

Democratic Party Primaries: U.S. “Progressives” as Political Contraceptives

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Region: [USA](#)

Global Research, November 23, 2015

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Over the past few decades, insurgent mass movements reflecting political discontent with the domestic economy and imperialist foreign policy have emerged to challenge the leadership and policies of the Democratic Party (DP). There are good reasons for this: The Democratic Party in power in Congress and the White House presided over

- (1) the deepening of inequality between labor and capital;*
- (2) the decline of real wages;*
- (3) the approval of repressive legislation;*
- (4) the reduction of trade union membership by two-thirds;*
- (5) deepening inequality between the races,*
- (6) a trillion dollar (and counting) bailout of the banks and Wall Street;*
- (7) mortgage foreclosure against millions of homeowners;*
- (8) endless ‘police state’ abuses by federal and local police;*
- (9) deregulation of the financial system and*
- (10) the off-shoring of manufacturing jobs and service employment.*

Over the same period, the Democratic Party has supported wars and invasions against Indo-China, Panama, Grenada, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Somalia and scores of ‘clandestine’ military operations – including the recent and current proxy-wars in Georgia and Ukraine.

Popular movements have emerged and mass public opinion has expressed hostility toward both major parties. Hence, the third parties struck a responsive note among the electorate to which the Democratic Party leadership felt threatened by a possible defection by wage and salaried voters, especially to supporting Ralph Nader.

Yet in the end, nothing came of the discontent. Despite large-scale and deeply felt anger and popular outbursts of protests, including the million-strong street demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in 2002-2003, the Democratic Party continued to dominate the ‘progressive’ electorate or relegated it to demoralized abstention.

This essay addresses the following questions:

(1) *Why* have mass movements and genuinely disaffected progressive voters and activists been unable to break with the Democratic Party, despite its consistently abominable record on foreign and domestic policy.

(2) *How* was the pro-Wall Street, pro-imperialist Democratic Party able to retain the support of an electorate, which overwhelmingly polls in favor of health care reform via a national, single-payer health plan, a living minimum wage, the end to police-state surveillance and against serial wars and invasions?

From Protest to Political Hostages

American mass movements have been successful in mobilizing hundreds of thousands in opposition to Washington's support of the South African apartheid regime, Central American dictators, wars in the Middle East and racist legislation. Progressives have educated and organized millions to oppose Wall Street and the Democratic Party's more recent bailout of banks.

Without fail every time mass movements and the popular electorate have opted for independent social action outside of the Democratic Party, a '*dissident*' politician has emerged from within the Party mouthing many of the criticisms and demands of the social movements and the critical electorate.

These Democrat '*dissidents*' organize '*grass roots*' campaigns in popular venues, soliciting small scale contributions and making promises to put an end to '*Big Money and Big Business*' domination of the electoral process.

Such Democrat '*dissidents*' round up millions of votes and hundreds of delegates to the Democratic Convention and then...they inevitably lose to the Party machine and meekly submit...reasserting their loyalty to the 'greater good' against the 'greater evil'.

The radical rhetoric used during the campaign is consciously designed to obscure the '*dissidents*' fundamental loyalty to the Democratic Party, its military machine, its billionaire fundraisers and its Wall Street economic policy strategists.

The pre-ordained primary campaign defeat of the Democrat '*dissidents*' is not the real issue here: The essential political consequence is that the "*dissidents*" channel mass social disaffection back into the Democratic Party thereby undermining any independent political initiative capable of breaking the duopoly stranglehold. In animal husbandry, they are like the handsome goat who tricks the flock into entering the big slaughter-pen of their social and political aspirations.

By endorsing the crowned Party nominee, these '*dissidents*' discredit the very critical ideas and social programs they claimed to promote. They demoralize and depoliticize important segments of the electorate. They demobilize and disorient the social activists who had worked for the social transformation promised by their campaign program.

Most important, by reorienting the peace and justice movements and the neighborhood and anti-racism community organizations into Democratic Party electoral politics, they empty the streets, neighborhoods and workplaces of effective activists.

A brief survey of presidential campaigns over the past thirty-five years confirms this analysis.

Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Hustle: 1984 and 1988

Jesse Jackson was an important leader-activist in the civil rights movement. Based in Chicago, he helped organize tens of thousands of Afro-Americans and develop ties with other minorities, white progressives and trade unions.

Jackson opposed President Reagan's assault on the trade unions, especially the firing of thousands of air controllers. Jackson's opposition to Apartheid South Africa and Reagan's invasion of Grenada and the escalation of military spending gained him credibility in the peace movement.

Millions looked to Jesse Jackson for political leadership and a new political direction. He negotiated with the bosses of the Democratic Party for his entry into the primaries. The deal was that he would compete with the traditional politicians, but immediately submit to the leadership if he lost the nomination.

Jackson mobilized hundreds of thousands of activists from the northern ghettos to the Ivy League college campuses and from the textile factories of North Carolina to the cotton fields of Mississippi. He rolled out the rhetoric about social justice, raising the minimum wage, a single payer (Medicare for All) national health plan and a massive transfer of public funds from the Pentagon to domestic social programs.

He secured an impressive 18% of the vote in the 1984 Democratic primaries. Upon defeat, he immediately capitulated and endorsed the Wall Street Cold Warrior Walter Mondale. He campaigned for Mondale with the promise that the '*Rainbow Coalition*' would influence the campaign and subsequent Mondale presidency. Nothing of the sort happened. Mondale lost. Reagan was re-elected. The '*rainbow coalition*' was as ephemeral as its namesake.

Four years later, a recycled Jesse Jackson trotted out the same rhetoric, the 'grass roots' organizing, the ghetto gab, the poverty hustle and the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow coalition with white and black togetherness... to the amusement of the party bosses and corporate funders.

It was '*All hands on deck*': The street movements shifted from concrete local struggles to door-to-door voter registration for the Democrats. Trade union locals were attracted to Jackson's '*save American jobs*' rhetoric. Middle class progressives were attracted to Jackson's promise to cut the military budget.

Jackson received a substantial 29% of the Democratic primary vote. Michael Dukakis won the nomination and, as promised, Jesse Jackson endorsed the party's choice and instructed all the civil rights, social justice and peace activists and anti-Wall Streeters to work for his election. Dukakis was resoundingly defeated by George Bush Sr. in the 1988 election.

At the end of the 'rainbow' and over a demoralized and de-politicized peace movement, the Bush Administration led the US into the First Gulf War. The wreckage from the popular movements- turned- electoral machines offered little resistance.

Confused by Jackson's double discourse, the disaffected masses fractured. Four years later,

the few pieces were picked up by Wall Street flunky “Bill” Clinton. Once in office and after tooting his victorious saxophone, President ‘Slick Willy’ proceeded to decimate welfare programs, roll back the Glass-Steigal Laws and deregulate the banks, launch a merciless ninety day war to break up Yugoslavia and maintain ten years of bombs and starvation sanctions against Iraq – causing the deaths of 500,000 children and many more adults.

Cowboy Dennis Kucinich and the 2004 Primaries: Keeping Progressive Livestock in the Democratic Party Corral



Just when disgust at the consequences of Clinton’s rotten policies and peccadilloes and George Bush, Jr’s grotesque wars were beginning to unite the disaffected, Dennis Kucinich popped up ‘*from nowhere*’ to launch a white working class version of the Jesse Jackson ‘Rainbow Coalition’ in the Democratic Party primaries of 2004. Saving a lot of money on placards, he re-cycled the same slogans about a national health system, minimum wage boost, higher taxes for the rich, anti-Wall Street rhetoric and public ownership of utilities – from the Jacksonites.

Since there was *still* a substantial strong anti-war movement, he called for the impeachment of President Bush (Jr.) for lying to the American people about Iraq. He criticized Congressional Democrats for supporting the fabricated pretexts to invade Iraq and called for the withdrawal of US troops from the Middle East.

His presidential primary campaign within the Democratic Party attracted a small army of disaffected voters and contributors who otherwise would have bolted from the party for the Greens and their candidate, Ralph Nader. In the Democratic Party Convention, Dennis (looking more like ‘Alfred E. Newman’ than any righteous working class leader) petered out with nary a mumble. He lost the nomination to the Uber-militarist and upper class hero, John Kerry, without even a floor-fight or speech. He endorsed the obnoxious crown prince of the Democratic bosses, Kerry, an ardent pro-war, member of the billionaire class and defender of the US Constitution-shredding Patriot Act.

Kucinich managed to corral the anti-war and anti-Wall Street Democrats into submission, seriously undermining the anti-Bush mass movements, especially the anti-war activists, and the rising tide of Americans who openly favored the Single Payer National Health program – an extension of Medicare for All.

Kucinich ran again in 2008 but he was already damaged goods. His ‘belly crawl’ performance at the 2004 Democratic Convention had alienated most of his backers. But even more important in relegating Dennis to the dustbin was the emergence of a new, slicker and infinitely more persuasive con-man : Barack Obama, the Hawaii-raised, Ivy-league polished and Chicago-crowned chameleon of many colors, cadences and clichés, who burst on the scene playing every instrument in the band!

Barack Obama: The Ultimate Progressive Rabble Rouser and Master of Deceit



Barack Obama's con-job far surpassed any previous effort by Jackson or Kucinich. His mind-boggling ascension on rhetorical bubbles left rival Hillary Clinton, long used to the cant of 'Slick Willie', literally pop-eyed and slack jawed. During the 2008 primary he *embraced* the progressive demands of the anti-war movement, promising to end the Iraq war, bring home the troops from Afghanistan and close the US torture camp at Guantanamo Bay. He promised to finally develop a national health plan (hinting broadly at a Medicare-for-All model) and regulate Wall Street's unbridled swindles and speculation.

Easily seeing through his fluffy rhetoric, the Democratic Party's Wall Street backers secured hundreds of millions from billionaires with which to finance a real '*grass roots movement- in style*' defeating an astonished Hilary Clinton in the Democratic primaries and swamping the mega-millionaire Republican candidate 'Mitt' Romney in the general election.

The Zelig-like Obama adopted the Baptist minister's deep and musical cadences in front of black audiences while savaging and disowning his militant black religious mentor from his Chicago 'community-organizing' day, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, who had condemned the war in Iraq in frank Biblical terms and alienated his Chicago Zionist financial backers and Israel-centric inner council. No longer useful, the good Reverend was effectively 'thrown under the bus' - an object lesson on introducing Ivy League graduates into mass community struggles and enabling their ambitions.

In office, Obama allocated a trillion dollars to bailout Wall Street while letting two million American householders sink under mortgage debt and foreclosures.

He expanded on-going wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and went on to launch new wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen. He supported the violent coups against popularly elected governments (*'regime changes'*) in Honduras, Ukraine and Egypt.

The re-cycled and bamboozled anti-war leaders, who backed his candidacy and lies, were discredited, the remaining "*movement*" fractured.

Initially upward of 80% of US public opinion expressed support for the anti-Wall Street '*Occupy Movement*' but they had no mass-based political organization to sustain the struggle after many of their leaders swam and ultimately sank, tied to the lies of Obama.

Under Obama more American blacks have been murdered by police with complete impunity; more abortion providers assassinated and clinics bombed than under any white Republican president. As for '*humanitarian intervention*': In Libya, tens of thousands of ethnic sub-Saharan Africans (contract workers and Libyan citizens) died in the post-Kaddafi ethnic cleansing of Libya by the racist warlords unleashed by Obama's air assault.

The bewitched progressives were befuddled by the Ivy League's '*black*' president and didn't notice that social inequalities had deepened at an alarming rate. As for access to health care, the American people were forced to 'buy private insurance plans' (many of which were worthless), meanwhile deductibles and co-pays skyrocketed forcing all but the well-salaried to forego necessary medical care. The notion that '*access to health insurance*' was

equivalent to having effective health care has been one of the biggest shams of the Obama era: Life expectancy for large segments of the low income rural and small town Americans has dropped – an unimaginable development in previous eras.

During Obama’s Presidency, the political climate turned rabid rightwing and the progressives turned tail and ran. Right wing extremists swept the Republican Party and then seized control of the Congress and the Senate.

After 7 years of failures, frustration and futility under Obama, progressives found themselves without a movement or prospects. Over 92% of US private sector workers were unorganized and faced continued decline in their standard of living. Black, Chicano and Asian neighborhoods were subject to large-scale, brutal police raids and the extra-judicial killing of minority youth, the homeless, mentally ill and the poor continued with impunity. Over 2 million immigrant workers were incarcerated and expelled. Tens of thousands of young immigrant and refugee mothers and their children were held in private prison camps.

The Republicans promised to extend Obama’s reactionary agenda without the smiling blackface mask. They assured greater tax handouts to Wall Street, with none of the embarrassing rhetorical flourishes, and more wars, without the sanctimonious ‘humanitarian’ cant.

Against this expanding panorama of social deterioration and war-weariness, (a backdrop, which would normally open up the possibility for alternative politics...), *Bernie appeared*. Bernie Sanders was to incarnate the *Fourth Coming* of the progressive Democratic primary campaigner-messiah and scupper any real movement to the left.

Bernie Sanders: After the Black Con-Artist Bring out the Jewish House Radical!



By 2015, US society was deeply polarized. After 7 years of Wall Street pillage, under Democratic President Obama, the mass of working people were looking for an alternative. On the horizon there was only more of the same promised from the rabid right which ran the Republican Party. Massive voter abstention had propelled the Republicans to power in ‘both Houses’ in the elections of 2010, 2012 and 2014. Terror-mongering, the so-called “*Global War on Terror*”, no longer cut any ice with a population terrified of losing their miserable jobs or getting bankrupted by an illness in the family. The Pentagon resorted to paying unemployed actors to stage ‘spontaneous’ displays of patriotism at huge sporting events – dressing up as veterans and running about on the fields with huge flags. There has been a big drop in healthy young Americans willing to ‘sign up’ and fight in overseas wars despite the continued prospect of being mired in poverty-wage jobs in the so-called ‘recovered domestic economy’. The mass of disaffected working

people were not flocking to the Democratic Party's plutocrat-of-choice, Hillary Clinton, the war monger, Wall Street favorite and pro-Israel candidate par excellence. The stage was now set for mass voter abstention and a resounding electoral defeat for a deflated Democratic Party with a disgusted electorate. As a presidential candidate Hillary would have to fight tooth and nail to meet the challenge of even the most marginal lunatic candidate from the increasingly bizarre Republican Party - because the Democrat's disaffected voter base would stay home.

Behold! A raspy rabble rouser, a '*democratic socialist*', floated in on a cloud of self-righteousness, conjuring up the illusion of a movement with promises of 'profound (and even profounder) changes'.

Like Jackson and Kucinich before him, Sanders launched right into *The Rant*: Against Wall Street, for a National Health Plan and a reduction of military spending (but not too much...). He added a few new planks about cancelling student debt, lowering tuition, ending the cap on the social security tax and greater regulation of Wall Street.



Early polls have given Sanders 25% of the Democratic preferences.

Bernie assured his worried Democratic Party handlers that *should Madame Clinton win the primaries*, Bernie (and his followers) would immediately and unconditionally support the Party's war mongering, Wall Street candidate of choice.

What are we to make of his promises and his radical program, if from one day to the other he can easily make a 180 degree turn to support the most discredited dregs of the Democratic Party - those largely responsible for the country's social and economic decline?

Conclusion

The whole history of Democratic Party '*progressives*' is one of deceit, hypocrisy and betrayal of millions of workers, minorities and other oppressed and excluded groups.

They rant and rave, till the votes are counted and then they dissolve their electoral organization and push their supporters into the Party electoral campaign!

They do not continue the struggle outside of the corrupt party - they simply go belly up, 'graciously conceding defeat' and wagging their tails hoping for a reward (like some inconsequential, toothless position within the administration) if the Democrats win.

After every one of the '*radicals*' defeats, their supporters are left adrift. Indeed, they are worse off than before because their movements had been diverted into the Democratic primaries and away from the communities. The historical record is clear: After Jesse Jackson lost, the Rainbow Coalition fell apart; civil rights movements were weakened; police

violence against blacks continued and even worsened.

After Kucinich ran and lost, his grass roots supporters within the trade unions had no mechanism to block the relocation of auto, steel and textile plants overseas.

After Obama conned progressive Americans, the peace and justice movement virtually disappeared. The church, trade union, neighborhood alliances who celebrated Barack Obama's '*historic victory*' have in reality experienced *historical retreats*. The only things "*historic*" about Obama's terms in office have been (1) the trillion dollar bailout of Wall Street, (2) the number of simultaneous wars waged by the Pentagon, (3) the millions of people of color slaughtered in Libya, Syria, and Yemen (4) the thousands of minorities killed in cities, big and small of the USA (5) and the tens of thousands lost to premature deaths in economically devastated rural and small town America.

The current "*Bernie*" *Sanders road-show* is just recycling the past, right down to the same rhetorical and inconsequential promises of his predecessors' .

Some of his gullible followers claim that he is important for "*raising issues*" - when in fact he will just raise them and then demoralize their advocates.

Other pundits claim he is 'challenging' the Democratic Party '*from the left*' when in fact he is doing everything possible to prevent millions of disaffected ex-Democratic voters, mostly workers and minorities, from rejecting the Democrats and joining or forming alternative political movements.

The key to understanding why millions of Americans, fed up with 30 years of declining living and health standards, deepening inequalities and perpetual wars, do not form an 'alternative party' is that they have been repeatedly conned and corralled in the Democratic Party by the "*house radicals*".

Jackson, Kucinich, Obama and Sanders promised radical changes in the primaries and then have gone on to hand their supporters, mostly disaffected workers, over to the Party oligarchs, abandoning them without their past social movements or future hope: like cast-off condoms. Is there any wonder why so many abstain!

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