

Bernie Sanders' OR Revolution—A Statement or a Question?

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Supporters of Bernie Sanders' presidential election campaign launched on Wednesday what it declared to be the next phase in the progressive political movement in the United States. More than 2,600 "Watch Parties" were organized and held in houses across the country to hear Bernie speak and announce the next phase of a continuing campaign to challenge corporate America and roll back the stranglehold of money on U.S. democracy that has been deepening with every election cycle at least since the 1990s.

Reportedly, more than 200,000 across the U.S. also listened in and watched Bernie remotely as well. The event, and the new movement, has been officially called "OR," for "Our Revolution."

Sanders Addresses the 2,600

In his video address Sanders pledged his recently terminated presidential campaign would continue to fight at the grassroots level for changes in US politics — including election campaign finance reform, single payer national health care legislation, racial and environmental justice, worker and gender rights. Sanders declared the new movement would work to immediately elect 100 new progressive candidates at every level — from school boards and local city and state government to the U.S. Senate - and support eventually hundreds more beyond that. And not just electoral action, according to Bernie the new movement, "OR" will fight to bring justice through passing initiatives and referenda, protesting police oppression, fighting for immigrant rights, and other non-electoral political action.

The goals and objectives Sanders has declared for the new movement are admirable — and not unlike his admirable policy positions he raised and promoted during his recent campaign for the Democratic Party presidential nomination.

But noble sounding objectives alone do not a movement make. A progressive movement and politics is as much a question of strategy and organization as it is of goals and objectives. Revolutionary objectives—and the new movement, 'Our Revolution', claims to want to achieve revolutionary objectives—requires a revolutionary strategy and a revolutionary organization. But what the hell is that?

Well, what a revolutionary strategy and organization in U.S. 2016 may be is up for debate. But what revolutionary strategy and organization is NOT, is not so debatable. It isn't a return to the corporate-controlled Democratic Party.

"Inside" vs. "Outside" Strategy

Sanders had made it clear from the outset of his recent campaign for the Democratic Party nomination that if he was not nominated as the Party's presidential candidate, he would support the Democratic Party's nominee. That nominee was clearly engineered by party elites to be Hillary Clinton. Sanders, true to his pledge, declared his public support for Hillary at the recent Democratic Party convention. From the beginning, Sanders has always been an 'insider.'

Sanders' running in the Democrat Party primaries and pledging to support whoever was the nominee of the Party represents what is sometimes called an 'inside' strategy—i.e. bring about progressive change by reform within the Democrat Party. Other progressives have repeatedly argued against "inside," and insisted an "outside" the party strategy and movement was the only way to bring real, permanent progressive change.

This "inside-outside" debate has raged in US progressive circles for years. Recent history shows, however, that "inside" has proven repeatedly futile and a waste of time. Every time an even remote, tentative challenge to the party's hand-picked pro-corporate nominees have occurred, they have been squashed quickly by those same party leaders. Howard Dean, Dennis Kucinich, Jesse Jackson are but the most notable examples.

Sanders' own recent campaign is also good testimony to the futility of "inside." In retrospect, it is now clear his candidacy was doomed from the start, given Party elites' structure of super-delegates as a safety valve – given the same elites' biased anti-Sanders maneuvers during the nominating process by party hack, Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, and, most recently, their control of the Democratic party convention and challenges to the Party's platform by Sanders delegates.

Once Sanders lost the nomination, he did not abandon his "inside" strategy. His next "inside" move was to tell his supporters to go to the Democratic party convention and change the Party's platform. That was a necessary first step, he said, to reforming the party. But "inside" failed at the convention as well—as the party elite ensured its free trade policy platform remained intact, including the recent TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership) deal, and made certain that Sanders' supporters' demands that the party adopt a single payer national health care position was also rejected as the party position. Not one really significant reform of the Party's platform was achieved at the convention.

Sanders' supporters should have learned that "change the party platform" was as futile – given party elites' control of the convention committees (rules, credentials, etc.) – as it was to run against a "stacked deck" of super-delegates and not to fall victim to the maneuvers of the Wasserman-Schultzes who ran the Party's primaries political sideshow.

Some of Sanders' supporters have apparently begun to learn, as they booed Bernie's endorsement of Hillary speech at the convention and walked out. The walkouts and others valiantly determined to carry on the fight for independent progressive politics in the wake of the convention.

They began organizing at the grass roots, city by city, building a proto-organization, determined to chart a course of true progressive politics "outside" the Democratic Party. That new progressive organization's launch was envisioned as the OR "watch parties" held on Wednesday.

But just as the 2600 "Watch Parties" were launched, half of the staff organizing the OR resigned and walked out. The reasons they did reveal that the "inside" strategy is still very

much alive and well among Sanders' professional politico operatives now taking control of the OR.

OR Staff Resignations and Lieber-Cohen Regime

The walkout and resignations were over the appointment at the last minute, apparently by Sanders, of Jeffrey Lieber, his longtime confidant and recent nominating election campaign manager. Lieber has been particularly disliked by many of the grass roots young organizers and staffers involved in Bernie's primaries campaigns who moved over to build the OR. Lieber had been, and remains, a strong advocate of raising money from wealthy donors whenever possible. He, and others like him in Sanders' organization, is also a proponent of reforming the Democratic Party from "within" as the main strategic thrust of the new OR.

Lieber's approach is also to turn the OR into what is called a 501c4 fund raising organization, that accepts billionaires' money. The 501c4 is a legal structure in the US that prohibits direct involvement in elections. By law, it can't even discuss, talk, or coordinate with candidates it may fund.

According to the staffers that just resigned from OR, as a 501c4 the OR could not, according to Lieber, support Tim Canova, a progressive candidate who is targeting to defeat Wasserman-Schultz, who led the anti-Sanders dirty maneuvers in the party during the recent primaries. OR as a 501c4 is a convenient legal structure that prevents OR from directly supporting progressive challengers to unseat Democrat Party candidates, in other words. And you can't reform the Democrat party from 'inside' if you alienate Party elites by trying to defeat their high ranking, hand-picked Democrat candidates running for office now, can you?

Lieber's insertion into the just forming OR, apparently by Sanders, also shows just what kind of organization the politicos at the top want the OR to be. Why hasn't there been some kind of democratic process to determine who will lead the OR, its supporters should ask themselves? And what about the 100 or so "Board" members of the OR? How has it been "selected" and by whom? Why not elected? Or the OR's chair, Larry Cohen, former head of the Communications Workers of America union. Who made him 'chair' of the Board?

It will become increasingly clear that Lieber-Cohen clearly want the 'OR' strategically to focus on reforming the Democratic Party from "inside." Yes, grassroots non-electoral activity will occur. Keep the troops in the field mobilized and busy until new progressive candidates can run "inside" and reform the party once again. And how will these progressives running for future office be selected as worthy to receive OR support?

"To Be OR not to Be" - That is the Question

These are organizational questions that in turn determine what kind of strategy is adopted. The OR may be "revolutionary" in its objectives, but certainly not at this point in its strategy—and even more certainly not in terms of its organizational structure. A counter-revolutionary strategic focus attempting to reform the Democrat Party from "inside" - with appointed managers like Lieber and selected Board chairs like Cohen in a top-down organizational structure - will not constitute "Our Revolution." It will still "be" theirs.

William Shakespeare's famous character, Hamlet, raised his oft-quoted famous line: "to be or not to be, that is the question." To borrow that line, what will OR "be" now that its

outlines are emerging and splits already developing—i. e. an organization with laudable progressive goals but with a strategy to achieve those goals by trying to reform ‘inside’ the un-reformable, counter-revolutionary, corporate-controlled, and billionaire-financed Democratic Party? Or will it build its own independent organization “outside” the Democratic Party and challenge the latter directly instead of trying to change it “inside.”

That is the question! In short, the OR now faces its “Hamlet” moment.

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