution might be fairly nonviolent, if the working people are united, courageous, and self-

There are a number of radicals who reject the "two-party system". These are socialists (of various sorts) and left-liberals who do not accept the anarchist goal of abolition of the state as well as capitalism. But the Leftists I am writing about agree with anarchists that it is a mistake to support the Democratic Party and its politicians and its organization (the modern Republican Party is not an attraction for Leftists). They agree that the Democrats, like the Republicans, are agents of the big business owners; that the Democrats support capitalism as a system; that they support the imperialism and war-making of the national state as it is; that, while the Democrats play lip service to the danger of climate change, they actually support policies which will lead to ecological catastrophe; that in practice they are actually supporters of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. (I am not going to argue for these controversial propositions, at this time.) Such radicals and left-liberals are aware that the Democrats serve to draw in popular movements, co-opt their leaders, and kill off their militancy. Therefore these militants do not organize for votes for any Democrat, even in the very unusual situation when a Democrat calls himself a "democratic socialist." Instead they seek to build a new, third, party to run in elections.

I am not discussing what individuals may do on election day, as individuals without a movement. Whether one person votes or doesn't, and for whom, does not really have much effect (if the individual is allowed to vote, and even if that vote is counted). I am not discussing how individuals should react to the vile Donald Trump in this specific election. What matters is what radicals advocate to be done by large numbers of people: the unions, the African-American community, organized feminists, the environmental movement, the LGBT community, immigrant associations, and so on. These groupings (which are the base of the Democratic Party) are potentially very powerful, if they would act together.

Rejecting the two-party-system, anarchists instead propose non-electoral mass action. Anarchists advocate union organizing,

community organizing, strikes, marches, demonstrations, nonviolent civil disobedience, "riots" (rebellions), military mutinies, and a general strike. They call for sit-ins and occupations of factories, of other workplaces, schools and universities, city centers, and transportation hubs. It was just such militant methods which won union rights and public benefits in the 'thirties, which overthrew legal racial segregation in the 'sixties and won certain other gains for African-Americans. Such methods were used to oppose the Vietnamese war in the 'sixties and 'seventies. The modern LGBT movement began with the Christopher Street "riot" and was advanced by ACT-UP's civil disobedience, among other events. Gains for women were won in the context of these upheavals and mass radicalization.

However, the non-anarchists, while not necessarily against direct actions, focus on building a new popular political party. Some of them, often from a Trotskyist background, see this as a proposal for a Labor Party based on the unions, as in Britain and Australia. Others are for a vaguer "Workers' Party" or something similar. Some raise both. For example, the slogans "Fight for a Labor Party!" and "For a Mass Party of Labor!" appear in a pamphlet distributed by the (Trotskyist) Workers International League. (Woods 2011) Others just focus on building some sort of general new party—class-content not specified. Michelle Alexander (who has led in exposing the attack on African-Americans through mass incarceration) wrote, "I am inclined to believe that it would be easier to build a new party than to save the Democratic Party from itself." (Alexander 2016)

Past Efforts

In any case, it is accepted that the new party would not be a revolutionary party, at least at first, if ever. Many—perhaps most—working people hold views to the left of the conventional party poli-

a labor party would be launched under thoroughly reformist leadership and program, with revolutionary socialists acting as a critical left wing at best….If American labor formed its own party…then there can be little doubt that the candidates it would run…would be as individuals not much politically different from liberal Democrats today. The difference would not be in the man but in the movement." (Draper 1972; 124–125)

But I am arguing that a "movement" for an electoral labor party would not, in practice, be much different from a movement for a new capitalist party—no more than the "man" would be different from other, reformist, men and women. If it showed any signs of vitality it would immediately attract all sorts of liberal mouthpieces, professional bureaucrats, and leftist charlatans, right along with the union officials, all comprising that "thoroughly reformist leadership."

In the coming time of crisis and rebellion, revolutionary anarchists do not want to let the politicians mislead the workers and others into conventional politics. Anarchists will do their best to prevent the limitations of the movements by electoral parties—to inspire popular militancy.

Revolution or Reform

If there is one thing on which Lenin and Trotsky agreed with the anarchists, it was that the existing (bourgeois) state could not be used to make fundamental changes—that it would have to be overthrown, smashed, dismantled, and replaced by alternate institutions. (Lenin and Trotsky advocated a new, "workers' state," while anarchists are for federations of popular councils and associations.) Lenin would quote Marx's conclusion from the 1871 Paris Commune rebellion, "The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes"—a statement which Marx and Engels were to attach to

This was the one major practical dispute between Marx and the anarchists in the First International. Marx wanted every local group of the International to foster independent electoral action. The anarchists were opposed. Marxists, then as now, accused the anarchists of being "political indifferentists" and "anti-political." The truth was that they were only anti-electoral. They were not against mass strikes and demonstrations which pressured the state. They were against spreading false confidence that workers could make real gains through getting elected to the government.

By now the historical "experiment" of forming workers' electoral parties is over. The Labor parties, Social Democratic parties, Communist parties, and Green parties have all had their day in Europe and elsewhere, with little to show for their elections. It seems peculiar to advocate a U.S. Labor party, given the reactionary, pro-imperialist, history of the British and Australian Labour parties. Most recently, there are the disastrous examples of the socialist parties elected in Venezuela (Chavez' Bolivarians), in Brazil (Lula's Workers Party), and most recently in Greece (Syriza, a real failure).

Sticking to Marx's class approach should lead to socialists rejecting votes for Democrats but also for third-capitalist parties, such as the Green party. Unfortunately, there is likely to be little real difference between a third capitalist party and a new"labor" party.

In a time of crisis, when masses of people are angry, radicalizing, and rebellious, the "leaders" of the workers will try to run around to get in front of them, in order to lead them into safe and respectable activities (such as going to the election booths every few years). The left wing of the union bureaucrats will split away from the Democrats, and so will the liberal politicians, the preachers, the pundits, and the middle class "leadership" of all the movements (women, environment, African-American, etc.). They may call their new party a "workers" party or a "labor party," but they may just as well call it a "green" party or a "citizens" party.

Advocates of a "labor party" admit, "…The assumption must be, given the political level of the American working class, that…such

tics. They are for taxing the very rich, fair trade between countries, guaranteed jobs, free community colleges, equal pay for women, prevention of climate change, and other causes. But the people do not (yet) see this as implying a social revolution. If a new party runs, not just to make progressive propaganda, but to get elected, it cannot advocate revolution—that is, it cannot tell the truth about what is really needed to save the world.

Back in 1968, some militants tried to create "a broad third-party movement of the left." (Draper 1972; 118) This was the attempt to build a national Peace and Freedom Party. Its rationale was explained by a leading advocate (another sort of Trotskyist): "The 'revolution' that is on the agenda for Peace and Freedom today is not yet overthrowing the whole System, but something a little more modest for the day: viz. overthrowing the two-party system…." (132) This effort failed.

In 1972, over 8,000 African-American militants went to Gary IN for a "Black Political Convention." They seriously discussed forming an independent Black party. But this was defeated by the Rev. Jesse Jackson and other establishment-oriented Black leaders.

An attempt to build a movement for a labor party began in 1991. The Labor Party Advocates was supported by a number of relatively left union officials, who were dissatisfied with the Democrats—and by members of various socialist organizations. At one point it even tried to declare itself a real "Labor Party." But the union officials just wanted to pressure the Democratic politicians on whom they relied, not to actually break with them. And so the organization failed.

Since then there have been other attempts to build a new party (one effort calling itself the New Party). Many U.S. radicals were inspired by the election in Greece of the Syriza Party and the growth in Spain of Podemas (although the recent failures of Syriza may have had a negative impact). In November 2013, Kshama Sawant of the Socialist Alternative (Trotskyists) was elected to the Seattle City Council, with support from unionized workers. Sawant and

her group have campaigned for some sort of independent party of the left. The group around The North Star website, led by Louis Proyect (and initiated by the late Peter Camejo) has also been advocating independent political action—a new party of the left.

In May 2015, there was a conference, "The Future of Left/Independent Electoral Actoin in the United States." It was attended by members of Socialist Alternative, Solidarity (Trotskyist), the International Socialist Organization (ditto), The North Star, the radical wing of the Green Party (such as Howie Hawkins), the Peace and Freedom Party (California), the Vermont Progressive Party, and others. About 200 attended. No solid organization came out of it.

In New York State, unions and others back what is called the Working Families Party. Unlike other states, New York permits cross-endorsements, so that the WFP can get enough votes to keep its ballot line by endorsing Democrats. In the last election it endorsed Governor Andrew Cuomo for re-election, despite his terrible record. The WFP probably should not be regarded as part of the third party movement.

At this time, the most successful "new party" is the Green Party. While its platform holds many good points, it is not actually anti-capitalist. For example, its platform says, "We must change the legal design of corporations so that they generate profits, but not at the expense of the environment…We must compel [corporations] to serve human and environmental needs…" (Green National Committee 2014; IV Economic Justice and Sustainability) So, in their green society there would continue to be profit-seeking corporations competing on the market, but they would be better regulated. This is a liberal image of an improved capitalism.

The Green Party has run several presidential campaigns, the most notable being when they endorsed Ralph Nader (including 2000, when he was accused of costing Al Gore the election). They have run gubernatorial campaigns. (Recently they got five percent of the vote in New York State against Gov. Cuomo, who was so bad that even the teachers' union could not endorse him—while

or so of the population, after all). Similarly they are for unions, but not as the single biggest (even now), most potentially powerful, organization of the working class. They have no special approach to workers as workers and no special hostility to capitalists as capitalists.

In brief, what this trend proposes is a third-capitalist-party. But the U.S. already has two capitalist parties and does not need a new one. Nor are progressive people likely to put money and effort into creating another capitalist party, when they can work within one of the existing ones. Despite its initiators' best intentions, such a third party would be under the immense pressure of the capitalist system to maintain that system. Once committed to maintaining this system (or at least, to not changing the system), it will be unable to resist the logic of the beast. I assume the supporters of this classless approach do not believe that capitalism is a central cause of climate change, economic crises, wars, and oppression. They are wrong. Without getting rid of capitalism, we cannot get rid of these terrible evils.

A "Workers' Party"?

The original motivation of Marxists was not to build a new, third, capitalist party. Quite the opposite: it was to break the workers away from the capitalist parties (such as the British Liberal Party, in Marx's day). It was to enhance working class self-organization and self-assertion against all capitalist parties. Marx wrote, "Even when there is no prospect whatsoever of their being elected, the workers must put up their own candidates in order to preserve their independence…." (quoted by D'Amato 2000) And Engels declared, "In a country that has newly entered the movement, the first really crucial step is the formation by the workers of an independent political party, no matter how, so long as it is distinguishable as a labor party." (quoted by D'Amato 2000)

keep the "mob" in its place. Despite changes, the system has continued to do that up to this day.

Supporters of new parties argue that some previous third parties made significant impacts. They refer to the Peoples or Populist Party and Debs' and Thomas' Socialist Party. This claim has truth to it, but these parties did not establish themselves nor change the system. The one time when a new party was successful was the one time when the system came apart. Lincoln's Republican Party did destroy the Whig Party and temporarily split the Democrats, in the process of getting elected. But the country was then in turmoil over slavery, sections of the ruling class (slaveowners and capitalists) could not find agreement, and a civil war was around the corner. Similar upheavals may yet occur in the modern U.S., but they have not yet.

This makes a successful new party unlikely in the near future. Is this how the U.S. Left should spend its limited human and financial resources?

A Classless (Capitalist) New Party?

As can be seen, many of those advocating a new or third party are not concerned with its class composition or class program. Like the Green Party, they may propose major improvements in the environment; worker rights; anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic policies; and general improvements in society. But they do not propose to change the economy from one owned mostly by what Sanders has called "the billionaire class," to one collectively owned and democratically managed by the working class and oppressed. Their program is left-liberal, but not anti-capitalist.

Similarly, such third party advocates want to attract people of all classes, from farmworkers to dentists and, if possible, "progressive" businesspeople. Of course, they would like the support of working people (non-supervisory workers and their families make up 80 %

the Republican, safely, had no chance of winning). The Greens' membership includes liberals (Roseanne Barr offered to run as their presidential candidate), Trotskyist socialists, people with "Green" politics (whatever that means to them), and others. In the New York gubernatorial campaign, their candidate was Howie Hawkins, who used to be associated with the anarchist Murray Bookchin. Their candidate for lieutenant governor was Brian Jones, of the ISO.

The Greens and other such parties have also won seats on local city councils. For example, in Richmond CA, the Richmond Progressive Alliance (which includes Greens) has won elections for Mayor and City Council. In the U.S. "federal" system, local government is the most democratic and the easiest to get elected to. It also has the least power.

However, the movement for a viable, left, third party was torn by Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign. Sanders calls himself a "democratic socialist," even though he does not actually advocate socialism. He does not propose expropriating any capitalists or creating a cooperative, democratically-planned, economy; his model is the capitalist welfare-state of Denmark. He has a liberal program, if one to the left of other politicians. And he ran within the Democratic Party. It was doubtful that he would be allowed to win the nomination, let alone the election. If elected, it was impossible that he could carry out his program—let alone socialism. But it is significant that he had drawn a large and excited following, especially among young people and working people.

The Left groups which usually get involved in the Democratic Party, such as the Democratic Socialists of America hadthrown themselves into the Sanders' campaign. (After some vacillation, the Communist Party supported Hillary Clinton, probably because of her support among African-Americans.) But many who might otherwise support a third party were also arguing for Bernie. Many of the Greens' members were attracted to Bernie. Certainly it had become impossible to build much of an independent political or-

ganization so long as Sanders appeared to be showing that it was possible to run inside the Democrats. Whatever Sanders was thinking personally, the effect of his campaign (like that of Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, Jesse Jackson, or Dennis Kucinich before him) was to draw potential opposition forces into the establishment Democratic Party. Some of his present supporters have become disillusioned by the whole process. Rather than being burned out (so to say) they may become revolutionaries.

Leaving the Sanderistas alone for now, let me focus on those who still want to build a third party of the left—if not now, then as soon as possible.

Trying to Build a Third Party is Impractical

First I will consider the most immediately practical issue. It would be very difficult to build a new party. Building an electoral machine and running in elections costs a great deal of money, as everyone knows. By definition, the capitalists have much more of it than the rest of the population. Sanders has been able to draw on lots of small donations—but he is running inside a major party, in a one-shot-deal (that is, he is not trying to create an on-going mass organization). He still has much less than Ms. Clinton, let alone his Republican rivals, if we count PACs and Super-PACs, which he has rejected (the rich would not donate to him anyway).

It also requires a lot of people, especially for maintaining an on-going organization. The working class and other oppressed people do have lots of people (much more than the "one-percent"). But the Democrats and Republicans start at least with fully staffed organizations while new parties must start from scratch.

It has been possible to start new parties in Europe and elsewhere for reasons which do not apply in the U.S. Other countries have proportional representation, so that a minority party which gets five percent of the vote gets five percent of parliamentary seats. Or

they have second round voting: people may vote for their preferred minority party, without feeling that they are "wasting their vote." There will be a second round of votes, with only the largest two or three parties competing. Only a few places in the U.S. have second-round voting. There are other advantages which non-U.S. parties have and U.S. citizens do not.

The U.S. has a bizarre political system, especially given its boast of "democracy." This makes it almost impossible for a new party to do more than to win an election here and there—if it wants to actually take over the whole government democratically.

Just at the national level, elections to the House of Representatives are grossly distorted by gerrymandering (also known as "incumbent protection"). The Senate has two senators from each state, no matter their size (so that Rhode Island and California each have two senators), elected for six year terms. The presidency is elected through the infamous Electoral College; all the electors of each state go to the majority candidate, no matter how large the minority vote (so that Democrats in Texas or Republicans in New York may as well stay home on election day). Judges at the national level are appointed, not elected—for life. This does not count the local levels with their corruption, legal distortion, gerrymandering, and voter suppression. This is before looking at the effects of money (legal and illegal), advertising, manipulation of the media, racist laws, and so on.

The "founding fathers" of the U.S. knew exactly what they were doing (even if they did not predict the rise of parties). They did not want the "mob" to rule ("democracy" as they saw it). This would threaten their property. The people might break up big landed estates or create cheap money so they could pay off their creditors. But the founders did not want one-person rule either: a new king, or a dictator such as Oliver Cromwell. They wanted a "republic" where their class could maintain its wealth—a government which would settle disputes within the ruling class, make decisions, and