

SANDERS DELEGATES IN A WHITE-HOT ROOM
BINJ Dispatch #2 from Our Man in Philadelphia
BY GARY ZABEL

07-26-16

Last night I spoke to a friend of mine who is a Sanders delegate. It was around 7 p.m. when I called him on his cell phone, and he was on the floor of the Democratic Convention at the time we spoke. Seven p.m. was about half-way between Sanders' talk in the early afternoon with his own delegates and his speech later that night to the entire Convention. I asked my friend, "What's it like where you are?" He replied, "It's white hot in this room."

He wasn't talking about a failure in the air conditioning system on one of the hottest days of the Philadelphia summer. He was referring to the mood of the Sanders delegates. "People are really pissed," he told me. In his estimation, the reason was not only the Wikileaks email dump that showed that the Sanders campaign had been right all along when it complained of unfair treatment by Debbie Wasserman Schultz and the rest of the DNC.

People were also angry at Tim Kaine's nomination, which they took as a real slap in the face. Kaine is supposed to be some kind of progressive in the minds of mainstream Democrats and commentators. But the fact is that he was an enthusiastic supporter of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, until he was forced to reverse himself upon being offered the vice-presidential nomination (Clinton had already been forced to back off on her support for the TPP under pressure from Sanders).

Like Clinton, Kaine is also well-known as a steadfast friend of the financial industry, as evidenced by his recent attempt to weaken regulatory standards for banks. Finally, to add insult to injury, he supported Virginia's "right to work" laws while governor of the state. Opposition to neoliberal trade deals and unfettered banks as well as defense of workers' rights to union representation are signature issues of the Sanders campaign. How could his delegates regard Kaine's selection as anything but a giant middle finger from the party's presumed nominee? The news outlets reported that, in their early afternoon meeting, his own delegates booed Sanders when he argued that it was necessary to support the Clinton-Kaine ticket to prevent the election of the "bigot" and "demagogue," Donald Trump. But my friend made the point, which should have been obvious to anyone with half a brain, that the delegates were not booing their candidate, but rejecting the idea that they back their adversaries.

If anything was evident from the meeting, it was the enormous respect and affection the delegates have for Bernie. But affection and respect do not mean that they will fall unthinkingly behind whatever their candidate says. According to my friend, what the delegates were trying to get across was their belief that Sanders is the only one who can defeat Trump in November. Instead of denying Trump the presidency by supporting Clinton-Kaine, many of them felt that, on the contrary, they would be insuring Trump's election.

There is something to say for that judgment. Battleground states like Pennsylvania and Ohio were devastated by the flight of industry that NAFTA and other trade deals (initiated by establishment Democrats, starting with Hillary's husband) made possible. How is Clinton going to compete for the votes of millions of displaced workers when she and her running-mate

promoted the international agreements that displaced them?

Donald Trump has developed a bogus but nonetheless powerful appeal to the people who were once making a good living in auto, steel, rubber, and coal, and are now desperately trying to make ends meet on miserable wages from Walmart or McDonald's. We know that the billionaire Trump has no genuine concern for abandoned industrial workers, since he opposes measures that would help them—such as raising the minimum wage and providing single payer health care. His own anti-TPP position is part of the fortress mentality, the unvarnished nativism and racism that have defined his campaign.

But how does the Democratic Party establishment expect forsaken blue-collar workers to react when what they are offered instead of Trump's bold though noxious message is Clinton's belated and tepid "high standards" for endorsing trade deals, and a party platform that refuses to put the Party's supposed rejection of the TPP in writing?

If Trump wins in November, you can be sure that Clinton's cronies in the party and the press will point their accusing fingers at Sanders and his supporters. But the Sanders delegates, whose uproar my friend depicted, are right at least in this respect: the Democratic Party establishment will have only itself to blame.