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Paralysis of the Will. The Crisis within the US Democratic Party

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The Convention of the US Democratic Party in Philadelphia ended with a big schism. And this schism divides not only the supporters of Hillary Clinton and her opponents but also Bernie Sanders and the movement that he led and symbolized until just a few days ago.

The senator from Vermont who attracted thousands across America to his rallies and ignited them with his speeches looked ridiculous and helpless in Philadelphia. His speech endorsing Hillary turned in a matter of seconds a charismatic leader who had embodied the hopes of millions of people into a provincial pathetic old man who does not understand what is happening around him. With a confused smile on his face he repeated that Hillary would be an excellent president, that the party had adopted the most progressive platform ever; he coaxed his indignant supporters to "live in the real world", clearly demonstrating lack of connection with the new political reality which had made possible his ascent to prominence in the national political arena.

Sanders garners very little support now: he is pitied at best. Young people who sympathize with him ask everyone not to criticize him too harshly since it was he who raised the banner of the movement, awakened them and brought them together. But they are mistaken in attributing their own accomplishments to him. In the last 20 years, a candidate similar to Sanders has appeared in almost every primary election only to get filtered out in the early stages of the race.

The fact that Bernie did not succumb to the same fate can be explained not by his special talents and merits but by the long overdue need for social change in American society, which accumulated imperceptibly over the years and suddenly exploded. This need is objectively generated by the systemic crisis and the contradictions of neoliberalism that have to be resolved by whatever means possible. Nothing but an excuse was needed for this spontaneous sentiment, particularly acute among young people, to turn into a political movement. The excuse was Bernie's nomination as a candidate. A wave caught him and carried him forwards.

As long as he was making his speeches, which reflected the mood of the people, everything was going quite well. But when the time came for serious political decisions, the senator from Vermont failed to become a leader, demonstrating total helplessness.

What has happened cannot be explained just by the individual qualities of one person. Bernie's capitulation in Philadelphia was prepared in the course of his campaign by the left intellectuals from the circles close and not so close to him. All of them – from Noam

Chomsky to Michael Moore, unanimously reiterated that Donald Trump, a brawler and a homophobe, is the main danger, and that support for Hillary is the only way to prevent the catastrophe that would inevitably befall the world if the Republican candidate won the election.

Now these people are in panic: they succeeded in breaking up Sanders' movement, forcing him to surrender, but now they suddenly realize that the most likely outcome of this situation will be a victory for Trump. Looking at the electoral fraud, the corruption of the Democratic Party apparatus, the machinations and lies, millions of people have reasonably concluded that Trump is not the "greater evil" in today's American politics. Sanders' capitulation tore away the last moral justification from under the political rhetoric of the Democrats. For those who followed the election, hoping for a change, and who now feel how profound the impending crisis is, it has become clear that nothing good can be expected from these politicians. And since even the best, most honest of the Democrats has surrendered so shamefully, everything is hopelessly rotten.

If Trump wins the election, it will be possible to argue with complete certainty that Sanders ensured this outcome at the moment he declared his support for Clinton, thereby betraying not only his supporters, his voters and himself, but also American democracy. Now it is the moral duty of any decent American to punish the Democrats. All of them. Including Bernie.

And they will do it, even if they don't vote for Trump: they will stay at home, or vote for the Green party candidate Jill Stein or libertarian Gary Johnson. By doing this they will open the road for Donald Trump. This will be the beginning of a new epoch for the United States and the world, the epoch in which the place of the neoliberal consensus will be taken by the uncertainty of risk and freedom. In reality, we know very little about Trump today, not counting his politically incorrect statements, which do not really matter, because they do not suggest any practical actions, except for the laughable project of the border wall construction. But if Trump is really half as dangerous as the liberal mass media insist, he cannot be stopped by lacklustre support for the "lesser evil". Only the enthusiasm of a mass radical mobilization around an alternative program of transformation can stop him, the program that Sanders tried to propose and abandoned in Philadelphia.

One cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs. And in conditions where concern for the interests of the eggs is the most important ideological principle, no omelette can be made. The trouble is that all the efforts of the politically correct egg protectors are worthless. In the course of the story the eggs will be broken anyway, but the omelette will not be made.

The policy of the "lesser evil" is a recipe for a disaster. In a period of crisis adherence to the principle of risk minimization does not work. It always produces the worst possible outcome. In the situation of a more- than-likely Trump victory only those on the left who did not support Hillary will survive politically. Everybody else will drown together with her. Attempts to preserve the integrity of a mechanism that does not work are burdened with the potential for apocalyptic disaster on a planetary scale. In the conditions of unending crisis, the calls on the left to accept the lesser evil in the name of avoiding the greater evil will lead us from one disaster to another.

There is nothing accidental about these successive capitulations of the left. There is a common element behind all of them: rejection of the simple principles that define the identity of the left. Half a century ago these principles were self-evident but now it is time

to recall them. The first of them is class interests. Not the abstract demagogy of sympathy towards the weak, inclusiveness, and rights of minorities, but the specific interests of real working class people including the “white males” so despised by the liberals. In fact, the “white males” are a notion invented by the liberals specifically to undermine class solidarity and discredit the labour movement.

In reality about fifty percent of “white males” are women, and not less than a third are representatives of other, non-white, races. But that makes no difference for the purposes of the liberal discourse. The logic of unity for the sake of solving common problems and achieving common goals is portrayed in this discourse as an attempt by the “white males” to discriminate against the minorities with their special, particular, private interests. It does not matter that the defense of these special interests leads not only to the discrimination against the majority but also generates the “war of all against all”, in which the minorities end up being the first casualty. The aim of this kind of politics is not to protect the minorities but to fragment the society, while providing the liberal elite with the privilege of redistributing resources among the minorities, who become their clientele.

One of the recent supporters of Sanders noted in an Internet discussion of his capitulation: “the senator from Vermont had to make a choice: what is more dangerous – Trump’s homophobic rhetoric or the dictatorship of financial capital promoted by Clinton. He concluded that the homophobic rhetoric is worse”.

This provides the most accurate insight into what the “real world” is for Sanders…

The second historic principle of the left was the vision of a historical perspective, and building of a strategy based upon it. In the 1930s politicians as different as Roosevelt, Trotsky, and Stalin had this common vision. It was based on an understanding of objectively urgent problems of development, the solution of which is the essence of historical progress. It is characteristic that the liberal left in the USA continues to identify themselves as “progressives” while not even discussing the issue of historical progress, and what it could mean today. Apart from organizing some humanitarian events, of course.

In the meantime, the issue has become more than clear. Overcoming neoliberalism is the urgent historical task of today – not because we don’t like this system, or because it does not correspond to our values, but because it has exhausted its potential for development and can survive only by devouring the resources needed for basic reproduction of society. In other words, the longer this system stays in existence, the more it will self-destruct and undermine all our livelihoods.

The connection of the historical perspective to class interests is determined by the answers to simple pressing questions: will jobs, which make possible not just survival, but also the cultural, professional and moral development of workers, be created? Will the unions and other organizations of workers be strengthened? In the course of the last two and a half decades the left has been in unison criticizing neoliberalism, the World Trade Organization, the weakening and de-solidarization of the working class. But they are reluctant to admit that the opposite theorem is also true: in the conditions of capitalism only protectionism leads to strengthening of workers’ positions in the labour market, to strengthening of labour unions and the political organizations based on them. Western European protectionism gave birth to a potent social-democratic movement: support of the domestic industry by the Russian governments of Vitte and Stolypin created the preconditions for the revolution of 1917.

Without a transitioning of the old industrial countries to protectionism, a consolidation of the labour movement in the countries of the global South, which also need to protect their own markets and their own industry, is similarly impossible. Democratic control and the welfare state are similarly impossible without protectionism. Bernie's campaign raised these issues but when the question arose of what is worse – Trump's protectionist program with its anti-Muslim and anti-Mexican flavor or Hillary's anti-social agenda packed into an impeccable politically correct lexicon, the choice was made in favour of the latter. Millions of American workers, regardless of the colour of their skin, their gender or their sexual orientation, will make a completely different choice. By voting for Trump they will be responding not to his scandalous rhetoric, even if they like it, but rather making an intelligent decision based on their interests as labourers in the conditions of capitalism. Trump only needed his scandalous rhetoric to attract the attention of the lower classes of society, to send them a signal, to stand out from a homogenous mass of dull political figures. Now is the time for a substantive discussion. Neoliberal politics has to be dismantled; the societal model has to be changed. If protectionism becomes a fact, the preconditions for a new welfare state will be created: the basis for a new popular movement, now without Sanders and the liberal left, will arise.

The third principle, which was always fundamental for left politics is the struggle for power. Precisely for power, not for representation, influence or presence in the dominant discourse. It is telling that it was precisely Sanders' attempt to start a real struggle for power that aroused the indignation of many left radicals, who perceive this kind of behaviour as something completely obscene. And, by contrast, when the Vermont senator abandoned his positions, he consoled himself and his supporters by drawing attention to the way the Democratic Party had adopted the most progressive platform in its history, though anyone who knows how the American state really works understands very well that this program isn't worth the paper it is written on. All the levers of power (not only in the administration, but also in the party) are in the hands of people who will never allow realization of these ideals.

The struggle for power requires corresponding organization and corresponding mechanisms of mobilization much sturdier than network structures. But most of all it requires strong will and political independence. This is why no matter how frustrated and embittered the supporters betrayed by Sanders are, the alternative for them should not be support for Trump.

The main problem with Trump is not that he is a misogynist, but that he is a capitalist. To be sure, his victory may be a necessary step in a process of overcoming neoliberalism, and dismantling the corrupt political system, but it will not lead to the triumph of a positive social programme. This task can only be solved by an organization which is built consciously and is progressive in the true historical meaning of this word. Will it be built around Jill Stein and her Green Party or will it be created by the activists who came out of the Sanders' movement? The answer to this is something we will know in the very near future. But the alternative has to be built now, irrespective of its chances of prevailing in the current political cycle. Political struggle requires patience and perseverance.

The political turn currently under way in the United Sates and Western Europe is changing the conditions under which people in the whole world live and struggle. It is opening new opportunities for them. The opposite is also true: SYRIZAs betrayal, Sanders' capitulation, Corbyn's wavering: these are not just issues in Greek, American or British politics. They are failures or weaknesses for which not only the left but humanity as a whole will have to pay

the price.

The neoliberal system, which the likes of Hillary Clinton and Francois Hollande are trying to preserve, is already so dysfunctional, so implicated in the processes of natural decay, that every day of its survival undermines the basic mechanisms of reproduction of society. If we are not ready to fight for its deconstruction, it will break down naturally anyway. But then the alternative will not be “another possible world” as imagined by the anti-globalists, but rather spontaneously mushrooming chaos and barbarism.

The paralysis of will that has afflicted the left movement during the epoch of neoliberalism has to be overcome. A great global drama in which everyone will have to play his role is about to start. We have to accept responsibility for the risky decisions, understanding that one cannot be nice and pleasant to everybody, and also that one cannot win without struggle and sacrifice.

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