

Demonstrations Surrounded the Democratic Party Debates in Detroit

Candidates were called out for failure to address pressing issues impacting urban areas

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Global Research, August 08, 2019

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

On July 30 and 31 the attention of the national media in the United States was focused on the Fox Theater in downtown Detroit where 20 Democratic Party candidates for the presidency debated various issues presented to them by anchors from the Cable News Network (CNN).

What went largely unmentioned by CNN and other corporate and government-sponsored media outlets were the events taking place in the surrounding blocks near the debate venue.

On Tuesday July 30, several organizations led by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), along with a number of environmental and social justice groups, held a rally at Cass Park beginning four hours before the commencement of the first night of the debate. SEIU workers began to arrive before 4:00pm in buses deployed from cities as far away from Detroit as Philadelphia, Milwaukee, Cleveland, Chicago, Flint, among other municipalities.



Detroit demonstration of workers, environmentalists and community activists outside the Democratic

Party debate on July 30, 2019.

The members wore t-shirts which said “Unions for All.” The SEIU organizes low-wage employees such as janitors, security guards, restaurants and fast food workers.

Speakers from the podium discussed issues involving the need for a \$15 per hour minimum wage and the right to union representation for the purposes of collective bargaining. Other speakers were invited by a coalition of largely non-profit organizations known as “Frontline Detroit.”

Sunrise, a nationwide group said to have been inspired by the newly-elected New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, had in conjunction with SEIU, put together the alliance which sponsored the rally. An entry on the Sunrise website says of the group that:

“We’re building an army of young people to make climate change an urgent priority across America, end the corrupting influence of fossil fuel executives on our politics, and elect leaders who stand up for the health and wellbeing of all people.... We are not looking to the right or left. We look forward. Together, we will change this country and this world, sure as the sun rises each morning.”

Many of the rally participants held signs calling for the implementation of the “Green New Deal”, a campaign which in broad generalities proposes the conversion of some aspects of the productive capacity in the U.S. to environmentally safe industries curbing the utilization of fossil fuels, a major component in the rapid process of climate change. Nonetheless, there were no specific demands from the July 30 rally proponents of the “Green New Deal” urging the transformation of the U.S. economy from capitalism to socialism, a prerequisite for genuine change towards social equality, the economic empowerment of working people and the nationally oppressed.



Detroit activists block the entrance and exit to the tunnel to Windsor Canada near the Democratic Party debate on July 31, 2019

Climate Change and Imperialist War

Of all the various organizations which spoke from the podium and marched in the demonstration from Cass Park to Grand Circus Park, just one block south of the Fox Theater, only the Detroit-based Moratorium NOW! Coalition and the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War & Injustice (MECAWI) staffed a literature table which distributed leaflets, pamphlets, placards and t-shirts which attacked the role of the Pentagon budget, the imperialist wars fought against peoples around the world, and the prominent role of the Defense Department in fostering environmental degradation internationally.

A two-sided flyer circulated by Moratorium NOW! Coalition and MECAWI pointed out that:

“The U.S. military is the world’s largest institutional consumer of Fossil fuels and the world’s worst producer of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and many other toxic pollutants. The U.S. military accounts for almost 80% of the federal government’s fossil fuel consumption. If the Pentagon were a country, it would rank 47th in annual fossil fuel consumption, it would rank 47th in annual fossil fuel consumption, ahead of 140 countries.”

Moratorium NOW! Coalition and MECAWI members felt that it was essential to raise these issues in any discussion of the impending global environmental catastrophe. The failure to criticize the imperialist war machine renders the demands for any reforms aimed at the reversal of climate change insufficient and even superfluous.

On the second side of the same flyer the organizations take on the failure of liberal Democrats and even “Social Democrats” to firmly oppose military interventions in various geo-political regions of the world including the Middle East. The statement warns of the impending threat of a full blown war against Iran by Washington and its allies. In addition, the leaflet expresses solidarity with the people of Palestine who have been subjected to Israeli occupation for 71 years. The funding of Israel by the U.S. represents an affront not only to the people of the Middle East, notwithstanding the peace and freedom loving masses of this country.

The Moratorium NOW! Coalition and MECAWI statement concluded in part by saying:

“Overall we want to express our solidarity with the oppressed and struggling peoples of the region in their fight for liberation, social justice, peace and prosperity. Our plight in the U.S. as oppressed and working class people has worsened as a direct by-product of the imperialist militarism of the White House and Wall Street. Every allocation for weapons, fighter jets, military occupations and destabilization efforts takes away potential funding for good jobs, guaranteed incomes, quality schools, environmental justice, public services, water resources, housing and other necessities for working, oppressed and poor people.”

Immigration and National Oppression

On the second night of the debate (July 31), a demonstration in solidarity with the targeted

immigrant communities from Latin America and other regions of the world populated by people of color took place beginning at Hart Plaza. The plight of migrant workers on the southern border seeking asylum was not raised at all from the podium by the sponsoring groups on the previous night.



Detroit activist Renla Sessions holds sign summing the sentiment of many outside the Democratic Party debate beginning on July 30, 2019.

The focus on immigrant rights was led by Movimiento Cosecha of Michigan and supported by the Moratorium NOW! Coalition, MECAWI, as well as several other local organizations in Detroit. This manifestation began with a rally and later march to the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, a major border crossing separating the U.S. and Canada.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Border and Customs Patrol (CBP) are very active in Detroit targeting communities of Mexican, Central American, Middle Eastern and African populations. When the several hundred protesters arrived at the tunnel entrance and exit, 21 people blocked the area by sitting down and refusing to move. Traffic was blocked at the extremely busy border crossing during rush hour.

Detroit police, who were largely deployed at the Fox where the debate was scheduled to take place soon, were caught off guard and took at least 15 minutes to arrive at the scene. CBP agents were seen in the background when police arrived. After three warnings, the 21 activists blocking the tunnel were immediately arrested and taken into custody. They are to be charged with both misdemeanors and civil infractions and were released from detention within 90 minutes.

Hundreds of other demonstration participants marched back to Hart Plaza and then north on Woodward Avenue to Grand Circus Park near the site of the Democratic debate. Activists were seeking to expose the role of corporate media-designated Democratic Party presidential frontrunner Sen. Joe Biden who served as Vice President in the administration of

the previous head-of-state President Barack Obama. The Obama administration deported three million people from the U.S., the largest expulsion of people from the country in history.

The Need for an Independent Political Party of the Workers and Oppressed

Of course the CNN-orchestrated debate on both nights failed to even remotely address the concrete issues impacting Detroit and other urban areas in Michigan as well as throughout the U.S. There was no specific discussion of the current crises in housing affordability and displacement, water shut-offs and contamination, the collapse of public education systems, the phenomenon of corporate capture of tax resources, mass impoverishment, racial violence, police terrorism, the evisceration of local democratic governance, environmental deterioration, inadequate public transportation and healthcare along with community security.

There was much emphasis placed on the necessity to defeat the current President Donald Trump based upon his vile racism and anti-immigrant policies, misogyny, attacks on the Affordable Care Act, etc. Yet while the Democratic candidates viciously criticized and attacked each other on stage, many people both inside and outside the Fox, felt frustrated due to the total absence of a concrete program to empower the majority of working and nationally oppressed peoples in the U.S.

The reality is that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans can provide a solution to the monumental domestic and global crises of politics, economics, the environment and imperialist militarism. On the first night of the debate, the Moratorium NOW! Coalition and MECAWI carried a banner in the march which summed up the current situation emphasizing in part that:

“Trump and the Democrats Support Wall Street Wars; U.S. Hands off Iran, Venezuela, Syria, Africa, North Korea, Free Palestine from the River to the Sea; Money for People’s Needs, Not the Pentagon.”

Establishment Democratic Party candidate in 2016, former Secretary of State and Sen. Hillary Clinton, lost Michigan in both the primary (to Sen. Bernie Sanders) and the runoff elections (to now President Trump). This represented the contradiction facing the Democratic Party which is a capitalist organization that differs only in the composition of its constituencies (workers, liberals, progressives, nationally oppressed) to the Republicans.

The Democrats could very well lose again in 2020 despite the widespread hatred of Trump in the U.S. Deep divisions in rhetoric and style between the so-called Left-wing of the party and moderates poses a major challenge in the electoral arena. If the Democrats cannot select a candidate who can spark enthusiasm among broad sections of the population they will not be able to succeed in recapturing the White House and the Senate.

Moreover, what is desperately needed is a party of the masses of workers and people of color communities, organized independent of the Democrats and Republicans, which speaks in its own name with a genuine commitment to full equality, worker empowerment, self-determination and socialist construction. Until this imperative is realized, the people will remain pawns in a vicious political game of the two ruling class parties which are incapable of addressing the needs of the masses in their need for revolutionary liberation.

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