

Some Points on the Discussion in the US Leadership on the Sanders Tactic

By Philip and Stephan, November 20, 2017

The IS is circulating to the IEC their “Contribution to the Sanders Debate in the US” from March 2, 2016. This is an excellent statement which we are in strong political agreement with. It is an important part of the record of the political discussions which took place within the US leadership and with the IS about our Sanders tactic.

Unfortunately, given the one sided picture we perceive the IS and EC Majority is painting about our role, we think it is necessary to register here some additional points.

This is not intended to diminish other comrades' roles. We have no doubt that the IS played a valuable political role overall in helping the US EC to develop our analysis and tactics on Sanders and other issues. We also fully recognize the critical role that all the other US EC members played in the collective discussions and debates on Sanders and in the tremendous work of SA over the past period.

“Independent Friends of Bernie”?

On April 24, 2015 Stephan circulated a rough draft of a statement for discussion with the EC Coordinators (Philip, Stephan, Bryan & Alan) and with Peter and Bob of the IS. This rough draft was circulated to be a concrete basis for a political discussion of what Kshama and SA would say when Sanders made his impending announcement of his campaign for president within the Democratic primaries (which was actually launched on April 30). It was not at all ready for publication (due to its “Germanish” and rough formulations).

Stephan’s draft said SA would campaign in support for Bernie Sanders by arguing for (and possibly initiating) a “Independent Friends of Bernie.” A “Independent Friends of Bernie” campaign (or called by a better name, as we eventually arrived at) would be independent of the official Sanders campaign structures and would argue for Sanders to run all the

way through the November 2016 general election as part of building a new party independent of the Democratic Party. The conclusion of Stephan’s draft stated:

Sanders running independent could open the floodgates. Maybe not to win in 2016. But, more importantly, it could change US politics forever, laying the basis for a new “third party” that could give millions of ordinary people and their families a powerful tool in our struggle against Wall Street and the 1%.

*If you want to be part of such a Bernie campaign, if you share our view, get in contact with Kshama and Socialist Alternative. Help us build for Bernie's proposals of \$15/hour minimum wage, single-payer health care, to close the gender pay gap, to break the dominance of Wall Street and create good paying jobs by tackling climate change. **Help us build a campaign to support Bernie and urge him to go the whole way to November 2016 – and beyond!***

We don't want to end with a defeat in the Democratic Party primaries – and that's it. We can build an alternative, uncompromising for working people's interests, without corporate cash, corporate control and corporate politicians.

Contact:

IndependentFriendsOfBernie@SocialistAlternative.org

[emphasis added]

Comrades can read the full rough draft that was discussed here:

https://web.tresorit.com/l#9JCSDFjw12Bu14Clg_-l7w

The draft was discussed by the EC Coordinators (Philip, Stephan, Alan and Bryan) and Peter and Bob from the IS in a phone call on Saturday, April 25, 2015.

Flowing from the arguments made at this meeting the IS comrades (Peter and Bob) and EC comrades involved agreed to a compromise formulation, that

was later also discussed by the EC. This was summarized in an article by Philip that was published on May 9, 2015 after a draft was circulated and discussed at a NC phone conference on May 6. Reflecting this agreement, the article was careful to adopt a friendly, but still somewhat distant and explanatory posture, rather than explicitly saying we were supporting Sanders, were campaigning for Sanders, or proposing an independent initiative for Sanders linked to campaigning for a new party. For example, the end of the article reads:

If you agree, join [Kshama Sawant](#) and [Socialist Alternative](#) to make sure this historic opportunity is not squandered. We will be campaigning with Sanders supporters against the corporate politicians while politically arguing for Sanders to run all-out through the November 2016 election, as a step toward building an independent political alternative for working people. [See full article here: <https://www.socialistalternative.org/2015/05/09/bernie-sanders-independent-campaign/>]

This was a strong position for us to take at the very early stages of the campaign and left the door open to develop a much bolder Sanders tactic. The campaign was still new and it remained to be seen how far it would develop (though all indications from the very beginning pointed to it gaining a major momentum). Furthermore, we had to fight to educate the membership and bring them along as there was a strong suspicion and hostility towards engaging, supporting, and much less campaigning for Sanders given he was running as a Democrat.

However, on the basis of further discussion, debate, and experience, the US organization eventually fundamentally arrived at the tactic that Stephan had originally proposed in broad outlines.

Millions got excited about Sanders' call for a "political revolution" and wanted him to win the Democratic primaries. But what about us? Was it possible for Marxists to want him to win - within this imperialist party? Could we pro-actively mobilize the radicalizing workers and youth who supported Sanders in campaigning activity geared to help Sanders win, but on an independent basis? SA struggled with these questions, of how to positively

relate to the progressive sentiment of workers wanting to see a radical anti-corporate candidate, Sanders, win the battle he was engaged in (the Democratic Party primaries) while maintaining our independent political program and demands (the capitalist character of the Democratic party and the need for independent working class political action).

The most developed explanation of our decision to launch #Movement4Bernie, explicitly campaign (critically) in support for Sanders, to say we wanted Sanders to win the Democratic primaries, explaining that our members should not register as Democrats but urging those people who (mistakenly) were registered as Democrats to vote for Sanders in the Democratic primaries, and arguing that our comrades and independents should vote in "open" Democratic primaries where they would not need to register as Democrats was the resolution originally written by Philip and adopted by the NC on November 21, 2015 (see Member's Bulletin 68, https://web.tresorit.com/l#gt8Xearg7jPf_O7_RWG_P6A).

We do not think the US organization would have been ready to adopt this position (the "Movement for Bernie" tactic) at the very beginning of the campaign. But we do think we would have been able to arrive at it faster if the EC and IS has been more politically clear from the beginning of the possibility, and indeed likelihood, that we would end up with such a tactic if the Sanders campaign continued to develop as it appeared it would.

We fully recognize this was a new situation and that it was no disaster that it took time for the EC, IS and the US organization to find the best way forward. This was a collective process where all the comrades contributed, and all the comrades made mistakes including ourselves (for example when we argued prematurely in March 2016 that Sanders campaign had hit its peak, when in fact that happened in May). However, a balance sheet of these discussions needs to take into account how we collectively prepared the organization to fully embrace and develop the Sanders tactic to its conclusion.

We welcome a review of the discussions that took place around this complicated issue. In the end, our successes were based on a very valuable and fruitful back and forth debate, based on accumulating living experience from our dynamic intervention in the struggle.