



An Incredible Election Year in America

Par [Jack A. Smith](#)

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Few Americans can remember witnessing a presidential campaign as extraordinary and fraught with extreme negative and some positive connotations as that taking place this year. Substantial sectors of both the Republican and Democratic parties are engaged in an unexpected open rebellion against their own leadership for different reasons.

The Republican rebels want to go further right and nominate the pompous and narcissistic billionaire real estate mogul Donald Trump, who is leading in delegate votes. Many observers in the U.S. and abroad view Trump as gravitating ever closer to neo-fascism. The Democratic rebels want to go further left and nominate social democrat Vermont Sen. Bernard (Bernie) Sanders.

The right/far right Republican establishment fears the selection of Trump will split or even destroy the party and prefers two other far-right candidates — Florida Sen. Marco Rubio or Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas. The two are bitter rivals. Rubio has more support from the party leaders, but he e now appears to be failing for lack of delegate support.

This means Cruz is the logical next establishment candidate against Trump in the internal Republican struggle. Cruz is an extreme conservative, religious zealot and a veritable Grand Inquisitor, judging by his performance back home as the state's Solicitor General. He also supports most of Trump's agenda. His only virtue is that he is not Trump. In a Feb. 4 article by The Religious News Service, author John Fea wrote:

Ted Cruz resonates with the evangelical culture warriors.... When Cruz says he wants to 'reclaim' or 'restore' America, he does not only have the Obama administration in mind. This agenda takes him much deeper into the American past. Cruz wants to 'restore' the United States to what he believes is its original identity — a Christian nation.

The indispensable billionaires and multi-millionaires who provide financing to the Republican and Democratic parties in return for lucrative expressions of gratitude, seek to help crush their respective uprisings. Ironically, the corporate mass media — which supports both party leaderships — is giving Trump far more TV coverage than the other candidates because his outrageous interviews and debates attract huge audiences that boost profits. Clinton enjoys good coverage but Sanders is far behind in TV exposure and much news coverage. undoubtedly because of his left leaning politics.

The Republican leadership is evidencing hysteria at the prospect that Trump will win the nomination, not lest because he is generally considered a racist and misogynist who repeatedly offends Mexicans and Muslims among others. Party funders have spent over \$30 million in key states for anti-Trump TV commercials in the last week, and more will be

coming.

The Center-right Democratic party establishment is emphatically backing former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. She is currently leading in nomination delegate strength but Sanders is doing well, having triumphed in Michigan March 8 after opinion polls predicted he would be defeated by a large margin. The delegate vote totals as of March 9: Clinton, 1,221. Sanders. 571. Needed to win: 2,382. Clinton is leading by far in party leadership super delegates. A March 8 poll by the *Washington Post* noted Clinton's margin over Sanders, 49% to 42%, has dropped by half since January.

Sanders was a political Independent during his 16 years as Vermont's only House member and most of his nine years in the Senate until last year when he became a Democrat to run for the presidential nomination. He has openly described himself as a democratic socialist throughout his political career, but his obvious objective now is to shift the Democratic party to the center-left, where it once brought about progressive social legislation in the 1930s and 1960s — and has accomplished extremely little since then. Those who think he is trying to lead a socialist movement are missing the point.

The Democratic party liberal and left sector has been sharply constricted by the traditional leadership and the Clinton and Obama two-term administrations, despite the fact that liberalism in Democratic ranks has increased 17% since 2001, according to a Gallup poll last June. That means 47% of Democrats are socially liberal and economically moderate liberal. Recognizing that at 74 he is in the autumn of a fruitful political career, Sanders seeks to motivate and lead the party left to demand and exercise considerably more political clout. The party hierarchy views this as an act of apostasy. Most funders equate it to a kick in the teeth.

Leading members of the Republican party establishment went on the road last week to insist that the that conservatives reject Trump — and they met with a solid wall of opposition. The *New York Times* Reported March 5:

From Michigan to Louisiana to California on Feb. 4, rank-and-file Republicans expressed mystification, dismissal and contempt regarding the instructions that their party's most high-profile leaders were urgently handing down to them: Reject and defeat Donald J. Trump. Their angry reactions, in the 24 hours since Mitt Romney and John McCain urged millions of voters to cooperate in a grand strategy to undermine Mr. Trump's candidacy, have captured the seemingly inexorable force of a movement that still puzzles the Republican elite and now threatens to unravel the party they hold dear.... Trump's supporters seem profoundly uninterested at the moment with the image, expectations or traditions of the Republican Party, according to interviews with more than three dozen voters, elected officials and operatives. They are, in many cases, hostile to it.

HOW DID TRUMPO DO IT?

When Trump announced his candidacy for the Republican nomination nine months ago he had miniscule support from the party hierarchy and not much more from the rank-and-file. But he quickly perceived that his ambitions could be furthered were he able to attract a significant segment of the party's constituency largely composed of white working class and lower middle class conservatives, many of whom ended their education with a high school diploma. This sector has long existed within the party, going along with the decisions of

party leaders with negligible complaints.

But times have changed in recent years as working class jobs have been sent abroad and existing jobs are often insecure with longer hours, lower pay and fewer benefits causing considerable resentment toward the powers that be. Since this conservative sector tends to regard itself as super patriotic and is intolerant toward many other Americans who think or look different than they do, it is imbued with a large degree of racism and nativism.

The 2008 recession and its lingering consequences were contributing turning points for many right wing workers who began to blame a variety of factors including their own party leaders as well the upper class, bankers, Wall Street, snobbish elites, Democrats, President Obama, and various government agencies. Up to a point they had something of a case, but they turned further right, not to the left, and also blamed African Americans, Latinos, Muslims, and others for transforming their « American Dream » into a bad dream.

Trump set the stage for winning support from this disaffected sector by promoting his own larger than life personality. I'm not a politician, he declared — immediately gaining some support from white working class and middle class Republicans who seem to blame the politicians for everything wrong in their world. I am a rich and successful businessman who knows how to get things done — a big selling point in a party that worships big business and capitalism. I hosted 14 seasons of « The Apprentice » on TV and newspapers always write about me so you gotta love me! — and many do because of his celebrity. But what really did the trick was this:

He figured out what this sector deeply hated and what it deeply feared. He then made clear in his outrageous demagogic, vulgar, threatening and racist remarks at mass rallies, that he shared their hatreds and was ready and able to protect them against their fears if he became president.

Their main hates and fears evidently evolve around how the leaderships of both parties are mishandling the country's economic, social and political priorities. Some examples seem to include resentment at being governed by a black president (whom Trump has been saying for years is a foreign-born Muslim); fear of economic insecurity and stagnant wages; fear of losing white privileges, white power and the fact that the white population will no longer constitute the majority in 30 years; the absence of decent jobs, which some blame on minority competition and others on the Democrats; the hatred of Mexican and Latin American « illegal » immigration; refusal to accept refugees from the Middle East; fear of foreign countries that Trump says are « ripping off » the U.S. economically; and opposition to some advances in recent years for women and LGBT people.

When Trump articulates their hatreds in speeches or debates his supporters go wild with adulation because he says openly what many in his crowds usually say in private to their « own kind. » By doing this he also validates racial prejudice. This may be why his fans praise him for « saying what he thinks. » Trump's popularization of the slogan « Make America Great Again » not only speaks to international imperialist dominance but to the good old days when white meant right, and people of other colors knew their place. Make America White Again! is perhaps the underlying slogan.

The discontents in both parties are transpiring because the economic, cultural and political contradictions that have been developing for decades in America are reaching a peak at a time when democracy itself is being auctioned to the wealthiest oligarchs and political

paralysis is nonchalantly engulfing Washington with few criticisms in Congress or the White House because so many politicians benefit from the process.

Sanders has a good program to cut Big Money campaign contributions, which he already rejects. Clinton largely depends on the richest people and companies in the U.S. to finance her political ventures. While still collecting from the 1% et al., the former First Lady now claims to support campaign finance reform, thus conflating words and deeds. The *New York Times*, which has endorsed Clinton's nomination, has repeatedly requested she make public the texts of six speeches to Goldman Sachs, for which she was paid \$225,000 each. Her defense for keeping the texts secret was that "Everybody does it. » to which a perturbed *Times* responded Feb. 25 that her response « is an excuse expected from a mischievous child, not a presidential candidate.... Public interest in these speeches is legitimate, and it is the public — not the candidate — who decides how much disclosure is enough. »

WHAT'S CLASS GOT TO DO WITH IT?

The working class, lower middle class, a sector of the middle class and the multitude of low income and poor workers are disgruntled by the absence of good jobs, many millions of which have been « globalized » and sent to lowest wage countries by American corporations seeking higher profits for stockholders and executives. These same U.S. workers are being cruelly exploited economically by their bosses who deny them decent wages and benefits. Teenagers are finding far fewer job opportunities these days. High school graduates have a hard time locating factory jobs that pay enough to cover the rent, much less ever to buy a house. College students and new graduates, burdened with educational debts and limp job prospects, are anxious about the future.

Both parties have supported the trade deals that offshored the jobs. Both parties exhibited indifference to the by now incredibly successful 40-year campaign by big business to lower wages and reduce benefits for American workers. Both have failed the youth of the nation. Both have failed the union movement, and that includes the Democrats who watched it decline and did nothing to help. The government controlled by both parties has not offered significant social programs to the masses of people in nearly a half-century. Both parties have supported the nearly 15-year wars in the Middle East. Both parties agree to surround Russia and China with U.S. military power.

Republicans are worse than the Democrats, we all know that, but can there be a doubt that *both parties* have failed the American people — and that this is a main cause of popular discontent among working people that is manifesting itself this election year?

Commenting on the uprisings in both parties, left wing analyst James Petras, a professor emeritus of sociology at New York's Binghamton University and the author of more than 62 books, wrote the following in his Feb. 24 article « Presidential Elections 2016 - The Revolt of the Masses »:

The rise of a social democratic movement within the Democratic Party and the rise of a sui generis national-populist rightist movement in the Republican Party reflect the fragmented electorate and deep vertical and horizontal fissures characterizing the U.S. ethno-class structure. Commentators grossly oversimplify when they reduce the revolt to incoherent expressions of 'anger.'

The shattering of the established elite's control is a product of deeply experienced class and ethnic resentments, of former privileged groups

experiencing declining mobility, of local businesspeople experiencing bankruptcy due to 'globalization' (imperialism) and of citizens' resentment at the power of capital (the banks) and its overwhelming control of Washington.

The electoral revolts on the Left and Right may dissipate but they will have planted the seeds of a democratic transformation or of a nationalist-reactionary revival. »

THE BIG CONTRADICTION

America's overarching economic and social contradiction derives, on the one hand, from exceptional inequality and poverty, and on the other hand the reality that the richest 1% of the people control 95% of the overall wealth (assets minus debts). Such wealth buys great luxury, power and inordinate influence in politics. Nearly half the U.S. population is uncomfortably situated in one of three economic categories: Low Wage, Poverty or Deep Poverty. It is estimated that 62% of citizens have [less than \\$1,000](#) in savings and are [one paycheck](#) away from the street. Several million families with two to four members each have been dispossessed from their homes or apartments since the 2008 Great Recession and its economically stagnant aftermath. The middle class was also hit hard, losing almost 30% of its wealth. One in five American children live in poverty.

What accounts for such great inequality and poverty amidst the plenty of the world's richest country? Wealth inequality, along with class exploitation and oppression, are *inherent structural* aspects of capitalism, particularly the neoliberal brand of capitalism that is imposed in the United States by those who control the economy, the political system including the two parties and the deep state. Both the Democratic and Republican parties view neoliberalism as a great gift, and such it is for the minority of Americans in the high income brackets who also finance these same parties.

Sen. Sanders' program for the campaign is not anti-capitalism, but anti-neoliberal capitalism, and he favors incorporating some of the progressive social democratic advances in Scandinavia and other individual countries into the American system. It's not quite the amplified social revolution Bernie talks about, but it could improve the standard of living for the majority of our people. Former Sen. Clinton has long approved of the neoliberal approach. These days Clinton's been swiping some of Bernie's proposals to show she's really a liberal, but if elected such « liberalism » will be blowing in the wind like a tattered campaign leaflet on a Chicago street.

The labor movement did a great deal to elect Presidents Clinton and Obama, but in return neither did much for the unions. In Obama's case the unions worked hard to get out the vote in 2008 and raise money for his campaign (in 2012 as well). In return Obama pledged to the AFL-CIO and other unions that if elected he would work for passage of the labor-suggested Employee Free Choice Act that would make it simpler for workers to form a union when a majority of company employees sign a card requesting one, rather than to require a secret-ballot run by the NLRB. When Obama took office he had a Democratic majority in the House and Senate. This all-important bill, which was designed to attract many more workers into unions, failed. Enough Democrats joined nearly unanimous anti-union conservatives to bury it for good. The matter never come up again.

The union movement agitated against Clinton's NAFTA and Obama's Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), and they were brushed aside like ants on a picnic table. Such trade deals

are the main transmission belt for moving U.S. working class jobs to Asia and Latin America. « In the first 10 years this century America lost 56,000 factories. That's 15 a day. Some just close. Others move offshore for the low wages and even lower environmental standards, » says the AFL-CIO, noting that about six million jobs disappeared in the first 15 years of the century, directly or indirectly related to the closings.

Hillary Clinton as First Lady campaigned for NAFTA and as secretary of state she strongly backed the TPP, saying it « sets the gold standard in trade agreements. » Sanders has long fought against the TPP. Clinton opportunistically flip-flopped five months ago. Foolishly, the AFL-CIO blames China and a few other countries for this situation instead of the U.S corporations, corrupt politicians, and the neoliberal government in Washington that built this particular house of cards.

The AFL-CIO announced in November it would « remain neutral » in the Democratic primaries. A large majority of the unions that have backed candidates are supporting Clinton, which gratifies the party leadership. Only a few have supported Bernie, who has spent his life helping and defending unions and workers. However, many rank and file union workers do support Bernie. Paradoxically another union sector backs Trump, disregarding the billionaire's declaration that American workers are well paid and don't need a raise, and that the minimum wage should not be increased.

Racial minorities — African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and others are disproportionately at the bottom half of the income scale, and so are many millions of working class whites. The recession reduced the median wealth of African American families to \$11 thousand. (Median means half have less, and half have more than that amount.) Forbes business publication estimated last year that a typical white household has 16 times the wealth of a black household. Black unemployment is twice that of whites.

During his two terms in office President Barack Obama has done very little to alleviate this dreadful imbalance, and there is little in Clinton's program that suggests her presidency would be any different. The White House brags on its website that Obama has been « restoring economic security to African American families: In the last 23 months, 3.7 million private sector jobs have been created and putting Americans back to work and restoring economic security for middle class families. » First, those jobs were lost in the Great Recession and not all have come back. Second, the implication is that those private sector jobs all went to blacks but they mainly went to white workers. For perspective, Emily Peck wrote in HuffPost Business Dec. 3 « The most startling divide is the one between whites and blacks. The wealthiest 100 households in the United States are wealthier than all the black people in the country combined (45.7 million). »

The Republican candidates do not demonstrate a modicum of interest in reducing inequality or poverty in America, as opposed to Democrat Clinton who does proclaim what amounts to a modicum of interest — and no more. Sanders has an extensive program for substantially diminishing both these plagues afflicting American working families and everyone with a low income. It will largely be financed by taxes on wealth and Wall Street, getting rid of loopholes allowing giant corporations to hide their profits from taxation and breaking up « too big to fail » banks that were bailed out at the expense of working people. Some think imposing higher taxes on the rich is too extreme. But as former Clinton administration Labor Secretary Robert Reich reminded us on his blog recently, « Since 1995, the average income tax rate for the 400 top-earning Americans has [plummeted](#) from 30% to 18%. The top rate was 91%, in 1960 and 70% on the eve of conservative Ronald Reagan's election in 1980. He

cut the rate down over the years. Bernie wants it to go up, relatively modestly but at least up. »

In a Guardian (UK) article last December, Columbia University professor Joseph E. Stiglitz, who received a Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, wrote: « America is becoming a more divided society — divided not only between whites and African Americans, but also between the 1% and the rest, and between the highly educated and the less educated, regardless of race. »

MILITARY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS POLICIES

The most ignored element so far in the Democratic primary campaign, is the question of Washington's military and foreign policy — two of the most important issues confronting the United States today. Further ignored is the matter of American world leadership — that is, unilateral global hegemony and policing the world with troops in over 100 countries backed up by history's most devastating military power. What about the wars the U.S has been fighting for the last 15 years? Or the program of the Obama administration that will cost up to a trillion dollars over the years to modernize America's nuclear weapons and delivery systems? Or the bloated military budget.

Who's best of the five?:

Here's a brief look at Trump, Rubio, Cruz, Clinton and Sanders. Of the five, Sanders is the best of a bad bunch. He is relatively moderate and occasionally progressive compared to the others but on imperialism, U.S. hegemony, Russia, China and various different issues his policies are indistinguishable from President Obama's. Clinton, as she was in the Senate and as secretary of state, remains a war hawk of the first magnitude whose shortcomings exceed those of Sanders in this regard. Trump, while a staunch militarist and dedicated hawk is sufficiently detached from ideology to subscribe to independent views on occasion, such as his opposition to the Iraq war. Extremist right-wingers Rubio and Cruz are trigger-happy neoconservative war hawks. All three Republicans will continue and probably enlarge the Bush-Obama wars.

Military spending:

Sanders is the only one of the five to have criticized the amount of spending in the military budget over the last two decades, mainly on the matters of waste and overspending on but also on just too much militarism. He supports a « strong defense, » and refused at times in Congress to vote in favor of military budgets he didn't like. As president it would seem he'd have to make cuts in military spending to obtain funds for some of his quite expensive social projects. Clinton generally supports the present rate of military spending with occasional exceptions. In September she called for the creation of a high-level commission to examine defense spending — the equivalent of shelving the issue. Trump, Cruz and Rubio seek higher military spending to « rebuild » the armed forces.

Clinton and Sanders on military and foreign policy:

Clinton: Her website positions are mainly generalizations that make her record look good, so it is best to judge Clinton but her actions in the Senate and primarily as secretary of state. Clinton maintained a hawkish posture toward Russia (she will « stand up to Putin ») and boasts that she played a major role in Obama's « pivot » to Asia to contain China. This

will continue if Clinton becomes president. In addition to supporting the Afghanistan and Iraq wars from the beginning, Secretary of State Clinton pushed hard for regime change in Libya and Syria starting five years ago — two of Obama's bigger errors, judging by the deadly crisis in both countries today. She justifies and continues those positions, even though her Libyan adventure has blown up in Obama's face, and her insistence on regime change in Syria is a main reason why the civil war has lasted this long and the casualties are so high. Four years ago she strongly opposed peace talks in Syria that Russia was ready to arrange, but she insisted talks would not be held until after President Assad resigned or was removed from office, a position Obama continued until this year when talks finally began while Assad still remains in power. In 2009, Clinton covered up for the right wing coup against liberal Honduran President Manuel Zelaya who was sent into exile. The U.S. government had been concerned over Zelaya's close relationship with leftist Venezuela.

As president, Clinton probably would go the whole way in Syria if she could and also expand Obama's recent continuation of the war in Libya. Like Obama she supports Saudi Arabia's unjust war against Yemen. As Secretary of State Clinton was active in the Saudi Kingdom's \$60 Billion purchase U.S. jets, smart bombs and other materials now being used to crush Yemen.

Clinton is totally in Israel's pocket, and her ex-president husband told a pro-Netanyahu meeting in Miami recently that that as president she would get closer than Obama to the right wing Israeli government.

There can be little doubt that Clinton will engage in more frequent military conflicts than the Obama administration, which she always thought was too restrained. Obama was relatively cautious for good reason — he didn't want to end up a shunned pariah like his predecessor. By her own admission she will not stray far from the Obama's policies except, it appears certain, to conduct even more aggressive wars.

Sanders: Bernie Sanders maintains « America must defend freedom at home and abroad, but we must seek diplomatic solutions before resorting to military action. While force must always be an option, war must be a last resort, not the first option. » Obama has said the same thing, and look where he's at today. Sanders voted against President H.W. Bush's 1991 Gulf War but voted for President Clinton's unjust bombing war against Yugoslav Serbia in 1999. He voted for President George W. Bush's 2001 war against Afghanistan, but voted against the 2003 war against Iraq. In 2011 he voted for President Obama's regime change bombing war against Libya.

Regarding Iran, Sanders' website says « the U.S. must do everything it can to make certain that Iran does not get a nuclear weapon, that a nuclear Iran does not threaten Israel, and to prevent a nuclear arms race in the region. » Although Israel has many nuclear weapons, he does not call for a nuclear-free Middle East as do many countries, including Iran. He thinks the recent nuclear agreement with Iran « is not perfect, » but adequate. He then says, « If Iran does not live up to the agreement, sanctions can be reestablished and *all other options remain on the table.* » Both the Bush and Obama administrations used this italicized expression to warn Iran the U.S. would use nuclear weapons if necessary.

ET TOI, BERNIE?

Sanders supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but does not rebuke Israel for its refusal to enter into serious negotiations to bring this goal about. The website

says: « Sanders strongly condemned indiscriminate rocket fire by Hamas into Israeli territory, and Hamas' use of civilian neighborhoods to launch those attacks. However, while recognizing that Israel has the right to defend itself, he also strongly condemned Israeli attacks on Gaza as disproportionate and the widespread killing of civilians as completely unacceptable. » By conflating the huge death toll and destruction in Gaza with several deaths in Israel and very little destruction, and connecting it all to Israel's right to defend itself, is disingenuous.

On the plus side Bernie opposes the expansion of NATO, but his reason is « it could lead to further aggression from Russia. » « The website says: « Sanders supports a strong, consistent stance with Russia's president, Vladimir Putin. Bernie supports enforcing economic sanctions and international pressure as an alternative to any direct military confrontation when dealing with Russia....To temper Russian aggression, we must freeze Russian government assets all over the world, and encourage international corporations with huge investments in Russia to divest from that nation's increasingly hostile political aims. « The United States must collaborate to create a unified stance with our international allies in order to effectively address Russian aggression. »

Bernie's position on both Russia and China seems even more hostile than Obama's. From the website: « Trade Policy: Our current trade policy with China is detrimental to American workers. Military Build-up: China continues to grow militarily and we must work with the international community to deter foreign support for China's military buildup. Human Rights: We must support Tibet, and call upon China to respect fundamental human rights both in Tibet and within China. All countries must respect fundamental human rights, including China. »

Our last point on this topic concerns Bernie's position on President Obama's continuing trillion dollar upgrading of U.S. nuclear weapons and delivery systems that Clinton supports. Our quote comes from the Defense One website that caters to the defense industry: In an article Feb. 22 headlined « Bernie Sanders Looks Pretty Darn Establishment on Nuclear Weapons, » it said: « Sanders is no outside-the-margin liberal on keeping up America's nuclear arsenal.... [his position is] Keep a large nuclear arsenal, but scale back, delay, or cancel programs that are excessive to our core goal of deterring a nuclear attack on America. Build new nuclear-armed submarines, but fewer of them. Build new bombers, but only when you need them. Keep land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, for now, but don't build a replacement. And cancel redundant weapons, like the new nuclear-tipped cruise missile.:] »

Objectively, this is an extremely important election, as Elizabeth Drew wrote in the Feb. 22 NYRDaily: « This country is facing the extraordinary situation of an election year in which control of all three branches of government is up for grabs. The confluence of a Supreme Court vacancy — a seat that could be the Court's deciding vote — with presidential and congressional campaigns raises the stakes to an unusual height. The Republicans, with 24 Senate seats up for reelection — seven of them from states that Obama carried in 2012—could be in a vulnerable position. The Democrats have just 10 seats up for reelection and have a shot at regaining control of the Senate. The House is populated mainly by representatives whose seats have been gerrymandered and, barring an avalanche, is unlikely to lose its Republican majority. It's possible that the Supreme Court opening that resulted from Justice Antonin Scalia's death will be filled before the election, but mighty forces are at work to prevent that. »

The outmoded though sacrosanct for now two-party system in this year's election nominations offers the American people three domestic options instead of the usual two — from the far right, the center right and the center left. We address these options below, one at a time.

- **THE FIRST OPTION** is a government takeover by extremists of the far right. All three leading Republican party candidates for the presidential nomination are aggressively within the ultra-reactionary category, turning the GOP's nominating procedure into a three-ring circus of the absurd.

Trump, Cruz and Rubio agree on deporting millions of Latinos without proper residence permits, and building a wall across the U.S southern border — making Mexico pay for it. They all want to engage in torturing captives in the Middle East wars, expanding the role of Guantanamo for that purpose. (President Obama has already deported over two million Latin Americans and will allow only a few thousand Muslim war refugees into the country after a two-year investigation of each family.) They all debunk global warming.

Writing in the Washington Post Feb. 26 Catherine Rampell pointed out that the three are very similar in their programs. « When it comes to human rights, » she says they « seem to be jockeying for who can commit more war crimes. » She views all their tax proposals as « highly regressive, » and notes all want to trash Obamacare but their replacement plans are vague. On Syrian refugees, Rampell continued, « Trump said he'd let in none at all (and later, no Muslim immigrants of any kind). Rubio also eventually agreed that the U.S. should accept [none at all](#), while Cruz said [Christians only](#). [All three do not accept](#) the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change. They [want](#) fewer gun-control measures, and to reverse nationwide same-sex marriage. »

Commenting on Trump and the Republicans March 2, the *New York Times* declared: « The Republican Party is taking a big step toward becoming the party of Trump. Those who could challenge Mr. Trump — Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio — are not only to the right of Mr. Trump on many issues, but are embracing the same game of exclusion, bigotry and character assassination. That Mr. Rubio would make double entendres about the size of Mr. Trump's hands and talk about Mr. Trump wetting his pants shows how much his influence has permeated this race and how willingly his rivals are copying his tactics.

On March 4 *Times* columnist Paul Krugman viewed the problem as one that infects the entire Republican party, not just its loudest and most vulgar mouth: « So Republicans are going to nominate a candidate who talks complete nonsense on domestic policy; who believes that foreign policy can be conducted via bullying and belligerence; who cynically exploits racial and ethnic hatred for political gain. But that was always going to happen, however the primary season turned out. The only news is that the candidate in question is probably going to be Donald Trump. Establishment Republicans denounce Mr. Trump as a fraud, which he is. But is he more fraudulent than the establishment trying to stop him? Not really. »

Columnist Maureen Dowd followed up in the *Times* March. 6 with this: « For all the Republican establishment's self-righteous bleating, Trump is nothing more than an unvarnished, cruder version. For years, it has fanned, stoked and exploited the worst angels among the nativists, racists, Pharisees and angry white men, concurring in anti-immigrant measures, restricting minority voting, whipping up anti-Planned Parenthood hysteria and enabling gun nuts.... How lame was it that after saying he was a crazy choice, Rubio, Ted

Cruz, Paul Ryan and John McCain turned around and said they will support Trump if he's the nominee? »

At this point only Trump seems positioned to win the nomination, unless the establishment's campaign to stop him gains sufficient momentum very soon. Even if they do succeed the only viable replacement so far is far-right Cruz. In a general election the Democrats may well be able to defeat either of these extremist candidates. Clinton probably could, and despite her campaign's constant refrain that leftist Bernie doesn't have a chance, some polls say he actually has a better chance than his rival.

- **THE SECOND OPTION** is for Democratic candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton to win the election and basically continue her party's economic and political direction of the last 40 years, particularly the eight-year administrations of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. That direction is rightward, away from the party's center-left orientation of the 1960s and 1930s, a course that has — by objective political standards — positioned today's Democratic party in the center-right of the political spectrum. These policies, combined with those of the right wing Republicans are what have led to America's extreme economic inequality and poverty amidst the excessive plenty of the upper classes.

For the last few months, Clinton's rhetoric has occasionally changed to centrist and even liberal in some cases, but this is a matter of expediency to defeat Sanders for the nomination. She also repeatedly promises to faithfully carry forward Obama administration practices mainly to secure African American votes in the southern states, a pledge that is now paying off for her big time. Some well-known left African Americans, such as public intellectual Cornell West, have declared blacks will vote against their own interests by backing Clinton. West, who supports Sanders because of his pro-people record, his opposition to neoliberalism and his social democratic campaign proposals, blames a number of black leaders who he says seem to have more loyalty to the Democratic party establishment than to the needs of African Americans.

Clinton also supports and takes some credit for the eight years President Bill Clinton served from 1993-2001. There was indeed economic growth during much of this period but the Dot-com bubble eventually burst. Of more importance is the sharp move to right during Clinton's term that put the great accomplishments of Democratic reformers Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson into cold storage. The notion that the party was not completely in Wall Street's pocket was shattered in Clinton's second term. He destroyed the Depression era Glass Steigel Act, which sharply limited commercial bank securities activities and led to the 2008 Great Recession. Further, Clinton bent the knee to Wall Street by passing the Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000 and the Riegle-Neal legislation that permitted holding companies to acquire banks throughout the U.S.

Bill Clinton deservedly gets the blame for all this but Hillary Clinton was his chief adviser and an activist First Lady who publicly supported these programs, as she also did the administration's mass incarceration legislation and the end of welfare « as we know it, » consigning female heads of household and their children into serious hardship. There can be no doubt that Bill Clinton would be Hillary Clinton's chief adviser should she become president.

Negative aspects of the Bill Clinton presidency were revealed in the March 6 Democratic debate in Flint Mich., as reported the next day by Robert Borosage of the Campaign for America's Future:

Hillary Clinton has had to separate herself from her husband's legacy: NAFTA, China and our disastrous corporate trade policies, mass incarceration and racially biased criminal justice policies, Wall Street deregulation and big money politics. She derides « debating the 1990s, » but has been forced to disavow the legacy and the impact of signature initiatives of the Clinton administration.

In her defense, Clinton continues to use Barack Obama as a shield. Her defense on taking Wall Street money: Obama did it. On opposing the break up of the big banks: Obama hasn't. On the auto bailout: Obama wanted it as part of the Bush bailout of the banks. On support for fracking: Obama says it works.

This is a clever tactic in Democratic primaries where Obama remains popular. And Clinton will no doubt distance herself from Obama when the general election begins, in order to paint herself as an agent of change. But at a time when voters are looking for real change, Clinton continually makes herself the candidate of continuity.

Hillary Clinton's economic plan has come under fire from the left. [Les Leopold](#) of [AlterNet](#) wrote March 6:

Her program fits perfectly within the neoliberal framework as she focuses on how to use public funds and policies to promote private sector gain. There are tax incentives to urge large and small corporations to create more jobs in the U.S. There are tax breaks to encourage corporations to provide more training and profit sharing plans. And there are tax breaks to promote long-term investment instead of short-term gains. To balance this equation, she also calls for exit taxes if companies take tax breaks and then move out of the country.

Team Hillary's populist sounding plan is in harmony with the pernicious neoliberal principle — that the private sector, by definition, is more valuable than the public sector — that all must be done to 'encourage' private sector jobs while limiting public sector jobs. She makes no mention of the decades-old attack on public sector jobs and benefits. Not a word about the privatization that is wrecking Michigan's public sector.

Clinton largely depends on the richest people and companies to finance her political ventures. While still collecting from the 1% et al., the former First Lady now claims to support campaign finance reform, thus conflating words and deeds. The *New York Times*, which has endorsed Clinton's nomination, has repeatedly requested she make public the texts of six speeches to Goldman Sachs, for which she was paid \$225,000 each. Her defense for keeping the texts secret was that "Everybody does it. » to which a perturbed *Times* responded Feb. 25 that her response « is an excuse expected from a mischievous child, not a presidential candidate.... Public interest in these speeches is legitimate, and it is the public — not the candidate — who decides how much disclosure is enough. »

Democratic leaders and big donors who have controlled the party for decades are nearly all supporting Clinton and her dedication to the policies of Presidents Obama and Bill Clinton. She has not put forward a serious program for overcoming the plethora of problems confronting working class, middle class and poor families, such as: halting gross economic inequality, and increasing working class wages, imposing substantially higher taxes on the rich to finance social and infrastructure programs for the people and imposing significant regulations on the banks and Wall Street, including jailing malfeasants when appropriate.

Clinton's plan to curb greenhouse gas emissions is fairly close to President Obama's more recent proposals following years during which the administration was standing on the sidelines. Her action plan tells us: « Climate change is an urgent threat and a defining challenge of our time — and Hillary Clinton has a plan to tackle it by making America the world's clean energy superpower, taking bold steps to slash carbon pollution at home and around the world, and ensuring no Americans are left out or left behind as we rapidly build a clean energy economy. » She makes promises to implement several clean energy projects. The plan needs a lot more work and money. Much will depend on the pressure and militancy of the environmental movement.

One of Clinton's strong points is that she could become the first woman president, and proclaims herself a feminist. Virtually all Democrats and leftists agree that it would be an important advance for a woman to govern from the Oval Office, and if she becomes the Democratic nominee instead of Sanders, most of his voters including Bernie will support her.

However, many Democratic voters, including an exceptionally large number of young women who consider themselves feminists, are supporting Sen. Sanders throughout the nation. Their logic is that the dangerous economic, social and political crises perceived by the American people today require an urgent national action plan to address the specific issues. These include economic inequality and poverty, stagnant wages for the working class, enormous wealth for the top 1%, bad jobs with little or no benefits, offshoring most manufacturing work to lower wage companies, anti-worker trade deals, high student debts, shameful minimum wages, high rents, etc. Bernie, in their view, would work for this more than his primary opponent.

There is no evidence that Clinton or the leadership of the Democratic Party entertains a genuine intention to take decisive action to attack these problems.

- **THE THIRD OPTION** is the left-liberal program of Bernie Sanders. Rank and file Democrats in the millions support Bernie's proposals to fight inequality, poverty, low-income jobs, and create of social programs to mitigate the hardships faced by so many Americans. However, this is an electoral movement that could dissipate after Nov. 8 (as it did following Obama's first election, although he inexplicably told his supporters to go home now that he was in charge.) At issue is whether Bernie's supporters stay together as an activist political movement after the elections, whether Sanders wins or loses.

Sen. Sanders' main objective is to resuscitate and expand the Democratic party's liberal and left wing that has been systematically suppressed by party leaders for decades, most certainly including Obama (who publicly mocked liberalism and kept it in check) and Bill Clinton (who worked intimately with Wall Street and scoffed at those who were attached to the « L word »). The L word meant « liberals » and the party avoided both the word and the practice from the mid-1980 until recently. Liberals occasionally were elected to office — such as outspoken Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich, a true friend of the people until his district was reorganized — but their influence was undermined by party leaders.

Sanders has pledged to weaken the great influence of Wall Street, the banks and corporations upon the U.S. economy and the political system. He pledges to fight for universal single-payer health care, to battle against the outrageous economic and social inequality that prevails in the U.S today, to demand free college tuition and to propose a variety of new social programs to benefit the working class, middle class the poor and the oppressed minorities.

This is one of the most radical Democratic party programs since the 1930s though it is well within the orbit of social democratic capitalism. He wants to reduce economic and class exploitation and oppression but not to replace the system with socialism. The historic replacement of capitalism by socialism can only be accomplished by mass movements and organizations, not a socialist politician in his mid-70s who is doing his best to energize Democratic liberals to stand up and fight back.

Bernie isn't directly campaigning against capitalism *per se* but he is gesturing in that direction, excoriating its methods and results and demanding a much better deal for the working class, middle class and the poor. This is new in the modern Democratic party and is a contribution to the deeper struggle for substantial radical change. Likewise it has in effect popularized and legitimized the word « socialism » in a capitalist state that has vehemently opposed the concept and its advocates for about 135 years.

The Washington Post's Catherine Rampell wrote about a YouGov poll Jan. 25-27, where 42% of Democrats had a favorable opinion of socialism and 34% were unfavorable. Among the public as a whole only 29% were favorable. In that same public poll 43% of young people 18 to 28 were more favorable to socialism and 26% were unfavorable. In that same poll, people 30 to 64 who were favorable to socialism dropped to 27%. It was 23% favorable for people 65 and older.

In a Gallup poll last June, 69% of 18 to 29 year olds said that they would be willing, as opposed to unwilling, to vote for a socialist candidate. For 65 and older it was 34% willing. (Willing does not necessarily mean a preference, just an open mind.)

Rampell wrote: « Much of the current conversation about Sanders's 'democratic socialism' is predicated on whether Americans can look past this supposedly toxic label. But millennials (18-30) love Sanders not despite his socialism, but because of it. 'Socialism' has never been a dirty word for the current cohort of youth, who either didn't live through the Cold War or don't remember it. We are more likely to associate socialism with prosperous, egalitarian, relatively well-functioning Scandinavian states. »

In terms of the environmental crisis, Sanders' plans to substantially reduce greenhouse gases and convert the U.S. to renewable fuel are hard hitting and thorough. He says:

Right now, we have an energy policy that is rigged to boost the profits of big oil companies like Exxon, BP, and Shell at the expense of average Americans. CEOs are raking in record profits while climate change ravages our planet and our people — all because the wealthiest industry in the history of our planet has bribed politicians into complacency in the face of climate change. Enough is enough. It's time for a political revolution that takes on the fossil fuel billionaires, accelerates our transition to clean energy, and finally puts people before the profits of polluters.

Climate change is the single greatest threat facing our planet. The debate is over, and the scientific jury is in: global climate change is real, it is caused mainly by emissions released from burning fossil fuels and it poses a catastrophic threat to the long-term longevity of our planet. If we do nothing, the planet will heat up five to ten degrees Fahrenheit by the end of this century. That would cause enough sea level rise from melting glaciers to put cities like New York and Miami underwater — along with more frequent asthma attacks, higher food prices, insufficient drinking water and more infectious diseases....

Let's be clear: the reason we haven't solved climate change isn't because we aren't doing our part, it's because a small subsection of the one percent are hell-bent on doing everything in their power to block action. Sadly, they have deliberately chosen to put their profits ahead of the health of our people and planet.

Establishment Democrats have been critical of Bernie's economic plan, but a number of economists have come to his side. An article by Dave Johnson posted Feb. 23 at the Campaign for America's Future discussed some criticisms of Bernie's economic plan:

« Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders says he wants the American people to join him and 'fight for a progressive economic agenda that creates jobs, raises wages, protects the environment and provides health care for all.' His website outlines [a number of proposals](#) toward this end, including increasing taxation of corporations and the wealthy and using the money to repair the country's infrastructure, extending public education four years to cover college, extending Medicare to everyone, expanding Social Security and addressing climate change.

« Gerald Friedman, a respected economist (and Clinton supporter by the way) took a look at Sanders' proposals, ran the revenue and spending numbers through a standard economic model, and suggested that the very high level of spending would provide a 'significant stimulus to an economy that continues to underperform, with national income and employment at levels well below capacity.' This stimulus could lead to several positive economic outcomes, including increasing gross domestic product growth to 5.3% a year, cutting unemployment to 3.8% and increasing wages by 2.5% per year. This, combining with the revenue proposals, would bring a budget surplus. Friedman wrote:

Like the New Deal of the 1930s, Senator Sanders' program is designed to do more than merely increase economic activity: the expenditure, regulatory, and tax programs will increase economic activity and employment and promote a more just prosperity, "broadly-based" with a narrowing of economic inequality.

« Then, four ex-chairs of the White House's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), all Democrats, wrote an open letter using Friedman's projections as a way to attack the Sanders campaign. The letter called the projections 'fantastical,' 'extreme' and 'claims that cannot be supported by the economic evidence. » They might have added, « Bernie's too left wing and he's running against Hillary, » but didn't of course, despite that being a factor in their analysis. Other economists supported Friedman.

For a leftist U.S. politician not well known throughout the U.S. to oppose Hillary Clinton for the nomination is a tough assignment. Clinton is one of the best known people in the world after eight years as First Lady, two elections as a U.S. Senator from New York State, the 2008 campaign for the White House, four years as Secretary of State and now another presidential campaign. What Bernie is proclaiming now is what he has been arguing throughout his career in local government and the House and Senate, but few Americans cared to listen to an obscure leftist politician from a small state in New England. But times are changing and running for the presidency as a Democrat provides him big time coverage, though certainly not as much as he deserves.

Now he not only speaks to millions but is supported by millions — but virtually the entire leadership of the party he has joined, plus its funders and super delegates, oppose him.

They are lined up like disciplined troops to march behind Clinton's center-right banner to fight for the political status quo.

Sanders is well liked by his Democratic Senate colleagues but none have backed his quest while 40 so far have given their support to Clinton and the rest are watching mutely. Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, a leading Senate liberal, did not announce her choice before or after her state's March 1 primary vote went to Clinton 50.1% to 48.7%. Had she supported Sanders there was a chance he could have won this key New England state.

Sanders still has a chance to win, but even if he loses the nomination or the election, he will have served the critically important purpose of galvanizing millions of Americans, including an extraordinary number of young people, around a left-liberal/social democratic program that could move further left. There is a possibility that this movement can survive outside the electoral orbit and take to the streets and meeting halls with demands for economic, social and political change. This will require dedicated intervention by the U.S. left.

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Articles Par : [Jack A. Smith](#)

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