

## **Independent Political Action Today: An Orientation**

**By David F& Dianne F**

One of Solidarity's principles is the call for a working-class political party, which has been made by the U.S. socialist left over the past century. The U.S. working class needs a party that represents its interests and is run by working people.

In today's climate the necessity of working-class and/or social movement independent political action is made more urgent, and at the same time more difficult, by the decay and emergent crisis in U.S. bourgeois politics. The two-capitalist-party system that has served U.S. elites and the ruling class for more than a century and a half, through all kinds of changes and crises, is becoming a factor of instability.

Uniquely in the USA, traditional parties have become vehicles for massive fundraising and heavy-donor dominance above all else, with actual membership hollowed out. In this context, the former "mainstream-conservative" Republican Party has become a far-right coalition of the partially overlapping Trump cult, the extreme religious right, white-supremacist Christian nationalism, and unrestrained corporate greed, with conspiracist-driven politics including denial of human-caused climate change and vaccine denial, undisguised racism along with misogyny, homophobia and other forms of bigotry.

*None* of these rightwing policies have majority support, but they can hope to win and maintain dominance through racial and partisan gerrymandering and voter suppression, with selective appeals to paranoia, irrationalism and above all white racism. It's a party resembling AfD in Germany, the ruling Fidesz in Hungary, Vox in Spain or the LePen "Rally" in France, although without the coherence or discipline of any of these.

The Democratic Party on the other hand has been pushed by powerful movements in a (relatively) progressive direction on a number of important social issues including reproductive and LGBTQ rights, racial justice and (less strongly) the environmental crisis. It embraces some form of industrial policy (the remnants of Build Back Better), driven by a mix of motives including economic revival and rivalry with China, a bipartisan priority.

But on *core issues that dominate people's lives* with all the disastrous legacies of the past three decades -- including "free trade," financial deregulation, crippling anti-labor laws, destruction of welfare and shredding the "safety net" -- the Democrats are constrained by their heavy-donor base as well as ideological commitment to capitalist logic.

Abandoning the most basic needs and interests of the working class voting base has put the Democrats in the position of dependence on the stereotyped "suburban soccer moms" and other highly unreliable constituencies. The progressive wing of the party has a loud voice but weak influence on any of its central policies.

The prospect of a volatile 2024 election that could be won by a far-right minority, or thrown into chaos by a better-organized rerun of Trump's attempts to overturn the 2020 result, hangs over the coming electoral cycle. Serious violence is not out of the question, although a repeat of January 6

is unlikely. What possibilities may exist on the local or national levels for a left alternative must be part of an ongoing discussion.

### **Our Activist Work**

During our organization's existence we have worked to build formations that are independent from the control of the capitalist class. We worked with a variety of local and national independent formations including Peace and Freedom Party (CA), the Progressive Party (VT), Richmond Progressive Alliance (Richmond, CA), Progressive Dane (Madison, WI), the Green Party, the Labor Party Advocates and later the Labor Party. Most recently our members in Chicago have worked with the Chicago Teachers Union, SEIU and community organizations to build the United Working Families Party of Chicago.

Each of these has had positive and limiting factors, but all represented an attempt to break free of the two-party system controlled by big business. The purpose of this discussion about our orientation is not to analyze these attempts in detail, but to suggest that those efforts rooted in ongoing social struggles are the ones that have the best opportunity to develop. So far that has meant local struggles more than a vibrant national network.

Despite quite modest success and many failures, nonetheless the examples of establishing footholds where the party formation has been able to carry out successful campaigns, built a leadership team and even transitioned from one generation of political activists to another, may provide us with the lessons we need as possibilities develop.

Meanwhile, as the far right has taken over the Republican Party and as its most rightwing candidates take office, attempts proliferate to void longstanding democratic norms. This includes intensifying gerrymandering and appointing Supreme Court judges who interpret the federal constitution to reinforce their insistence on "originalism."

One result is that the country is awash with guns and rifles (126 guns/rifles per 100 people). Another result has been the overthrow or dismemberment of longstanding constitutional rights including voting rights and the right to privacy, and exceptionally vicious and reactionary social legislation.

Given the dominance of money and media attention necessary to compete in the longstanding two-party electoral system, the Democratic Party appears as the only alternative to defeating Republican candidates, many of whom have been elected in primaries by fundamentalist, conspiracy-believing voters.

Much of the left and many progressives realize that the ostensible broad tent of the Democratic Party is dominated in fact by the corporate elites that fund it. Some of these forces have concluded that a viable strategy is to grow the Democratic Party's left/progressive wing and "change the party." Others do not have the illusion that the party itself can be transformed and simply vote and even work for Democrats.

Recognizing this political crisis, and the failure of unions to build an alternative over the years, we see the best chance for educating people on the need for an independent working-class party

is through local initiatives such as the ones being pioneered in Chicago and Richmond CA. In these cases, their candidates run against those selected by the Democratic Party. Many who participate in those local campaigns have not fully broken with the Democratic Party although they have opposed its corporate and neoliberal policies in practice.

We do not see a mass of voters ready to break with the Democrats in the present period, but the creation of independent campaigns at the local level can provide the opportunity to build for future possibilities of independent political action. We also promote referenda at the local and state level as an effective means to campaign for important rights, and we celebrate recent and successful initiatives on reproductive freedom, environmental justice and ballot rights.