

Left Third Parties in 2013: The Wave Begins?

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The 2013 municipal election contained mixed results for left third party advocates.

The two most high profile and exciting candidacies, those of Socialist Alternative's Kshama Sawant and Ty Moore, appear to have gone down to defeat. But the margins were small-a few percentage points- and both are young and have already committed to rematches in two years with a strong likelihood of success.

Furthermore, even if these two candidates had won, they would have amounted to no more than two small points of light. Municipal office and the opportunities it presents for building power have yet to be recognized by the left whose anarchist tinged distaste for "electoralism" on the one side and abusive spouse relationship with the Democrats on the other have prevented any widespread recognition of this potential from emerging.

Sawant and Moore have shown that such campaigns can be run cheaply, effectively and competitively most notably in the numerous cities where Democratic machines have dominated for generations. Their campaigns may have woken up many leftists to follow suit and it is not impossible that 2015 could see a wave of municipal candidacies on Moore and Sawant's Socialist Alternative line, from a reinvigorated Green party and other independent left formations, such as the Vermont Progressive Party.

While leftists might not yet be fully aware of this potential, it seems certain that the Democrats, whose history of compromise and capitulation to big money-"pond scum" compared to the Republicans dog poo, as a recent Daily Show segment pegged them- are aware that they are ripe for the picking by the left.

WFP, WTF?

A good indication occurred in Syracuse where long time Green activist Howie Hawkins, whose previous campaign against an machine Democrat failed by 94 votes, this time went down by a slightly larger margin. The difference did not reflect a lack of support but rather as the Syracuse Post Standard reported, the presence of "the Working Families Party, which hired paid canvassers and coordinated an intensive get-out-the-vote effort on (Hawkins's opponent's) behalf during the past few weeks."

This is only the most recent chapter in the long and increasingly sordid history of the WFP which during the last gubernatorial election, showed its true colors as a pawn of Democratic Party leadership by supporting the union busting "Governor 1%" Andrew Cuomo.

Increasingly true to form, rather than aiding numerous Democrats against Republican competition, (for example, here) the WFP turned its fire against the left, supporting a bland, corporate centrist in Syracuse. Their rationale for doing so was pithily summarized by one of the paid WFP out-of-town "organizers" who declared on social media that "A victory for Hawkins tomorrow would be worse for the progressive cause than any other victory for a Right Winger."

It was due to Hawkins strong challenge that the combination of crackpot logic and cynicism which is at the core of WFP much vaunted "strategy" has been finally revealed for all to see, provoking this petition which has attracted the support of noted left intellectuals such as Barbara Garson, Rick

Wolff, Margaret Kimberly, Doug Henwood, Steve Early and 200 others.

Rather than being coddled, the WFP should be widely repudiated, most notably by the Nation magazine, which has championed it, to the exclusion of other left parties, for years.

The Left Wins when it Loses

More positively, strong Third Party challenges, have shown, as did OWS a few years back, that they can force a shift in the political agenda, requiring Democrats to get on board or expose themselves as the servants of capital which their business model requires them to be. A case in point was Sawant's signature issue of a \$15 an hour minimum wage quickly adopted by all leading Democratic candidates lest they show themselves as out of touch with the anti-corporate mood which formed the backdrop to this electoral cycle.

These are only two indications of how, as was reported by the Seattle NPR affiliate, the left wins even when it loses serious, well organized and viable campaigns.

Let's hope 2013 is a preview of many more to come.