

US Presidential Election : Crisis in Democrats, Too

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The divisions in the Republican Party over Donald Trump's candidacy in the primary elections are well known. It remains to be seen how this will play out. We may not know until the Republican convention. Speculation at this stage is a waste of time.

The divisions in the Democratic Party as a result of Bernie Sanders' candidacy in the primaries are becoming noticed more, including in the bourgeois press. A recent front page article in the *New York Times* reflects this:

"Even as his chances of winning the Democratic presidential nomination slip away, Senator Bernie Sanders and his allies are trying to use his popularity to expand his political influence, setting up an ideological struggle for the soul of the Democratic Party in the post-Obama era."

"Aides to Mr. Sanders have been pressing party officials for a significant role in drafting the platform for the Democratic convention in July, aiming to lock in strong planks on issues like a \$15 minimum wage, breaking up Wall Street banks and banning natural gas 'fracking.'

"Amid his unexpectedly strong showing in the Democratic primaries, Mr. Sanders has tapped his two-million-person donor list to raise money for liberal congressional candidates in New York, Nevada and Washington State....

"The pressure from Mr. Sanders and his allies is putting the party establishment, which is closely allied with Hillary Clinton, in a delicate position. Democratic leaders are wary of steering the party too far left, but do not want to alienate the Sanders supporters whose votes Mrs. Clinton needs in November, or risk losing the vast new donor base Mr. Sanders has created."

But winning over Sanders' supporters is easier said than done. One indication is that exit polls of Sanders supporters in the primaries show that somewhere between 25 to 40 percent say they will not vote for Clinton in the general election.

Clinton early on positioned herself as the continuation of the Obama presidency. As Sanders votes in the primaries increased, she tacked left, seeming to echo his proposals, but with vague promises.

During the eight years of the Obama administration, the anemic economic recovery bypassed most workers. This explains the strong showing among white workers for Sanders in the primaries. It also explains his overwhelming support among young people, including where Clinton won. Strikingly this includes young women, a category Clinton counted on winning.

In the years since the Great Recession and the election of Obama in 2008, young people have seen their situation get worse. An 18-year-old today has known only this period in her/his teens, which has seen stagnant wages at best, growth of student debt, and poor job prospects even for college graduates. Someone 30-years-old today was 22 in 2008, and has experienced the same conditions in these years of youth. Sanders also has done well even among those younger than 45.

It's no wonder that these young people are not enthusiastic about Clinton, or are even opposed to her. After all, she is the candidate of the establishment they reject.

Clinton has done well among African Americans. But even here there is a generational divide. The *Times* ran a recent article about this titled "On Crime Bill and the Clintons, Young Blacks Clash With Parents." The crime bill refers to the law passed in 1994 under Bill Clinton's presidency that greatly accelerated the mass incarceration of Blacks and other people of color.

(At a rally endorsing his wife, Bill Clinton was greeted by Black Lives Matter protesters who denounced the 1994 law and mass incarceration. Bill Clinton then launched a vehement attack on the protesters, defending the law.)

The *Times* reporter found that the most important issues for young Black activists are police murders of Blacks and the mass incarceration. He also found that while some said they were voting for Sanders in the primaries, others said they weren't voting at all, that elections didn't matter much and they thought that only direct action can bring about change. This reflects the position of most Black Lives Matter activists, who don't support either Clinton or Sanders.

He also found that while older Blacks voted by big majorities for Clinton, for those under 25, less than half did.

Another thing worrying the Democratic Party establishment is that in those primaries that allowed independents to vote, they were largely in the Sanders camp.

All these divisions among potential Democratic voters that the Sanders campaign has brought to the surface amount to a crisis for the party. Just as with the Republicans, we don't know how this will play out, and speculation is useless.

There is a clamor among some Democrats for Sanders to quit the race and endorse Clinton now, for the sake of "unity." But Sanders has rejected that course so far. He intends to win as many delegates to the Democratic convention in the upcoming primaries as he can. It is becoming clearer that his likely objective is to pull the Democratic Party back away from the Bill Clinton move to the right in the 1990s, which Obama has continued, and make the party into what it was previously.

That is, his objective is not to build a new party, but to change the Democrats through a struggle within the party. He has made it crystal clear from the beginning that he will call for a vote for Clinton if she is the nominee. His justification is not a full embrace of her, but the old "lesser evil" argument, that he will not be a "spoiler" and help a Republican win by pulling votes away from her.

While the two-party system has been shaken in this primary election season, it remains the bulwark of capitalist rule. The hopes of many progressives and even socialists that the Sanders campaign would lead to the formation of a new left party are just that - hopes without any evidence that this is so.

Sanders' supporters are not organized into an organization they control. His campaign is run completely top-down. There is no way they can launch a new movement.

Some socialists have even gone so far as to join Sanders' Democratic Party campaign, urging union leaders to endorse him. A few have, but this doesn't amount to any break with the Democrats, and is no victory for independent labor political action.

Perhaps the most far-out hope among some socialists is that the Sanders campaign could result in the formation of an independent labor party. In the context of a greatly weakened union movement

that has been in the main unable to pose any real fightback against the decades-old capitalist assault on workers, any idea that the labor movement can or even has any desire to break with the Democrats is an opium pipe dream.

How will Sanders supporters vote in the general election assuming Clinton is the nominee? Will some follow Sanders and vote for the lesser evil? Will some not vote at all? Will some vote for an independent candidate, if one emerges and has reasonable backing? All of the above? We don't know.

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