

Q & A with Angela Walker, Socialist Party USA candidate for Vice-President

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TNS: First question, why were you chosen to be Mimi Soltysik's running mate?

Mimi reached out to me about the campaign following my run for County Sheriff in Milwaukee. He said that he'd followed my campaign and really liked the fact that we took a very grassroots, people-centered approach. He felt that I would make a good running mate based on work I was involved in in Milwaukee, and the fact that I ran for sheriff unapologetically as a socialist.

TNS: Which public offices have you previously run for?

I ran for Milwaukee County Sheriff in 2014.

TNS: What did you accomplish by running?

I like to think that we reopened the discussion in Milwaukee about socialism, and how placing the needs of people at the center of the issues needed to be done, and could be done. We can demand, in very clear terms, the changes we want and agitate for those changes. People just need to be reminded of their power.

TNS: What would you like to accomplish with this current campaign?

I think we'd like to accomplish something similar with the presidential campaign. We want to remind people that they have power, and that worker ownership of their workplaces and communities makes as much sense now as it ever has. At a time when so many people have been victimized by deindustrialization, gentrification and institutional racism, we want people to be reminded that there really is another way to live. It's not supposed to be this way, and people need to know that.

TNS: What is the difference between the Soltysik/Walker campaign and the presidential campaigns of other socialists?

I think the difference between our campaign and the campaign of other socialist candidates is the fact that we really do center the voices and faces and needs of people in what we are doing. Both Mimi and I agree that showing up and telling folks what they need and what we'll do for them is insulting and pretentious. By honoring the ideas and input of the people who are involved with the Party, and involved in activist work, and involved with the campaign, we keep ourselves grounded where we need to be. We are focused on building and maintaining relationships between people that will endure beyond November 2016. This work will continue.

TNS: Why didn't the SPUSA just support one of the other socialist campaigns, be it Mary Scully', Gloria La Riva, Monica Moorehead, or some other socialist?

I believe we decided to do our own thing with this campaign and run our own candidates because we are in a position to speak unapologetically about what it means to be socialist, and to make the connections between the Party platform and Black Lives Matter, the movements for immigrant rights, the fight for LGBTQ rights, the struggle for the end of the exploitation of the environment, an end to public school privatization, and so many other issues. We can speak to all of those things because our approach is an intersectional one."

TNS: Why not support Bernie Sanders?

We need Bernie Sanders to be brave enough to talk explicitly about the need for workers to own their workplaces and what is produced. We are not interested in reforming capitalism, we are interested in destroying it. We understand why Sanders is not discussing that, but Mimi and I are not here for slapping a Band-Aid on a sucking chest wound. Call out capitalism for what it has done to the people in this country and abroad. Mainstream candidates will not do that. We can do that.

"TNS: What is your honest opinion of the Sanders campaign?

My honest opinion of the Sanders campaign is that he is doing what is in bounds for a Democrat candidate to do, and saying what it is permissible for them to say. He's playing the game, it's politically expedient to do that.

TNS: Is the Soltysik/Walker campaign expecting to get ballot access anywhere?

The Soltysik/Walker campaign may get ballot access in some states, while in others it would be an uphill battle. Ballot access has not been our main focus, we want to make the connections with the people doing the work of uplifting their communities, and that is more important to us. The push for ballot access has not been our priority. We'll get it where we can, and still move our message everywhere else.

TNS: What has the fight for ballot access been like so far?

The current two-party system operates in its own best interest. This country runs on this illusion of choice, and there are entities who are very deeply invested in making sure that nothing changes or threatens the status quo. If the people of this country truly desire change and would be willing to look past the smoke and mirrors of the current system, things would get interesting.

TNS: Why do you think the current electoral system makes it so hard for independents and third party candidates?

As the Vice Presidential candidate for the SPUSA, I believe that dismantling institutional racism and U.S. imperialism, honoring the planet we live on by ending our dependency on fossil fuels and aggressively adopting measures that are environmentally responsible and creating environmentally responsible jobs that rebuild the infrastructure of this country and are owned by the people who live here are the most pressing issues for me. Those, and immediately creating a high-quality single-payer national health system.”

TNS: As the VP candidate on the ticket what are the 3 most important issues, in your opinion, facing this nation?

Ending the system of mass incarceration, detaining and deportation would go a long way towards addressing the damage institutional racism has caused in this country. The legalization and decriminalization of marijuana, with a rider attached that immediately frees all people currently incarcerated for nonviolent marijuana offenses is another way. Creating a revenue stream with priority given to people from the communities most harmed by drug policies- Black and Brown marijuana growers and suppliers- is yet another way. Cutting military spending and removing US presence from countries that have been exploited for their resources is something we would address. If we divested from making war on other countries, we could reinvest that revenue in strengthening our public schools through the community schools model, rebuilding our bridges, roadways, and all public transportation systems, and promote affordable alternatives to fossil fuels, using cooperative models for all of these things.

TNS: How would the Soltysik/Walker administration resolve these issues? If you comrades actually won, what would be the hallmarks of your administration, hypothetically of course?

If we actually won the election, Mimi and I have no illusions about the way we would be treated by Congress. We'd be blocked every step of the way. But the hallmarks of our administration would be the things I mentioned, and a sense of possibility that we believe people aren't feeling now.

TNS: The American Left is fractured and bogged with sectarianism, how could this be overcome going forward?

The sectarianism of the Left in the United States is problematic, but can definitely be addressed and worked on. Essentially, we are fighting for the same things. Take the egos out of the equation, be willing to be humble and to work cooperatively with other groups, and adopt an intersectional approach so that ALL segments of the population can engage. We can do this.

TNS: Are there any current issues that the various left/socialist groups could build a united front around?

I think there are plenty of issues that socialist groups can unite around. Black Lives Matter, the fight for womyn's reproductive rights, the struggle for the environment, the fight for a living wage for all people, immigrant justice and the end of borders...so many things. I can't stress the need for intersectionality enough. If you are about liberation for all people, then you'll connect your freedom with the right of Indigenous sisters to live without being assaulted and disappeared. You'll fight against the terrorizing of Muslim sisters and brothers. You'll see yourself in the children of Flint, Michigan, and you'll know that the folks who denied clean water to them deserve nothing less than prison time and reparation paying. You'll know that dropping bombs on people in Syria, that undermining democratic governments in Honduras, poisoning people in the Amazon...you'll know that those things cannot be allowed to happen. That they're unacceptable, because your freedom is connected to so many others' liberation.”

TNS: How do we build a broad left/mass left party, or coalition of parties in the USA?

It's exhausting, and it's painful. It forces your heart to be bigger than you ever thought it could. But if we are about liberation, then we have to be about liberation for all people, everywhere. Unity and intersectionality are essential. Unite around the issues. That's how we build coalitions and a mass Left movement. Leave out the ego.

TNS: Any lessons that you think the America Left could learn from Podemos or Syriza?

I think the Left here could learn a lot about perseverance and flexibility from Podemos and Syriza, and definitely about taking real political power and using it to move our agenda forward instead of having to stay on the fringes.

TNS: Are there any issues that the radical Left and Right could work on with each other?

With the polarization of politics and issues in the United States now, I honestly don't see where there could be honest and respectful collaboration between the radical Left and Right, especially not with the hideousness that is the rise of Donald Trump. No.

TNS: How do third parties, socialist parties in particular, break the stranglehold that the Democratic Party has over the Black community?

I think the best way for third parties to loosen the hold the Democratic Party has on the Black community in the United States is to let folks know they exist, and that their platforms address the particular needs of that community. We need to be much more intentional about getting information about third parties into communities where folks aren't hearing about them.

TNS: Why don't we see more Blacks gravitating towards socialism and anarchism these days?

I would argue that we are indeed seeing more Black folks, particularly young Black folks, moving towards socialism and anarchism (to a lesser degree). The Black Panthers and Young Lords were socialist, and those movements resonate with young people, especially those involved in the Movement for Black Lives. People are aware that capitalism is at the bottom of the oppressions our people face, and they are making the connections between Black Liberation and the elimination of the capitalist system.

TNS: What has happened to independent Black political action in the 21st century?

I see independent Black political action coming out of Black Lives Matter. The people on the ground are creating the agendas, deciding on action (or inaction in some cases), and acknowledging the fact that in many places, the current two-party system has not served our people well and has actually failed us, and that it's time to talk about alternatives. Those discussions and decisions are happening. The fact that the Movement as a whole is refusing to endorse any candidate in the upcoming elections is big. The fact that young activists are centering the needs of the Black community using candidate debates as a platform is big. I would say independent Black political action in the 21st Century is in the hands of young people, who are very smart and very intentional about direct action and social media and other methods of getting the messages out.

TNS: What are your thoughts on the Black Lives Matter and prison reform movements?

Black Lives Matter is an essential continuation of the struggle that started for Black people in the United States in 1619. It's an intersectional movement that understands that there is no room for kyriarchy or ageism. It's a movement that is diverse, nimble on its feet, very exciting and engaging,

and unafraid of calling out institutional racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, white supremacy, classism, imperialism and the capitalism that upholds all of that. The fight against mass incarceration is a part of the work Black Lives Matter does, and it's necessary work. The ending of state-sponsored violence against Black people must happen. The fight to end the abuses of the prison system and this entire system of "justice" is happening, and it's needed.

TNS: How will we keep the next movement created by a community of color from being co-opted by the Dems?

I think, with a couple of exceptions, that movements like Black Lives Matter have been very vocal about making sure the Democrats know that they're not here to be subsumed into the Democratic Party or the interests of the mainstream. I believe that grassroots, people-centered and people-led movements have got to be vigilant and vocal about keeping mainstream interests at bay because co-optation is always a real danger. A perfect example of this co-optation was the Wisconsin Uprising in 2011. All of that raw energy that came from the people themselves was co-opted and funneled into a recall effort that left people feeling powerless and depressed. This is unacceptable. So I am excited and happy when I see Black Lives Matter activists being very specific about keeping the Democrats away.

TNS: Do you see mass incarceration as the New Jim Crow? If so, why?

Mass incarceration is absolutely the New Jim Crow. It's a system of control that impacts the way Black people move and interact in this country. It's the constant knowledge that as a Black person, your life is worth nothing in this country, unless you are providing the labor that makes the system work. It's an understanding that you really don't have any rights under law, and that because of the color of your skin, you are subject to discrimination everywhere and by anyone. It's the stigma attached with being labeled a felon and not being able to house or support yourself, and ending up back in the system that labeled you. The privatization of public schools, the restriction of access to public resources such as transportation and food stamps and housing, all of these things are linked to the New Jim Crow. The issue of protection and safety, and who deserves those things, that's also related. Mass incarceration is a system that is pervasive and extends far beyond prison walls.

TNS: As a Black woman, how do you view feminism in relation to the Black female experience?

I believe that mainstream feminism is for White womyn and always has been. Black, Latina, Native and Asian womyn have always had to create their own way of relating to the world and demanding culturally-specific ways of honoring womyn's experience, because the mainstream movement doesn't include us. It doesn't speak to our intersections of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, and other issues. Mainstream feminism takes the experiences of White womyn as the only experience to be honored, and that's exclusive. The lived experiences and needs of womyn of color can only be discussed by womyn of color.

TNS: Do Black Girls Rock? What does that actually mean?

Black Girls Rock simply is that. It's the assertion that Black womyn are not less than anyone else, that we deserve the same love and care and mobility and respect as anyone else. We have to lift one another up, and constantly affirm our brilliance, beauty and versatility and diversity in a society that consistently devalues us. And so we do it. Black Girls definitely Rock."

TNS: Ms. Walker, what is socialism to you?

Socialism, to me, is worker and community ownership of the means of production. If that is a farming community, the folks who live and work in that area own the farm and the tools needed to

work it. They decide what is produced. In an urban setting like Milwaukee, that would be the workers at a factory owning that factory and all that it produces, and making democratic decisions about what is produced and how it is distributed. Whatever would be produced is something of use to the workers and the community, and is available to all without profit motive. As a worker, I know that I would be more invested and interested in my workplace if I were a part owner who made valued decisions in that workplace.

TNS: What will the revolution look like in the USA?

My advice to young people interested in socialism is to read about it from diverse sources, and look at socialism from many different perspectives. The forms that socialism takes in Africa and Central and South America are vastly different than the forms socialism takes in the United States. I would want them to understand that socialism must be intersectional, taking into account all of the differences people bring to the work with them, and understanding that those differences are never weaknesses. I would want them to know that there is joy possible in this work, and that that joy is something that must be incorporated into what they're doing. It's a form of self-care.

TNS: Any advice for young people just entering the socialist movement?

I have a hard time picturing what revolution will look like in the United States. People here are very diverse, with diverse needs and viewpoints and life experiences. In my own life, I have no national identity that moves me. For me, revolution is necessary for the liberation of my own people, and others who are oppressed by those forces that hurt and humiliate Black people. I believe that any revolution in this country would be bloody and painful, because there are so many institutions deeply rooted in the domination and exploitation that is the capitalist system. They won't want that power taken from them, and have proven around the world what they are capable of when their interests are threatened. I don't have any illusions whatsoever that they won't come against revolutionaries in this country full force. They have before. I believe revolution is possible, but I don't know exactly what it will look like."

TNS: Anything you would like to add?

The only thing I want to add is the reminder that people are powerful, more powerful than they know. I hope folks in the neighborhoods embrace their power, step into it, and use it to build the world they believe in and want, even if that is only in their own small areas. Because they can, and it desperately needs to happen. It's the only change that we'll get, and the only change that matters.

TNS: Thank you Angela, for your time and good luck with the campaign.

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