

The Pseudo-Left's "People's Summit" in Chicago: Preparing the Switch from Sanders to Clinton

By [Patrick Martin](#)

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Some 3,000 supporters of the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign met in Chicago June 17-19 for what was billed as the "People's Summit."

The ostensible purpose of the meeting was to take stock after the failure of Sanders' bid for the Democratic presidential nomination. The real purpose was to prepare those assembled to support, actively or tacitly, an all-out campaign for the election of Hillary Clinton.

Despite a pretense of open discussion and respect for a diversity of opinions, the "summit" was tightly orchestrated and controlled. The mechanism for control was simple: no votes were taken on anything, and all decisions were taken behind the scenes, without any public discussion.

The conference organizers, for example, rejected a bid by Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein to attend and address the assembly. All discussion was premised on the acceptance of the political monopoly of the Democratic Party, even if harsh words were occasionally hurled at the Democratic National Committee and some of its leaders.



Image: The platform of the People's Summit

The assembly was convened under the auspices of National Nurses United, which rented part of Chicago's vast McCormick Place convention center and supplied the manpower as well as the money to run the event. NNU Executive Director RoseAnn DeMoro presided over the conference and other union officials and staff played major roles.

The NNU was formed in 2010 through the merger of several statewide nurses associations, notably in California, Minnesota and Massachusetts, and now has a membership of nearly 200,000 registered nurses. DeMoro, then head of the California Nurses Association, became executive director of the combined union and sits on the AFL-CIO Executive Council. She

was one of the most prominent union officials to support the Sanders campaign.

Like most such gatherings of Democratic Party liberals, union officials and their pseudo-left apologists, there was a large element of political fraud. Speaker after speaker postured as a fierce opponent of Wall Street, “neo-liberalism” and various forms of oppression, despite having engaged in non-stop collaboration with the corporate bosses and their political representatives such as Hillary Clinton.

The tone of the conference was set at the opening session on Friday night, which combined “left” demagoguery with political prostration before the Clinton presidential campaign. DeMoro of the NNU gave an opening address that praised those assembled as the “non co-opted and the un-compromised,” although the vast majority of those in attendance were long-time participants in groups that are either part of the Democratic Party, like the Democratic Socialists of America and the Progressive Democrats, or completely tied to it, including environmental, feminist, gay and anti-racist organizations. All these organizations have long since been co-opted by the corporate-controlled two-party system.



Image: Audience at the People’s Summit

Adopting a “left” pose, DeMoro declared, “Social and economic inequality, including racial and climate injustice, affects each of us in this country, except, of course, the privileged, who have extreme control over our political system, creating and perpetuating a system of exploitation that is predicated on private profit and greed.”

DeMoro declared that the Sanders campaign was the outcome of a series of protest movements, largely based on the middle class or sponsored by the trade union bureaucracy, including Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, immigrant rights groups, feminist and gay rights campaigns, “Fight for 15,” and what she called “the climate justice movement,” among others.

In reality, the sum total of these protest efforts had very little impact compared to the Sanders campaign, which won 12 million votes, including margins of 70-90 percent among young people under 30. The broad support for Sanders has been as much a surprise to the middle class protest groups and the unions as it was to Sanders himself. It represents an initial stage in the political radicalization of masses of youth and working people who are being driven primarily by class issues—jobs, income, a future for the new generation, anger over the dominance of big money—rather than by identity politics based on race, gender or sexual orientation.

DeMoro called for keeping the protest groups united (i.e., subordinated to the Democratic Party and the unions), but she tried to give this a left face, warning about the experience of the Obama administration. “Regardless of who is in the White House, we need to learn the lesson from the Obama years, where that movement was built on hope and change,” she said. “The moment he got into office the movement went away and Wall Street occupied the White House, and like termites they ate away at the foundation of democracy. The most important thing here is there will always be termites and we can never go away regardless of who is in the presidency.”

The truth is that once Obama entered the White House, the various protest organizations completely subordinated themselves to Democratic Party rule. Previous opposition to the war in Iraq was scrapped once the commander-in-chief was a Democrat, who proceeded to expand the war in Afghanistan, bomb Libya, extend the campaign of drone missile assassinations and engage the US in further military operations in Iraq and Syria. This example would certainly be repeated in a Hillary Clinton administration, which would mark a further shift to the right from Obama in both foreign and domestic policy.

Following these introductory remarks, DeMoro gave way to a panel consisting of Juan Gonzalez, a former columnist for the *New York Daily News* and co-host of the “Democracy Now!” program; actress Rosario Dawson; John Nichols, a slavish apologist for the Democratic Party in his role as political analyst for *Nation* magazine; writer Naomi Klein, author of numerous books, most notably *The Shock Doctrine*, and a prominent leader of the New Democratic Party in Canada (she is married to Avi Lewis, grandson of longtime NDP leader David Lewis and son of former Ontario NDP leader Stephen Lewis).

Juan Gonzalez spoke only briefly, but delivered the main political thrust. He recalled his own history of radical protest at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, followed by a refusal to vote for Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic presidential candidate in the election won by Richard Nixon. He urged the audience to “learn from this mistake,” a clear call for a vote for Hillary Clinton.

He also suggested that the Sanders campaign could pave the way for a more leftward development in US politics, along the lines of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, parties of the pseudo-left that are implacably opposed to the interests of the working class.

Nichols performed predictably, with demagogic salutes to the working class rebellion against Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker in 2011 (betrayed and smothered by the Democratic Party and the AFL-CIO, with the assistance of Nichols and Co.); while solidarizing himself with efforts to push the Democratic Party to the left.

Naomi Klein claimed that Sanders had “moved Hillary Clinton to the left” on issues like fracking and the minimum wage, and called for continuing efforts to build social protest movements so that the next president (whom she referred to as “her”) would feel the pressure from below.

She compared the upcoming American presidential vote to the 2015 Canadian elections, in which Canadians “voted out the worst guy and created space to dream,” suggesting that this outcome—the defeat of the Conservatives and the election of the Liberal Party under Justin Trudeau—was a possible model for the US.



Chuy Garcia speaking, with Nina Turner and Tulsi Gabbard seated next to him

The second main session of the conference, held on Saturday afternoon, featured the same type of populist demagoguery, with Cook County Councilman Jesus “Chuy” Garcia, defeated by Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel in the latter’s reelection bid last year, and former Ohio State Senator Nina Turner, a prominent representative of the Bernie Sanders campaign, serving as the featured speakers.

The overriding feature of the main presentations, aside from the demagoguery used to provide a left cover for the shift from Sanders to Clinton, was silence on the question of war and foreign policy. None of the speakers cited above made any reference to the ongoing US wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, to the drone missile assassination program, or to the Obama administration’s continued build-up of police state powers for the NSA, the CIA and the rest of the military-intelligence apparatus.

The conference organizers likewise downplayed the issue of war: there were no panel discussions or workshops or presentations devoted to the subject of war and militarism, or to government spying and attacks on democratic rights.

The reason for that is clear: Hillary Clinton is identified publicly with calls to step up the US military interventions in Syria and Iraq. In general, she is known to favor an even more belligerent foreign policy than that pursued by the Obama administration, which is now confronting Russia and China, both nuclear-armed powers, in regions close to their borders: Moscow in the Ukraine and Eastern Europe, Beijing in the South China Sea.

The dangers that any discussion on war would pose to the pro-Clinton effort were demonstrated by the final speaker at Saturday’s main event, Representative Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii. Gabbard, an Iraq war veteran and major in the military police, has introduced legislation to cut off funding for US efforts to overthrow the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. She made the growing threat of what she called “regime-change wars” the main focus of her remarks to the People’s Summit.

Gabbard said the same arguments used to justify US wars in Iraq and Libya were now being made in Washington on behalf of intervention in Syria. She cited the “dissent cable” by 50 State Department officials calling for military action against the Assad regime. And she warned that establishing a no-fly zone, as advocated by Clinton, would “lead to a direct confrontation between our country and the world’s other nuclear power, Russia. People have

learned nothing from Iraq and Libya.”

Gabbard is not an antiwar figure, backing the US military operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. But her somber statements in Chicago underscore how quickly the US government and military are moving towards major confrontations in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Asia once the 2016 elections are past, whether Clinton or Donald Trump is in the White House. No other speakers addressed these issues.

This is the reality that the Democratic Party—and especially the factions allied with Sanders and the pseudo-left—are seeking to conceal from the American people.

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