

Taking Some Distance from Dan La Botz's Demurrer of the DSA Endorsement for Cynthia Nixon

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Dan's sober and sobering comment on why he opposed an endorsement by DSA of the Cynthia Nixon campaign to dethrone Andrew Cuomo, New York's corporate deny-the-corporate-class-nothing's two-term governor [see "Why I voted Against Endorsing Cynthia Nixon"] is sharply and smartly posed. It deserves a similar if brief reply, one crafted in what I hope encapsulates the same spirit.

I was one of the more than 70 percent of the Lower Manhattan DSA branch members who agreed that endorsements for Cynthia Nixon and Jamaane Williams were at bottom necessary. The debate in the branch, like the exchange Dan relates, was among the most comradely and constructive of any I've taken part of in my many years on the left, and the wisdom of making the case coherently — pro or con — is reflected well in Dan's demurrer, too, though his insistence that Nixon be a DSA member to qualify for endorsement is the only serious misstep in his perspective. Asking candidates to declare as socialists is one thing; insisting they join our own organization as a precondition is at best premature if not eerily sect-like. Know that were the lesser Cuomo even a tad less of a corporate tool, I'd be siding with Dan and his otherwise well-sculpted perspective.

Part of my interest in seeing a maximum vote for Nixon in the September 13 primary has less to do with any realistic assumption that we precious few can hold her accountable in the event of her long-shot election victory (which is the real and only compelling reason to be involved in electoral efforts generally, and we can't do that just now for compelling reasons if we're honest. And holding electeds accountable or else in most situations has to be the core condition for endorsing candidates and following through. Otherwise we're just playing at politicking or collecting creds for a political consulting resume resume. What bears remembering is that there are short range tactical advantages in being visible in this race. To name one, it's a stick in the eye to the labor bureaucracy. With virtually no exception the union tops in New York State are lining up with Cuomo — spinning a mythos of how he's helped workers — this in the face of his laggard labor record, his dirty development deals and the real damage his eight years in office has done to public sector workers' lives. Endorsing Cuomo's opponent says to the union tops — and more to the point their members — that the leaderships are ill-serving their own members, the communities and our class.

I am fully aware of the limited benefits of a Nixon victory but unlike Jason I don't see the endorsement as an error or even much of a misstep, but a tactical accommodation to the moment that could do justified harm to the state's thug governor. I also don't see this NYCDSA decision as a template for future DP work or a body blow to independent political action or the fostering of illusions in the bought-and-paid for Democrats. This race is anomalous, no product of a "lesser of two evils" syndrome, and no slippery slope to DP perdition as I think Dan would agree. Of course the danger in endorsing a Nixon-type is if it is mistakenly taken as a precedent for future endorsements;

it isn't, I'd insist, though it may make those of us who support independent political action have to argue all the harder for building a movement where we don't have to endorse or do ward work for a so-so liberal aspirant to defeat a pro-business cat's paw. But those are the cards we're dealt. With just some six weeks before the state primary, there's no time to reshuffle the cards.

I do think, as I've written before in *New Politics* and on DSA blogs, that the enchantment many DSAers have with electoral work, whether for Democrats or independents, tends to overshadow work in base building with the movements. Electoral activity is a tool, but so is direct action, socialist education, propagating anti-capitalist programs that go beyond mere social tinkering, and engaging in other forms of extraparliamentary insurgencies not synchronous with the election cycles. The battle over Nixon, even in interventions with the high degree of comity expressed by Dan and his critics, will soon be over. Situating electoral work in our overall anticapitalist politics needs doing, but not at the expense of either sanctifying political action as purely electoral, whether for or against the corporate friendly Democratic party. Add to that the hard fact that a refusal to endorse doesn't by definition favor other work; it merely obviates campaigning in what little time is left. Sitting out the race does nothing to prepare the left now for moving on developing the many critical nonelectoral programs that a revolutionary opposition must develop to prepare itself and the movements for the coming struggles. At its best, the "no endorsement" argument for this time and place represents stasis. At it's worse, it is a defense of an abstracted independent political action stance that never gets beyond the rhetorical or sabotages any efforts to raise a radical profile in local areas through press-the-flesh organizing that have salience, win or lose, post-election. If IPA is to be the wave of the future — and like Dan I believe it must — it won't come from a principled electoral abstentionism, by enshrining protest voting as anything more than an individual and abstracted moral stance, or by pretending that the fractious Greens are a viable alternative. Abstentions build nothing.