

Strategy, the Left and Doing Battle in the Electoral Arena



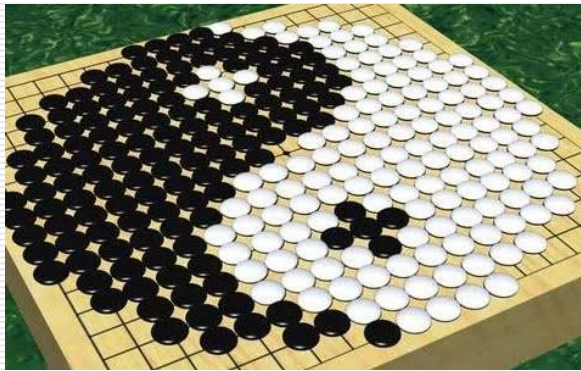
**'If You Don't Have a
Strategy, You're Part of
Someone Else's Strategy'**

--Alvin Toffler

Prepared by Carl Davidson, National Co-Chair, Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism

What Is Strategy, What Are Tactics

- Strategy is taking a view of the whole, the big picture, then asking 'Who are friends, who are adversaries'



- Tactics are the limited moves and campaigns within strategy, battles where forces are concentrated to take out a weak part of the enemy
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Big Picture: Who Are Friends...

- ❑ **A Diverse Working Class, Distressed, Insurgent and Seeking Positive Change**
 - ❑ **Communities of the Oppressed—People of Color, the Broad Masses of Women and Youth**
 - ❑ **The Small Producers and Productive Capital Innovators, Seeking a 'High Road' and Green Economy**
 - ❑ **Taken Together, the 'Progressive Majority,' the Many We Can Unite to Defeat the Few**
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Big Picture: Who Are Adversaries?

- ❑ Finance Capital, the Banksters of Wall Street
- ❑ 'Low Road' Capital, the 'Race to the Bottom' Employers and Job Exporters
- ❑ The Far Right, Right wing Populism and its Militias



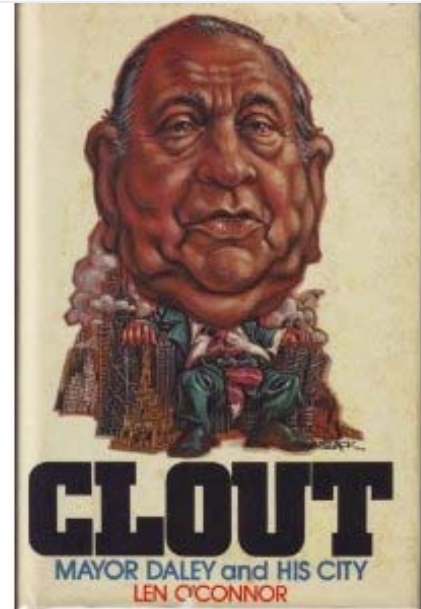
Big Picture: Elections Are Only One Arrow in Our Quiver. Keep an All-Sided View



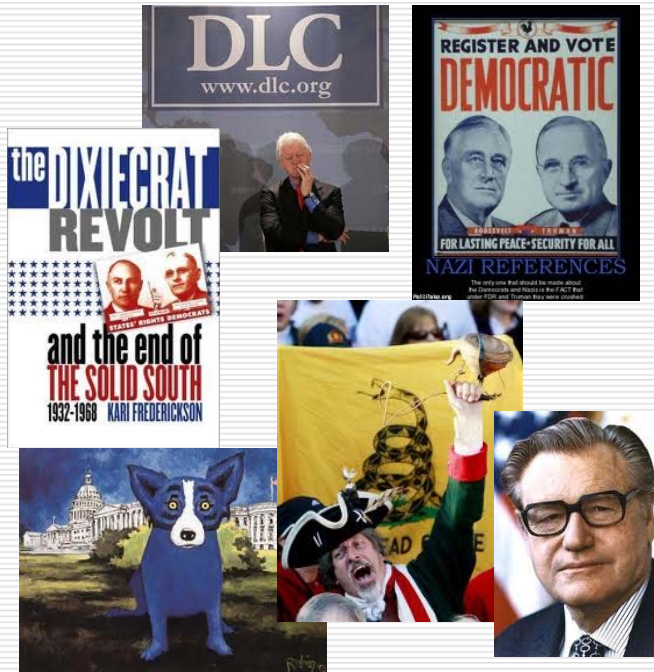
- ☐ **Defense of Civil Rights**
 - ☐ **Trade Union Battles**
 - ☐ **The War on Women**
 - ☐ **Stopping New Wars**
 - ☐ **Bringing Troops Home**
 - ☐ **Ending Student Debt**
 - ☐ **Organize the Unorganized**
 - ☐ **Living Wage Campaigns**
 - ☐ **...Other Social Movements in the Battles for Democracy**
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Big Picture: Crass Realities...The Most Backward System in the Modern World

- ❑ Voting relegated to the states, with little federal oversight.
- ❑ President not selected by popular vote, but by 50 state elections for 'Members of the Electoral College.'
- ❑ 'Winner Take All' rather than a parliamentary system with proportional representation and/or preferential balloting
- ❑ Structural bias against more than two parties



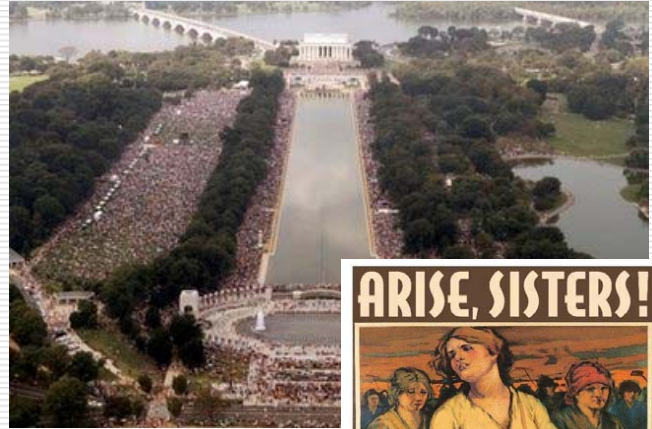
Our Parties Are Not Really Political Parties in Any Traditional Sense



- ☐ Their platforms are largely ignored
- ☐ Their representatives and officials are rarely held to any discipline or 'party line.'
- ☐ They rarely, if ever, have local mass meetings where members discuss and debate issues

Divisions Among Adversaries: Our politics is best viewed as a six-party system

- ☐ Tea Party
- ☐ GOP
- ☐ Multinationalists
- ☐ 'Blue Dog' Democrats
- ☐ 'Third Way' or 'New Democrats'
- ☐ Old New Dealers
- ☐ Congressional Progressive Caucus



Above: Glenn Beck Tea Party Rally in DC.
Poster: Key Force Against It



Our 'Debates' Are Not Real Debates over Substance

- The debates are contending sound bytes in small strung-together info-mericals
- For a real debate, you have to go back in history, and read the Lincoln-Douglas exchanges.



Our Campaigns Are Largely the 'Politics of Spectacle'

- The aim is to render us into consumers of candidates, and sell them like toothpaste
- The last thing desired is an educated, engaged and participatory 'Public Citizenry' on a large scale.



So Why Bother?



- Elections are one major 'factory floor' for the manufacturing of consent
 - Engels: Campaigns are the playing fields for the shaping of political consciousness. The outcomes measure our maturity
 - In electoral periods, the interested audience for political exchange multiplies by a factor of ten
 - Gramsci: If you want to conquer the fortress, you must pass through the moats and trenches of its defenses
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Tactics for 2014: Take Down Our Adversaries, Grow Our Friends

- ☐ Defeat as many GOPers as we can
- ☐ Expand the Congressional Progressive Caucus, defend Old New Dealers
- ☐ Stronger alliances at the base among Labor, Community, Women, Youth
- ☐ The aim is to tip the overall balance of forces in a more favorable way

Potentially vulnerable House Democrats	
Member	District
Ron Barber	AZ-2
Ann Kirkpatrick	AZ-1
Kyrsten Sinema	AZ-9
Ami Bera	CA-7
John Garamendi	CA-3
Jerry McNerney	CA-9
Scott Peters	CA-52
Raul Ruiz	CA-36
Elizabeth Esty	CT-5
Joe Garcia	FL-26
Patrick Murphy	FL-18
John Barrow	GA-12
Bruce Braley	IA-1
Dave Loebsack	IA-2
Cheri Bustos	IL-17
Bill Enyart	IL-12
Brad Schneider	IL-10
John Tierney	MA-6
Rick Nolan	MN-8
Collin Peterson	MN-7
Mike McIntyre	NC-7
Ann McLane Kuster	NH-2
Carol Shea-Porter	NH-1
Steven Horsford	NV-4
Tim Bishop	NY-1
Dan Maffei	NY-24
Sean Patrick Maloney	NY-18
Bill Owens	NY-21
David Cicilline	RI-1
Pete Gallego	TX-23
Jim Matheson	UT-4
Suzan DelBene	WA-1
Nick Rahall	WV-3

Potentially vulnerable House Republicans	
Member	District
Jeff Denham	CA-10
Buck McKeon	CA-25
Gary Miller	CA-31
David Valadao	CA-21
Mike Coffman	CO-6
Dan Webster	FL-10
Bill Young	FL-13
Steve King	IA-4
Tom Latham	IA-3
Rodney Davis	IL-13
Jackie Walorski	IN-2
Andy Barr	KY-6
Justin Amash	MI-3
Dan Benishek	MI-1
Kerry Bentivolio	MI-11
Michele Bachmann	MN-6
John Kline	MN-2
Lee Terry	NE-2
Scott Garrett	NJ-5
Frank LoBiondo	NJ-2
Jon Runyan	NJ-3
Joe Heck	NV-3
Chris Gibson	NY-19
Michael Grimm	NY-11
Tom Reed	NY-23
David Joyce	OH-14
Jim Renacci	OH-16
Mike Fitzpatrick	PA-8
Keith Rothfus	PA-12
Scott DesJarlais	TN-4
Scott Rigell	VA-2
Open (Capito)	WV-2
Sean Duffy	WI-7
Reid Ribble	WI-8

What Do We Need To Know to Do Electoral Politics?

- ❑ Most critical: what you do in the poll booth on election day is the **LEAST** important thing about electoral work.
- ❑ Your political consciousness needs to be raised to the point where it's **AT LEAST** as high as the average machine precinct captain



What does a precinct captain know? Can you match him or her in your own workplace or neighborhood? If not, you're likely to lose the battle

Nuts & Bolts of Voter Organizing

- ☐ IDTV Identify
- ☐ RTV Register
- ☐ ETV Educate
- ☐ GOTV Mobilize
- ☐ PTV Protect
- ☐ ~DTV Anti-Depress
- ☐ CTV Claim,
Consolidate



Election night, Lowndes County, 1966



CTA50811207 Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) delegates challenge Mississippi Democrats at the 1964 Democratic Convention. MFDP delegates and supporters staged a sit-in on the Martin City, Ala. boardwalk in front of convention center. The demonstration continued, day and night throughout the Convention. ©George Ballis / Take Stock / The Image Works



The Base Community: Why It Matters...



- Without grassroots political organization, rooted in base communities of workplace and neighborhoods, you have nothing to do politics **WITH**
 - With organizations, you can go on to network, upward and outward, with other organizations in wider coalitions
 - With organizations, you have forces to bring to other battles **OUTSIDE** the electoral arena
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The Base Community: What Platform Does It Stand On?

- ☐ 'Out Now' from the Wars
- ☐ Medicare for All, Defend Social Security
- ☐ The People's Budget, with full employment and the 'Robin Hood' tax
- ☐ Green Jobs for All, starting where they're needed most, the 'Green New Deal'
- ☐ Debt Relief, especially for the youth



Who Can the Base Community Vote For?

- Its own local candidates, where it has the strength to do so
- The candidates of its allies, when key issues are at stake
- The 'lesser evil' among its adversaries, when the differences matter.
- One can vote tactically to defeat another, so long as you tell the truth about both
- The main thing: organize around your own platform, double your size



Why Voting and Elections Are Not Enough...



**JOIN BERNIE SANDERS:
KILL BIG OIL'S WELFARE CHECK**



- We rarely win at the top measures that we haven't already won and consolidated at the base
 - The elections are often bought and rigged. We can see this with the Supreme Court allowing unlimited corporate financing and the current GOP efforts to purge voter lists
 - Popular candidates do best with an inside/outside approach, making alliances with highly energized social movements
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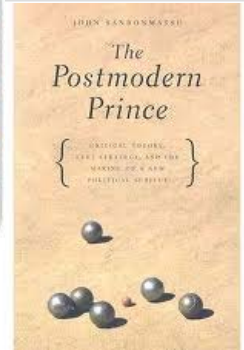
Getting Clear: Two Kinds of Politics, Two Organizations, Two tasks

- Politics as self-expression,
politics as strategy
- Organizations of the popular
front against finance
capital, war and the right
- Organizations for 21st
Century socialism
- Democratic tasks, socialist
tasks



Politics as self-expression, politics as strategy

- The militant minority as a critical force with a prophetic voice, calling the passive to a righteous path.
- The progressive majority as the main force, the makers of history, answering 'Who are friends, who are adversaries,' so as to unite the many to defeat the few.



From John Sabonmatsu's study applying Gramsci to post-1968 politics. They must be combined, just as Gramsci combined the war of position and the war of movement.

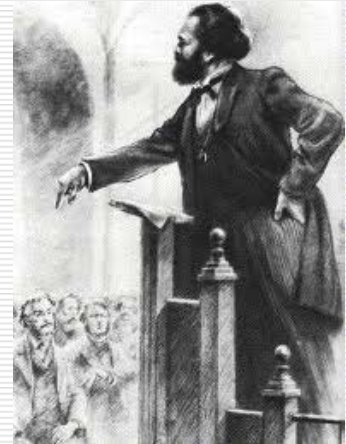
Popular Front, Left Front

- The popular front is the 99% vs. the 1%, a multi-class alliance of workers and the oppressed, middle strata and even sectors of high-road productive capital—all aimed at finance capital. PDA and the Congressional Progressive Caucus are examples
- The Left Front unites socialists, anarchists and other radicals to press for structural change altering power relations. Die Linke in Germany and Front de Gauche in France.



Democratic Tasks, Socialist Tasks

- **Democratic tasks take up the immediate needs of the many, and presses for consistent democracy for all the oppressed, challenging the structure of race and class privilege, in elections and elsewhere**
- **Socialist tasks alter relations of class power, seeking to replace the old order and set a new course. Theory, policy work and education among the advanced fighters**



'The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy' –Karl Marx

Two Concluding Notes

- **A Simple Rule.** Without a base organization controlled by its working-class members, whether they vote for some Democrats or a third party or not, **YOU HAVE NO CLOUT.** That means your politics is reduced to so much cafe chatter. So start there, with organization-building. Work out the rest as you go along
 - **A Simple Test for Victory:** Is your base organization stronger after the campaign than before it started? If it is, then you have a victory, whether you have won the office or not.
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