

“We Demand Change in America”: The Real Significance of the One Nation Rally

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How are we to interpret the massive One Nation demonstration in Washington D.C. on October 2nd? Was this a rally to elect Democrats? A progressive movement hijacked by the Democratic Party? Or something else?

It's true that most of the speakers at the event chose to speak about the November elections, and the importance of defeating the Republicans. In the weeks leading up to the rally, some of the organizers and much of the media decided that the “elections” should overshadow the main demand of the demonstration — jobs.

But, the vast majority of the demonstrators did not show up to kick off the election season finale, they came to demand change. In fact, the One Nation website says explicitly: demand the change we voted for!

The demonstrators thus demanded jobs, education, immigrant rights, peace, etc. A demand is not a friendly request, but a confrontational act which implies a threat: create jobs or else.

Even some of the rally's pro-Democrat speakers talked in demanding voices about “bailing out main street” and “jobs,” while they encouraged people to vote Democrat in November.

Of course this doesn't add up.

The Democrats have controlled Congress and the White House for two years with pitiful results: they have proven that working people take a back seat to corporations. The pointless wars continue at the expense of jobs and health care, education and social services.

The majority of demonstrators at the rally knew this; they didn't come to cheerlead but to DEMAND change — changes the Democrats are totally unwilling or unable to implement.

This massive disconnect will not be easily resolved. The tremendous anger of working people that continues to build cannot be funneled into the Democrats — the source of the anger.

Derailing this anger will be even harder from now on, since the One Nation demonstration proved that working people can unite together under a specific set of demands. This newfound unity can and will become the basis of future demonstrations organized by similar coalitions, against both the Democrat and Republican parties.

The biggest organizers of the One Nation coalition, the AFL-CIO and Change to Win, will be unable to push their members towards the Democratic Party for much longer: you cannot continue to campaign for politicians that you are continually demanding change from.

Sooner or later, the labor movement will be forced to break with this hopelessly flawed approach, which for 40 years has produced only disappointment, betrayal, and labor's decline.

When the unions declare their independence by raising their demands in a unified and coordinated manner, as they are beginning to do, it will mean that a formal political independence is not far off. Once the demands are clearly articulated, it will become overwhelmingly obvious that the Democratic Party has no interest in pursuing them, and working people will be compelled to consider other alternatives.

The labor movement might then address the issue of running their own candidates, as Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO, indicated September 16 on the AFL-CIO blog. They will look back on October 2nd, 2010, as the inspiration for a new direction that labor initiated, the day that labor realized it could unite and energize working people on its own.

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