



Voting With Our Feet

Par [Chris Hedges](#)

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Bernie Sanders' political corpse in the presidential race is still warm, but some of his prominent liberal supporters already are urging us to flee to Hillary Clinton. Sanders, who knows [the game is up](#), will soon become the Democrats' pied piper. He will seek to entice his supporters into the Democratic Party rattrap. He has decried the disruption of Trump rallies—denigrating the only power we have left—saying “people should not disrupt anybody’s meetings.” His “political revolution,” like his promise of a movement, is a cynical form of advertising. Sanders will, like the Barack Obama of 2008, end as an impediment to the mass movements he claims to represent. And mass movements in our system of [“inverted totalitarianism”](#) are our final and only hope.



I understand the fear over Donald Trump. I too want to crush the growing fascist sentiments rising up from the rot and decay of American society. But voting for Clinton and supporting the Democratic Party will not halt our descent into despotism. It will only accelerate it. Trump is not creating phenomena. He is responding to them. It is up to us to halt the array of forces, including the Trump campaign, that are preparing a species of American fascism and orchestrating a global ecocide. The only way we have left to vote is with our feet.

When fundamental rights are abolished by the state, as novelist and activist Arundhati Roy has pointed out, “they are almost always won back *only* through revolution.” And it is not as if we have much time left. Josh Fox, in his brutally honest film about the looming effects of climate change, “[How to Let Go of the World](#) (and Love All the Things Climate Can’t Change),” notes that we have to cut 80 percent of all carbon emissions by 2020 if we are to have any hope of saving the Greenland ice sheet. The Paris climate talks were a step backward. The loss of the polar ice will flood coastal cities around the globe. It will trigger a

global ecological catastrophe. It will displace hundreds of millions of people. It will bring, if not revolution, violence, anarchy, chaos, suffering and death that will rival the black plague. And our elites intend to do nothing to stop it. That fact alone should send us into the streets.

The Democrats, and in particular Hillary and Bill Clinton, are responsible as much as anyone on the right for our being sacrificed on the altar of corporate profit. They told the same lies as the right-wingers. They fed the same hate. They too orchestrated the corporate coup. The Clintons removed from the Democratic Party platform the progressive stances championed by [Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition](#). They spoke early in their careers in the coded racism of "law and order." They transformed the Democratic Party into the old Republican Party. They unleashed the predators of Wall Street and the fossil fuel industry. They stripped us of our civil liberties, championed endless war and empowered the arms industry and agencies such as Homeland Security to suck the marrow out of the federal budget. The Clintons and the Democratic Party filled the prisons and destroyed welfare. And under President Obama it has gotten worse. Obama authorized the [assassination of U.S. citizens](#). He signed into law legislation that permits the military to act as a domestic police force and detain U.S. citizens indefinitely without due process. He and the Democratic Party establishment are attempting to ram new trade agreements down our throats.

It pays to betray the citizenry. The Clintons have made more than [\\$153 million for paid speeches](#) alone since 2001. The Democratic Party is awash in corporate cash. And the Obamas will soon, like the Clintons, be multimillionaires.

The two parties colluded to turn American politics into anti-politics. The culture wars replaced political debate. The Democrats co-opted the liberal elites and unions. The Republican Party embraced the lunatics of the Christian right, nativists and opponents of abortion rights. The Republicans and the Democrats looked at their supporters as useful idiots. It worked for a while. Then the manipulated and the abandoned sent the elites back to their gated estates. Voters flocked to Trump hate rallies and fueled Sanders' political insurgency.

It was a bankrupt liberal establishment that made possible the rise of totalitarianism in Germany and Russia in the 20th century. The great intellectuals, writers, philosophers and artists—from Fyodor Dostoevsky to Hannah Arendt—who fought against emergent fascism and communism warned about a failed liberalism. They understood that stories of rage were, first of all, stories of despair. Liberalism, by constantly betraying its stated values, neutered and discredited itself as a political force. Its self-destruction left the working poor bereft of their only means of halting their abject exploitation and abuse. Incremental and piecemeal reform became impossible. When the underclasses turned against the liberal establishment they rejected not only its representatives but also the values liberals claimed to represent. And they searched for a leader who promised new glory, moral renewal and vengeance.

In his book "The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology," Fritz Stern, a refugee from Nazi Germany and later a scholar of fascism, examined the roots of fascist ideology. He singled out as fundamental to the rise of fascism the collapse of liberalism as a political force and a government crippled by infighting and paralysis. He wrote of the nascent German fascists:

They attacked liberalism because it seemed to them the principal premise of modern society; everything they dreaded seemed to spring from it: the

bourgeois life, Manchesterism [laissez-faire capitalism], materialism, parliament and the parties, the lack of political leadership. Even more, they sensed in liberalism the source of all their inner sufferings. Theirs was a resentment of loneliness; their one desire was for a new faith, a new community of believers, a world with fixed standards and no doubts, a new national religion that would bind all Germans together. All this, liberalism denied. Hence, they hated liberalism, blamed it for making outcasts of them, for uprooting them from their imaginary past, and from their faith.

Who wants to support liberals when, year after year, they demonstrate that they stand for nothing? Who can trust liberals when they routinely sell out because they are afraid? (You cannot truly claim you oppose the apartheid state of Israel, endless war, mass incarceration, the ravaging of the environment or wholesale state surveillance and then go vote for Clinton.) How can you build a movement to blunt the legitimate rage of the underclasses if you are not willing to defend their most basic rights?

There are mechanisms to wrest back our democracy. Voting in presidential elections is not one of them. Shutting down Trump rallies, [as took place in Chicago](#), and blocking fracking sites are examples of the only form of direct democracy left. We must begin to mobilize around mass actions. We must, in large and small ways, disrupt the system.

Street demonstrations to denounce the party conventions in Cleveland and Philadelphia would expose the political theater. Unfortunately, the state, whose fear of protests is pathological, will impose de facto martial law in the host cities during the conventions, as it has in the past. It will flood the streets with militarized police, set up mazes of barricades and deploy the usual array of militarized hardware—including drones and helicopters—and crowd control technology. The state has, I suspect, already infiltrated and is monitoring any group it believes might attempt to protest. Authorities will work to make it impossible for any demonstrator to get within blocks of the convention halls. Sustained, mass civil disobedience—if not in Cleveland and Philadelphia then in other parts of the country—that can impede the machinery of corporate power is our only hope.

There were once radicals in America, people who held fast to moral imperatives. They fought for the oppressed because it was right, not because it was easy or practical. They were willing to accept the state persecution that comes with open defiance. They had the courage of their convictions. They were not afraid. It is only by reclaiming this radicalism that the left can regain its credibility and effect change. It was the radical left that amid the breakdown of capitalism in the 1930s ensured we had the New Deal rather than American fascism, which many U.S. industrialists openly championed. Franklin Delano Roosevelt told his fellow oligarchs that it was either the New Deal or a revolution. Better to lose some of your wealth, he warned them, rather than all of it.

We need to once again make the power elites afraid.

Ask yourself, what would [Ida B. Wells](#), [Mother Jones](#), [Jane Addams](#), [Randolph Bourne](#), [Emma Goldman](#) or [“Big Bill” Haywood](#) do? What would Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, James Baldwin, [Fannie Lou Hamer](#), [Ella Baker](#) or [Fred Hampton](#) do?

“They were madmen [and madwomen],” Pierre-Auguste Renoir said of the radicals who rose up and led the [Paris Commune](#), “but they had in them that little flame which never dies.”

These radicals understood that plutocrats and the armed goons who kept them in power had

to be fought. There was not enough money, power or fear to get them to surrender their integrity. And because they did not waver, indeed were willing to suffer persecution and in some cases death to speak truth and demand justice, they inspired those around them to resist. Present-day protesters in the United States, such as those in Chicago after the police murder of Laquan McDonald and those who were targets of arrest or violence at or near two Trump rallies in Arizona, grasp this fundamental truth about power. These men and women did not wait for police permits to march or protest. They defied the law. Some of them went to jail. We will embrace this inspiration and courage, handed down by earlier generations of radicals, or we will stumble like sleepwalkers toward catastrophe.

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