

UNITY & INDEPENDENCE

Forum for Independent Working Class Politics

Interview with MPP Coordinator Nick Brana on Why the Democratic Party Cannot be Reformed

PRESENTATION

Over the past several months, *The Organizer* newspaper — through its *Unity & Independence* open-forum section — has been promoting a two-pronged campaign to advance the struggle to build a new mass labor-based political party in this country. The campaign calls for the formation of (1) a Labor-Party Advocates-type committee in the labor movement (taking its cue from the October 2017 resolution of the AFL-CIO on independent politics), and (2) committees (or coalitions) in cities across the country to run independent labor-community candidates around a platform that embraces the workers' and oppressed communities' pressing demands.

Bolstered by the formation earlier this year of a new political formation advocating for independent working class politics — the **Movement for a People's Party (MPP)** — we believe that now is the time to take these next steps toward this objective.

In this issue of *Unity & Independence*, we publish an interview with **MPP National Coordinator Nick Brana**, on why — despite efforts toward this end by “progressive” Democrats like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in New York — the Democratic Party cannot be reformed or otherwise used to advance workers' interests. As past national political outreach coordinator of the Bernie Sanders for President campaign, Brana is well versed in all the inner workings of the Democratic Party that make it impossible for “progressives” to take over the Democratic Party.

Please send your comments on this campaign to theorganizer@earthlink.net. We want to hear back from you.

— The Editors

RALLY SLATED IN KANSAS



BERNIE SANDERS (I)
VERMONT SENATOR



ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ (D)
CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATE

The Organizer: All the major media have given huge play to the trip across the United States by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez during which they stumped for “progressive” Democratic Party candidates running for office in the November 2018 elections. Ocasio-Cortez had just stunned the party's establishment when she defeated Jeff Crowley, the fourth-ranking House Democrat, in the New York primary. Many of the articles have highlighted what they are calling the growing divide inside the Democratic Party between the Bernie “progressive” wing and the Democratic National Committee (DNC) “moderates.” What is the real story here; what does this challenge inside the Democratic Party represent?

Nick Brana: Progressives are making a genuine effort inside the Democratic Party, as they have for many decades, in an attempt to take over and remake that party. But these efforts are following the same trajectory that they have in the past. For more than 100 years, the Democratic Party has refined a

model to suppress progressives and block their efforts to take over the party. It goes like this: You block their efforts in the primaries, and then, for the scattered few who make it through, the party machine goes to work to reel them further and further into the establishment, which in turn will de-radicalize them.

There is a striking divide between the hype that has gone into reporting on progressive victories and the actual statistics behind it. You will notice, for example, that the various articles that are celebrating Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's victory don't mention that she is the *only* progressive to have unseated a Congressional incumbent in the 2018 midterms.

That's a striking figure. Nearly all the incumbent corporate Democrats are going to go right back to Congress next year.

We in the Movement for a People's Party (MPP) have been analyzing how progressives are doing in the Democratic primaries. We totaled up the Congressional endorsements that

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... Interview with Nick Brana



"The Democratic Party and the corporate media are jointly focusing on anecdotes of progressive victories in the Democratic Party ... in an attempt to make it appear that Democratic Party is reformable and that a sweeping wave of progressives is coming in, when, in fact, the media are spotlighting the exception to the rule, not the rule itself."

the leading progressive groups have made (Our Revolution, Justice Democrats, Brand New Congress, and DSA). And what we found is that there have been 21 Congressional progressive primary winners, but of those 21 the overwhelming majority have been in deep-red districts. These are double-digit Republican districts where the Democrats face extremely well-entrenched incumbents. They are districts where the Democratic Party establishment didn't even contest the progressives who were running, because the DNC and the DCCC have written off those districts as so heavily Republican that it is not even worth challenging those seats.

The majority of progressive primary wins have been there. When we looked at the primary victories that had actually been in blue districts, where the nominees have a good chance of winning, we found only four progressives who are likely to go to Congress.

And when we broke it down even further, we found that two of the four progressives who won are incumbents that the Democratic Party establishment is not trying to unseat — representatives Jamie Raskin and Ro Khanna. Another winner, Chuy García, got his seat by making a corrupt deal with two machine Democrats in Illinois, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and State House Speaker Mike Madigan. García was also uncontested by the party establishment.

And the only remaining one, the only new progressive heading to Congress, is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The Organizer: You talk about the establishment's goal of blocking "progressives." The DNC adopted a resolution that lets them block Bernie Sanders from running for president in 2020 as a Democrat. Can you explain what this is about?

Nick Brana: This goes back to the 2017 DNC fall meeting, where DNC Chair Tom Perez appointed zero progressives to the very important Rules and Bylaws Committee, which is in charge of making the rules for the 2020 presidential race and for the rest of the elections.

The committee was stacked with corporate lobbyists, consultants, and people like Donna Brazile (who outrageously helped to rig the 2016 presidential election). These were the people left in charge of deciding the rules in 2020.

This past June the committee decided to pass a new rule stipulating that to be a candidate for president on the Democratic Party line, your writings, your public statements, and your actions have to demonstrate that you have been a "faithful" Democrat throughout your career.

This is an elastic clause that gives Tom Perez and the DNC the power to decide who gets to run on the Democratic Party line for president, and who doesn't. The DNC can essentially veto progressives from running on the Democratic ticket. If the party's corporate donors demand that Bernie be blocked from running, Perez and the DNC will dutifully oblige.

The Organizer: One story that has gotten a lot of play in the media concerns the superdelegates — the provision that gives the DNC an overwhelming majority at the Democratic Party national conventions. According to the reports, the power of the superdelegates was recently curtailed, allegedly under pressure from the "progressives." This is being presented as proof that the Democratic Party can be reformed and taken over. What is the reality behind this change, if any, to the superdelegates provision?

Nick Brana: The rule that the DNC is pushing regarding the superdelegates is one that says they won't be able to vote until the second ballot; they just won't be able to vote on the first ballot.

This is a way to make it appear that progressives have succeeded in nullifying superdelegates. But if the DNC really wanted to do that, it could just get rid of them. But they're not doing that. Instead, they are keeping them in such a way that retains their ability to suppress progressives.

The superdelegates were created in the first place as an elite check on the rule of the people; if the people ever made the wrong choice by attempting to elect a progressive like Bernie Sanders, then the superdelegates would be there to veto them.

In 1944, Henry Wallace had the support of Eleanor Roosevelt and Franklin Delano Roosevelt for his vice presidential nomination — and he won resoundingly on the first ballot at the national convention. The party leadership quickly adjourned the convention (because they controlled the rules), prevented the vote from becoming official, and then came back the next day and held a second vote on the second round. They ensured, by making all sorts of deals, that Henry Wallace would lose his vice presidential nomination, and Harry Truman would then win. Harry Truman went on to become Roosevelt's vice president and then president of the United States.

So the Democratic Party has the power to force proceedings to a second ballot to activate the superdelegates, as a veto on any progressive who could come uncomfortably close to challenging the party establishment.

And that veto power has not been removed; it has just been transferred to the second ballot.

The Organizer: The Democratic Party establishment is proclaiming that the reason Hillary Clinton lost the election was Russian meddling in the election: Russiagate. In our view, this is simply a refusal to acknowledge the failures of the Clinton campaign, beginning with its pro-Wall Street and anti-worker agenda, in the election. Any thoughts on what this Russiagate is all about?

Nick Brana: What is ludicrous about this is the fact that in the United States in 2016 there was a political party that participated in rigging an American presidential election — and it wasn't the Republican Party; it was the Democratic Party, when it rigged the primary against Bernie Sanders.

The evidence is out in the open thanks to Wikileaks. The email exchanges are out in the open. The fundraising contracts are out in the

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open. It has been admitted to by numerous party figures. Debbie Wasserman Schultz was actually fired from her job as DNC chairwoman as a result of the rigging. DNC staffers were fired for this as well. It's well understood that the Democratic Party orchestrated the rigging of an American election.

For the past two years, however, the country has been treated to a Democratic-led hysteria, a new McCarthyism, with the Democratic Party essentially blaming the Republican Party for something that it itself is proven to have done.

The Organizer: Given this situation, what are you and the Movement for a People's Party saying needs to be done in the coming weeks and months to build a new mass party of working people?

Nick Brana: We believe we need to come together as organized labor, as a progressive movement, as the Poor People's campaign, as students, as immigrants, across civil society, to build the major new political party that two out of three Americans are now calling for.

One of the areas where we can begin is to run labor-community candidates in particular cities, hopefully in 2019. We need to promote a slate of labor-community candidates, as there are new fissures developing within the labor movement, in particular, in relation to the Democrats, seeing as how the unions have been devastated over decades by the Democrats. Those fissures are finally creating the opportunity to build a major new party.

To help establish the roots of an alternative political party we need to push for a new Labor Party Advocates that brings together the many unions and labor organizers who are starting to break with the two establishment parties.

The Organizer: Is there anything you would like to add?

Nick Brana: Yes. One of the things that's really important to understand — and that has gotten completely lost on those who are aiming to reform the Democratic Party — is the unfortunate perception that once you elect progressives through the Democratic Party, those individuals will remain faithful to their campaign platforms. The idea then follows that you will just keep on adding on more progressive colleagues in the next election, and so on.

Well, that is not true whatsoever. It ignores the historical fact that once they win, the few progressives enter a machine that consistently, almost without fail, reels them into the establishment. The few that make it through must show deference to corporate party leaders to receive desired legislative committee assignments, and party support for legislation and campaigns. And they must moderate their critique of the party, too, and support conservative Democrats in swing districts.

They must also trade votes and favors with neoliberal committee heads to get their legislation heard. They must secure the blessings of the establishment, too, to avoid well-funded primary challenges and to keep their jobs and their income. And they have to toe the party line to move to higher office and advance their

of Congress.

Progressive have been elected here and there to the Democratic Party for decades, but they have never managed to change the direction of the party or the country. The party always changes them.

I would like to add one final point: With the Democratic Party, you cannot hold onto the progress that working people make through mass struggles — with the huge strikes of the 1930s, and through independent party pressure from Norman Thomas and the Socialist Party, or the Progressive and the Populist parties of the early 20th century. These struggles forced the progressive issues to the forefront and compelled Roosevelt and the Democratic Party to accept them. That is how we won the New Deal, banking regulations, labor rights, a social safety net, and a 40-hour workweek.

But when you're contending with just the Democrats and Republicans, working people in this country cannot hold on to the progress they fought hard to achieve. We can't build upon the victories of past generations because these two parties are constantly undoing the progress that millions managed to win through blood, sweat and tears. Rather than building upon our achievements, we're stuck fighting to defend them as they are dismantled.

That is the dynamic that we have to change with a major new party of working people.

The Organizer: From our perspective as *The Organizer* newspaper, what we are witnessing is the deepening crisis of capitalism, a system in its death agony. It is also a crisis of the two mainstream political parties that have been beholden to this system. It's this crisis that is compelling the twin parties of capitalism to roll back all the gains — social safety net, voting rights, labor rights, civil rights, immigrant rights, banking and environmental regulations, etc. — that workers and the oppressed have won through bitter struggles over the past 80 years.

Nick Brana: Absolutely. And that is why the Democratic Party and the corporate media are jointly focusing on anecdotes of progressive victories in the Democratic Party, rather than on statistics, in an attempt to make it appear that Democratic Party is reformable and that a sweeping wave of progressives is coming in, when, in fact, the media are spotlighting the exception to the rule, not the rule itself.



careers. Every structural incentive inside the Democratic Party works to make incumbents more conservative.

Progressives like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez thus become opiates that create the illusion of progress inside the Democratic Party. But really those progressives that you elected two years ago are in the process of becoming part of the party establishment.

One of the best examples is Bernie Sanders, unfortunately. He said that the political revolution was about electing progressives. But out of all of the corporate Democrats running for Congress, Senate, and governor this year, Bernie has only endorsed against a single incumbent: Rep. Dan Lipinski in Illinois. He endorsed Marie Newman. He has also supported establishment Democrats running for the Senate.

This is because Bernie wants to get along with establishment Democrats in Congress in an effort to win their support for his policies. So it leads even someone like him not to challenge the re-election of conservative members