John Halle Replies to David Finkel on Politics

written by John Halle | August 30, 2016

In his useful and perceptive review of *Empowering Progressive Third Parties in the United States*, David Finkel claims that I endorse the "ultra-left conclusion of historian Eric Chester's *True Mission* that the concept of a national labor party has always been a ploy to keep labor ensnared and subordinate to the Democrats."

In fact, the main conclusion I draw from Chester's book has not so much to do with labor parties, but rather with labor officialdom whose obsessive focus on obtaining establishment respectability has led to routine capitulation and devastating losses. The roots for this go back many years, as Chester's book reminds us.

They also extend forward to the 2016 campaign which, as Andrew Tillett-Saks notes, yet again immediately brought forth "unions' support of an anti-worker candidate," in this case Hillary Clinton, while "suicidally" passing on Bernie Sanders, the greatest presidential hope for advancing the interests of workers since FDR.

While the chapter was completed well before, the Clinton endorsement was of a piece with the recommendation of the chapter that those attempting to challenge anti-worker neoliberal orthodoxy (either through a third party or within the Democratic Party) direct their attention to local activist networks which can act independently of national leadership, as many did in endorsing Sanders. Rather than be blindsided by their inevitable capitulations, we should expect that national leadership to be at best risk averse and more likely hostile to challenges to even the most right-wing Democrats.

This unpalatable conclusion may be why Finkel and others find that, for them, that "it's not quite clear where (my) argument leads."

It should by now be clear where it does, even if this means opening our eyes to aspects of organized labor which we would prefer not to see.

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