

Does Bernie Sanders Have a ‘Plan B’?

By [Dr. Jack Rasmus](#)

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[Jack Rasmus](#) 5 June 2016

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Does Bernie Sanders have a ‘Plan B’? We’ll soon know after the California Democratic Party primary election on Tuesday, June 7.

Even if Sanders wins California, the Democratic Party nomination was wrapped up in favor of Hillary Clinton some time ago. 712 of the 2,383 nominating delegates—composed of party operatives, members of Congress, state and local party officials, local party hacks, and assorted ‘wannabes’ wanting someday to get the party endorsement to run for some local office—constitute the ‘super delegates’ appointed by senior party leadership. Democratic party rules allow super delegates to vote as they please, regardless of how other party members in their states vote in their official primary elections. Thus far 520 of the Democrats’ 712 super delegates have already declared their support for Hillary and did so months ago. The vast majority of those left will no doubt do so soon after June 7.

The Democrats introduced the super delegate system back in 1982, in order to prevent another populist upsurge in the early 1970s with the grass roots George McGovern campaign; and as a response to another outsider, Jimmy Carter, who turned out to be a disaster for the party in the 1980 election.

Democratic Party leadership has never been comfortable with primaries. The primaries process is really a product of the early 1970s when various grass roots movements were emerging in the USA—antiwar, women, black and latino, environmental. Primaries are tolerated so long as they don’t challenge party leadership control. Sometimes a candidate from below slips under the fence—like McGovern in 1972 or Trump today in 2016. The leaders then revise their rules to patch up the hole in the fence.

There have been many undemocratic trends emerging in the US in recent years, state and local voting restrictions, illegal purging of citizens from the voter rolls, court cases giving big money donors advantages, limits on third party candidates running for office. Following this election cycle the Republican party elite will no doubt do its fence mending to prevent another Trump. And almost for certain, Democrats party leaders will never allow another ‘independent’, like Sanders, to ever content for their party’s nomination. Sanders has given them a political scare. The Democratic party fence will undergo some major rewiring.

So why did Bernie run in the first place? Did he naively think he could overturn the super-delegate system at the party convention? Or was it always about injecting ideas into the campaign that were once part of the Democratic Party but which the party has steadily abandoned since the 1980s? Did he think he could actually reform an un-reformable party firmly in the hands of its corporate donors—at the convention or even after? Was it about starting a movement that would continue beyond the 2016 elections?

So what's Sanders going to do after California? What's his Plan B? Some of possible Plan B options might include:

First, run as an independent candidate—either announcing in June or waiting until after the Democratic convention in late July. If Sanders waits, however, running as an independent would be a 'quixotic' effort. Many US states make it extremely difficult for independents to run in general and even more so on short notice. So if Sanders does not announce as an independent candidate soon after June 7, it is extremely unlikely he will ever do so. In recent weeks, a movement has emerged in his camp to get him to run as an independent. Or even join with the Green party's presidential hopeful, Jill Stein, on some kind of joint ticket.

Second, he could indicate the fight is not over, and Plan B is to court the super delegates at the convention. Perhaps he still believes he can convince a sufficient number of independent delegates to shift from Hillary to himself at the convention. Or that his supporters can dilute or the super delegates effect by taking over the convention's rules or credentials committees. But if that's Plan B, it's extremely naïve. Careerists and party hacks, who hope to rise in the party structure, or who enjoy being local notables in the party in their districts, are not going to challenge the party's leadership. Especially after they've already publicly declared for Hillary. Plan B may be 'in consideration', but it's a plan that's DOA—dead on arrival as they say.

Third, even if Hillary has a conclusive majority of delegates after Tuesday, Sanders could say the fight continues to the convention to ensure that the party 'platform' of political positions reflects the views of his supporters and others who have become disenchanted with the Democratic party's policies since Bill Clinton and the 'Democratic Leadership Conference' (DLC) corporate-leaning faction consolidated its control over the party in the early 1990s. But if that's Plan B it's a political farce. Party position platforms mean absolutely nothing. They are 'feel good' statements designed to create an appealing public image. Party platforms have, however, nothing to do with proposals, programs, or actual legislative or executive actions taken by party politicians once in office. Check out the Democrats' 2008 and 2012 party convention platforms and compare that to the reality of Obama and other party proposals and initiatives that followed.

Should Sanders indicate his 'Plan B' is to lead the fight to ensure democratic and populist language in the party platform, it will mean Sanders has 'thrown in the towel' and it's game over for all his supporters who want to make a basic change in US politics and take back the party from corporate-type leaders. Platform fights are designed to give newcomer delegate ranks something to do at the convention, to make them think they are making a difference. Platform fights are a political sandbox.

A fourth possible 'Plan B' could find Sanders' calling, in radical language, for a democratic revolution to fundamentally change the Democratic Party—the fight which starts at the convention but which will continue intensely thereafter, win or lose to Trump, to prepare for the subsequent, really important 2020 national elections. There will be hot rhetoric, and Sanders will ride off into the sunset, at age 74, after the election going on college campus tours, liberal talk radio shows, writing a book, and settling into a dean of the new liberal left squatting at the doorstep of the Democratic party for the next four years. Or maybe Hillary will offer him a minor cabinet position.

There's also a 'wildcard' fifth Plan B. Sanders and supporters may be trying to position him

for the Democratic Party's vice-presidential nominee. Smarter sources in the Democratic Party might well pay heed to that, since it is becoming increasingly clear that Hillary may lose the election to Trump. She desperately needs Sanders' supporters. Sanders has the vast majority of the youth vote, 18-34, behind him, as well as some intellectuals, and a slice of the Unions. Hillary cannot win without them. In the key northeast and west coast states, Sanders beats Hillary by margins. Hillary wins in the south, Midwest, and conservative areas. But these are regions she will never carry against Trump in the general election. If young voters stay home, if a significant part of the unskilled working class goes with Trump, which it will, and if the Obama economy slides over the summer, which it may appear about to do, then Hillary is 'toast', as they say. She needs Sanders' but don't count on the party establishment to give that alternative serious consideration.

Of the five possible 'Plan B' options, most likely are options 2, 3 and 4 or some combination of the same. They are all dead-ends for popular reform politics in the US. Option 1, to run as a true independent third candidate will not happen. Sanders himself declared early in the campaign he would support whomever the party nominee was and he will keep that commitment. Option 5, as a vice president nominee is barely less likely than option 1.

Plan B is therefore most likely one the middle options. And we shall see which soon after the California primary. All of those will greatly disappoint Sanders' supporters wanting fundamental change in the political party system in the US. That party system now is really a single 'Corporate Party of America' system with two wings—Republican and Democrat.

Plan B will prove to be a harsh learning lesson for many determined young reformers. What they are now experiencing is a learning process with the hardest lessons yet to come—i.e. to discover that there is no way out of the US current political crisis through either wings of the Corporate Party of America. Maybe then a grass roots movement of the growing legions of the discontented in the US will be able to emerge into a truly independent political party in the US.

Jack Rasmus is author of 'Systemic Fragility' in the Global Economy', Clarity Press, January 2016, and the forthcoming, 'Looting Greece: An Emerging New Financial Imperialism', Clarity Press, July 2016. He hosts the New York radio show, Alternative Visions, on the Progressive Radio Network, and blogs atjackrasmus.com .

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