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LRR Focus: Labor Party Advocates

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LRR Focus: Labor Party Advocates

Abstract

[Excerpt] For more than a decade, Tony Mazzocchi, Presidential Assistant of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, has traversed the nation as the principal organizer of the Labor Party Advocates. His message: "For the past ten years, I have openly declared my belief that unless the trade union movement in this country seizes the political initiative and organizes a labor party, it will never again be the force it once was."

Responding to this challenge, in October 1993, some 80 trade unionist's from 23 states voted to convene a founding convention. Then, in the spring of this year, LPA'S interim steering committee endorsed a proposal to hold the convention in Denver in 1995.

Keywords

Tony Mazzocchi, Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, trade unions

LRR FOCUS: Labor Party Advocates

For more than a decade, Tony Mazzocchi, Presidential Assistant of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, has traversed the nation as the principal organizer of the Labor Party Advocates. His message: "For the past ten years, I have openly declared my belief that unless the trade union movement in this country seizes the political initiative and organizes a labor party, it will never again be the force it once was."

Responding to this challenge, in October 1993, some 80 trade unionist's from 23 states voted to convene a founding convention. Then, in the spring of this year, LPA'S interim steering committee endorsed a proposal to hold the convention in Denver in 1995.

The promotional literature of LPA states, "The bosses have two parties. We should have a least one."

"We need a political party that will speak for the interests of working people in this country, and not just for the corporations."

"And we need a political party that will help working people restrain the power of the corporations, and once again be able to deal with them on a more equal footing."

LPA stresses, "We have a single purpose: To organize a labor party in the United States. It will neither run nor endorse candidates for political office and therefore will not interfere with your COPE work or other political activity. But it will agitate for a new economic, social and political agenda for working people. And it will serve as an organizing committee for a new labor party."

LPA sees itself as a catalyst for a wide-ranging, broadly-based debate throughout the labor movement about the need for an alternative agenda which speaks to the needs and interest of working people. LPA does not eschew work within the existing political and electoral framework, although it seeks to change that system. It contends that until a labor party is a reality in this country, the labor movement must continue to work through the existing political structure.

LPA believes that the creation of a labor party will take many years and that the only objective measure of its success is the number of people who are willing to become dues-paying Labor Party Advocates. Membership is open to any trade unionist or working person who believes in the need for a labor party. LPA leaders assert, however, that a real labor party will not exist in the U. S. until a sufficient number of people believe in one.

It's promotional literature reads, "When there are thousands of Labor Party advocates, a party can be organized with a platform developed by

its own members. And when the party has a realistic chance of winning an election, it can nominate candidates from its own ranks who can be truly accountable to working people.”

While recognizing the need to work with a broad constituency, LPA believes that the trade union movement remains the single best available base upon which to build an alternative party. It argues that unions command the kinds of resources necessary for a long-term organizing effort. It points to previous efforts to launch a third party which have failed for lack of a steady stream of income and other resources generally commanded by unions.

LPA argues also that trade unionists have more experience challenging corporate power than any other mass constituency in the United States. LPA recognizes, however, that it cannot build a majority movement for an alternative politics by itself.

“Labor Party Advocates must welcome unorganized workers as members. And it must ensure that all working people—black as well as white, female as well as male, Spanish-speaking as well as English speaking—are equally represented in both its membership and its leadership.”

LPA will seek to ensure that all working people—blacks and whites, Asians and Latinos, women and men—are fairly and equally represented in the organization.

Membership in LPA is \$20 a year. Members receive a short pamphlet entitled “Question and Answers,” a membership card and a regularly-published newsletter. Dues money is used to assist recruitment committees and help secure broad-based support for LPA.

—J. J. Johnson,
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