

Volume 002
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THE RED VINE



Journal of the Red
Party

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Still Looking for a Silver Bullet

by **Gabriel Pierre**

Anonymous, writing last month¹ in response to a talk² I gave on ‘money in politics’, criticized my dismissal of campaign finance reform as a worthwhile reform campaign. While he agrees that the radical-democratic program I and the Red Party defend is a good thing in the abstract, he argues that campaign finance reform is the necessary first step to any kind of mass left-wing political project and should be promoted at basically any cost. Not only is this argument unsound on its own terms, but it rests on some faulty assumptions about the nature of working class politics - and, frankly, an insulting paternalism toward the American people in general.

First, some clarity about what campaign finance reform is. It usually refers to a proposed Constitutional amendment promoted by groups like Move to Amend and supported by both Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton (the latter hypocritically.) The amendment would overturn the Supreme Court’s 2010 ruling *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which dramatically increased large corporations’ freedom to sponsor candidates for office - think SuperPACs. It

also covers proposals for public finance matching (like the Fair Elections Now Act) and greater disclosure of campaign donors. Of course, we should fight to weaken the capitalists’ ability to buy elections outright. But to discard the objective need for the radical extension of democracy as key to our practice in favor of ‘campaign finance’ salvation is both tactically mistaken (because the methods used to obtain it will fail) and a misunderstanding of how the ruling class rules.

The comrade’s first argument is that the influence of the bourgeois media is so strong that it makes mass support for socialist politics impossible - that it is “to the level of brainwashing.” Of course, the capitalist class does hold a tremendous ideological sway via the power of its full-time army of paid persuaders: journalists and pundits, preachers and filmmakers, et cetera. The ruling ideas of any society are the ideas of the ruling class. But to despair over “brainwashing” is to dismiss out of hand the majority’s ability to think and act in its own interests. It’s more an admission of ignorance toward history’s lessons than it is a material reality.

Consciousness changes, and the class struggle continues: see the

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Submissions and Contact:
party@red-party.com

St. Louis Commune of 1877, the Seattle General Strike of 1919, the powerful Socialist and Communist-led struggles of the 1930s, the Black & Women's Liberation movements... Or more recently, look at the reawakening of open class struggle (albeit at an elemental level) with Occupy Wall Street or Black Lives Matter. Kshama Sawant, in her re-election campaign for the Seattle City Council earlier this year, won her seat despite the combined opposition of the Democratic and Republican parties for her opponent. Clearly, reactionary prejudices and attitudes can be countered. Pointing to capital's ideological hegemony is actually a compelling argument to build a powerful working class alternative media, not self-censor in an attempt to pander to our opponents.

His second argument is that "the inability of the people to affect change stems from the loss of their leverage. They have lost their first form of leverage in the vote, due in part to the wealthy using their monetary leverage to influence the process." We would gain this leverage back by "getting the vote to mean something again," which will force open "a crack in the foundation of the system that will let future victories happen,"



though the battle "will last a long, long time."

Now, I can appreciate the sense of patience here. At least the comrade is trying to work out some kind of long-term strategy, as opposed to the spontaneism and r-r-revolutionary action fetishism so common on the left. But our problem is not that the proletariat "cannot keep up with the bourgeoisie in disposable income per capita." The working class's power (potential or realized) is not in how much money individual workers can scrape together and donate to this or that election campaign, but in its separation from the means of production, its ability to withdraw its labor, and its collective / global character. These are what make the proletariat the revolutionary class of today.

No kind of single issue campaign will be able to build this desired "leverage." Campaign finance reform is another attempt at finding a silver bullet, one more in a long line of illusory quick-

fixes peddled by U.S. populists for over a century. In earlier periods we've had nearly identical reforms actually passed into law, including the Tillman Act of 1907 (which prohibited corporate donations in federal elections) and the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 (which created the FEC.) Incidentally, the Constitutional amendment championed by Move to Amend would actually weaken the working class in a significant way if passed, since it draws an equal sign between corporate and union campaign contributions!

At any rate, fostering a cross-class alliance around the silver bullet du jour will only end in tears. No lasting organization and no serious reforms to show for our trouble. Much better to build on a stronger foundation. A working class party of systemic opposition, or a Communist Party, lacks the appeal of being a quick fix. But only by building a mass (but for the time being, minority) party on a Marxist program can we extract real concessions from capital, let alone serve the goal of socialism and general human liberation.

Notes

1. <http://red-party.com/letters-november-2015/>
2. <http://red-party.com/beyond-money-in-politics/>

Refugee Solidarity Beyond Platitudes

Editorial by the Red Party Central Committee



Donald Trump's latest inflammatory statement, that the federal government should enact a "total and complete shutdown of all Muslims entering the United States", has drawn indignant anger from across the ruling class and its institutions. Even the conservative establishment has joined in condemnation of the right-wing demagogue, with newly minted House Speaker Paul Ryan disclaiming the idea as "not who we are as a party" and others, including presidential candidate Lindsey Graham, naming Trump a fascist. Indeed, the f-word is now being wielded across the bourgeois media as journalists ponder whether The Donald bears more than a superficial resemblance to Il Duce.¹

Whether or not Trump is a fascist or proto-fascist according to a scientific socialist criterion, a question is posed: how much do his politics actually diverge from the existing U.S. establishment on the refugee crisis? The Republican Party is clearly not filled to the brim with pro-refugee sentiment, considering the 30 Republican governors making

various public statements and legal maneuvers to keep refugees out of their states. The Democrats are complicit here too. Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker joined his GOP colleagues in announcing that additional Syrian and Iraqi refugees weren't welcome in the Bay State, though he backtracked a few days later, presumably upon learning his constituents aren't as xenophobic as he thought. At the federal level, 47 House Democrats joined the Republicans in a vote to increase the already onerous requirements for acceptance into the U.S. - enough bureaucratic red tape that the program would essentially grind to a halt.

The constant fear mongering over national security from the refugee population is a red herring. The existing vetting process is the most exhaustive in the world.² First potential refugees must apply for their status with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and, after passing their vetting protocols, be referred to the United States. They are then scrutinized by the FBI, State Department, Department of Homeland

Security and the National Counterterrorism Center, with multiple rounds of background checks and interviews... as well as one last screening when they arrive in the U.S. by plane. The process takes between one and three years. At this point new arrivals are handed off to one of nine non-governmental organizations that resettles the individual or family somewhere in the country and controls the \$1,000 stipend each refugee receives (meant to last three months.) They do not receive any special housing or job arrangement from the state, and in fact they are expected to pay back their stipend and plane fare!³

No reasonable person could think the U.S. is coddling refugees, yet the bourgeois-liberal establishment continually allows the Right to set the terms of debate. President Obama, defended by many as a paragon of tolerance, defends a miserly admittance policy. Leaving aside for a moment the U.S.'s intense involvement in creating the very situation millions are fleeing from, fewer than 2,000 Syrians have been brought into the country since 2011. Obama's plan, the funding for which survived its inclusion in the recent omnibus spending bill⁴, provides for an additional 15,000 refugees next year then 30,000 and 45,000 in 2017 and 2018. The total limit on refugees will be increased to 100,000 per year. Compare this to Lebanon, a small neocolonial country that has already taken in 1.2 million refugees from Iraq and Syria. Germany, an imperialist power in its own right with a fraction of America's population and economic capacity, has accepted a million asylum-seekers and counting. The progressive refugee plan is actually quite conservative.

Bourgeois politicians of every stripe are basing their refugee policy on loyalty to the capitalist nation-state and to the imperialist project. This includes Bernie Sanders, whose response to the refugee crisis and right-wing doomsday predictions was to... launch a petition⁵ to preserve the status quo. Not exactly socialist internationalism! Contrast this to communist policy, which starts with what will advance the confidence, position and self-organization of the world working class. This includes principled opposition to immigration controls and opposition to the imperial project as a whole.

Yes, it's essential to organize on a day-to-day basis against the worst kinds of national chauvinism and jingoistic bigotry peddled by the likes of Trump. But marrying ourselves to liberal politicians is a dead end. Only a positive left-wing challenge can cut across the rising specter of the far right.

Notes

1. Disappointingly but in keeping with its tradition of vapid class "analysis", the bourgeois media tends to use more or less arbitrary definitions of fascism rather than any kind of Marxist approach like the one laid out by Leon Trotsky in *Fascism: What it is & How to Fight It*.
2. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>
3. <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/11/20/8-facts-about-the-us-program-to-resettle-syrian-refugees>
4. Pending but expected to pass at the time of publication.
5. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/11/20/bernie-sanders-launches-petition-drive-to-preserve-syrian-refugee-program/>

Feel the Bern!

Josh Hollandsworth explores the mind of an American liberal.

Dangerous levels of satire follow!

As a liberal socialist, Bernie Sanders has my vote for 2016. Here's why you should vote for him too.

Bernie Sanders will do his part to make socialism happen here. I mean he even calls himself a democratic socialist! That means more public libraries, firehouses, military spending... maybe even bridges! Because when you think about it, ANY government spending is socialism! I saw it on a meme shared by one of his fans; it showed all the public works programs which count as socialism: police, the FBI, vaccines... But let's make socialism happen for the people, not for corporations! We've had enough corporate socialism over the last few decades after all.

Of course his radicalism is sure to make right-wingers' heads explode, but what I found really surprising is that there are people on the left who try to criticize him too! Especially those Black Lives Matter folks; don't those people know that Bernie is the best for them!? HE SUPPORTED CIVIL RIGHTS

50 YEARS AGO! And then there are these self-righteous socialists

who say Bernie isn't "really" one of them. Um, don't they realize his entire platform is basically about how capitalism sucks? What about that other socialist in Seattle, that... Kshama? I forget how to say it exactly but she totally supports Bernie, and she's a REAL socialist! And if Bernie isn't really on the far left, then why does the Communist Party of the United States endorse him huh? Is that not "radical" enough for you?

One of the biggest criticisms from the left is about Palestine. Okay yeah, I'm not saying I agree with that, but hey free college! And legal marijuana! Besides, all the others do the same thing anyways, so when you think about it Bernie really is the best. And I don't want to hear you criticize Bernie if you can't tell me of somebody else to vote for (who will win the election)!

It's important to understand that even though socialism has always been bad, Bernie will make it good. He's a democratic socialist after all, just like they have in Denmark and Sweden. Not one of those Marxist socialists! I really don't get why other socialists (We in the Sanders group call them "tankies") complain about him. He'll do for the term socialist what Democrats have done for progressive!



But anyways, enough about all that. Let's get this *political* revolution rolling!

Scapegoating Refugees and Migrants

by David Smithers

In the Middle Ages the serfs, those who worked, were the majority of society, considering their benevolent masters and protectors to be the nobility, lords and knights, and the church. Serfs became victims and agents in wars by siding with whichever group of nobles protected them better. For that, the serfs submitted to severe controls on their minimal freedom. And during the period of the Hundred Years War between France and England, peasant and urban revolts occurred in England, France, and in the much more urbanized and bourgeois Italian city-states.

Workers in the 21st century West are deceived and self-deceiving in an age of austerity capitalism, low wages, uncertain employment, and diminishing government social spending, creating a climate of fear. The overlords are now capitalists with their militarist ideology, and the church has been considerably shunted aside by the nation-state. Workers are still in submission. Freedom is an illusion and so is the safety of bourgeois politics.

On the *Economist's* cover for December 12-18 are a Rushmore-like trio. The cover shows Donald Trump,

frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination in the U.S; Marine Le Pen, the leader of France's National Front, and Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary, the leader of an increasingly illiberal state.

Older white men, in particular, suffer unemployment and cultural insecurity on both sides of the Atlantic. Increased blame is incited in these workers against fellow workers of color and against immigrants by right populists like Trump, Le Pen and Orbán. Right populists are in power in Hungary and Poland and in the governing coalition in Switzerland and Finland. And other governments, Socialist, Conservative, or Democrat, increasingly cater to right-populist and militarist sentiment. I would have added Russian President Vladimir Putin to the list as he governs as an insular populist and is admired by the likes of Trump, Le Pen and Orbán.

The 21st century witnesses a flood of refugees, the largest since World War II. Many are from wars sparked by U.S. invasion or support of nation-state disruption in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. Upwards of seven million Syrians are displaced to Turkey, Lebanon and Europe. Moreover, millions of workers must and do

emigrate for work, denied most citizenship status by their host countries from such countries as the Philippines and Mexico to places such as the United Arab Emirates or the United States.

Stateless people such as the Rohingya of Burma flee by rickety watercraft to Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia. They face in their journey slavery or island internment. And internal displacement of peoples is increasing not only in failed states such as Syria or Somalia, but has always been a factor in the developed world, with the Roma in Europe of African Americans (Hurricane Katrina, for example) and Native Americans in the United States.

The movement of workers freely within borders and across borders must be a protected right. Concerted international class unity of workers and the oppressed must also be organized in a fight against the conditions that adversely force such movement to disordered and disadvantaged status we see in modern times and learn about throughout much of history. In the short term the immediate need is for leveling-up of wages and social benefits across national borders and the provision of immediate citizenship, residency, and integration of all migrants and refugees.

Supplement: A Class Program for Migrants & Refugees

The following is the text of a leaflet being distributed by Red Party members at demonstrations defending immigrants & refugees against the right-wing backlash. - Ed.

The xenophobic attitudes on display from the Republican presidential candidates, embodied by Donald Trump and his painting of an entire nation as drug dealers, criminals and rapists (and some good people, he assumes) are disgusting, but they're just the sharpest edge of a whole political establishment that criminalizes and dehumanizes human beings.

Both the Democrats and Republicans, along with the major media and the big corporations backing them, frame immigration as U.S.-born workers *against* immigrants. Undocumented immigrants, fleeing economic devastation as a result of NAFTA and U.S. interference in Latin America, are used by the ruling class to

drive down wages for all workers and keep native-born workers directing their anger downward rather than at the top.

The massive increase in ICE raids under the Obama administration, along with guest worker programs and "pathways to citizenship" that cement immigrants' second class status, speak to this. The dehumanizing vitriol unleashed against the Syrian refugees is another area where chauvinist bigotry (including from 88 House Democrats and 2 Democratic governors) both plays into ISIL's hands by further alienating oppressed refugees and lets imperialism off the hook. The disastrous invasion of Iraq destabilized the whole region, and U.S.-British-French support for sectarian forces of all types (including the Iraqi government and Salafi militias in Syria) directly lead to ISIL's birth. The specter of terrorism is also a red herring - aside from the sheer impracticality, home-grown

white nationalists have caused the overwhelming majority of U.S. terror attacks since 9/11.

Only a class-based, internationalist program can build a movement strong enough to undercut racist sentiment, break the "us versus them" narrative and deliver justice for undocumented workers and refugees alike:

- We need to fight for a truly massive working class movement that organizes immigrant workers regardless of legal status and organizes across national borders - leveling up wages & working conditions across the board.
- End the deportations; citizenship rights for all undocumented immigrants. Defend refugees' right of resettlement - migration is a democratic right.
- Oppose imperialist military intervention; only the international working class can stop war and social disintegration.

No Child Left Behind, Left Behind

by Mari Pierre-Antoine

Countless teachers and parents breathed a sign of relief in early December when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the Bush era neoliberal counter-reform of education policy passed in 2002, finally expired. NCLB was the opening in what became a sustained project of educational privatization, which has since been expanded to include things like the federal Race to the Top grant program and the Common Core initiative. Busting teacher unions, shrinking educational horizons, public school closures and ‘doing more with less’ are on the order of the day.

No Child Left Behind has been replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), supported by President Obama and signed into law on December 10 with broad bipartisan support: 85 to 12 in the Senate, and 359 to 64 in the House of Representatives.¹ The fact that the Democrats and Republicans agree so much on education policy is itself very educational. The two education workers’ unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), representing 4.5 million workers together, are vocal proponents too. So can Every

Student Succeeds live up to expectations?

With the state of public education today, it would take radical measures to reverse decades of attacks on teachers and students, particularly poor and minority students. A few statistics paint the picture: low income children are now the *majority* of public school students, the average² student / teacher ratio is 24:1, and teachers continue to be paid much less than similarly qualified professionals in other sectors.

But the Every Student Succeeds Act won’t fundamentally shift education policy. To be fair, there are some modest but positive aspects to the bill, reflecting the pressure exerted by organized teachers, students and parents in recent years. There will be a \$250 million annual preschool grant program for low income children, an arts education grant program, and an end to NCLB’s rigid “Adequate Yearly Progress” metric, which was a cudgel used to push through closures, takeovers and mass firings at schools performing below average.

But ESSA still leaves almost the whole structure of No Child Left Behind intact; most of the changes are only cosmetic.

Despite some rhetoric from the President about education being “so much more than filling in the right bubbles,” the myopic focus on high-stakes testing will stay, just with authority handed to the states instead of the federal government. The narrowing curriculum, high stress and inordinate resources diverted from well-rounded education toward rote ‘teaching to the test’ will still be with us, along with sanctions for underperforming schools.

So Every Student Succeeds isn’t the cause for celebration it’s made out to be. What we need is not tinkering with the neoliberal project but a program for expanding, democratizing and fully funding public education.

Notes

1. http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2015/12/esea_rewrite_headed_to_obamas.html
2. https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/table/sass1112_2013314_t1s_007.asp

Party Update

by Gabriel Pierre

The New Year is upon us - what are your resolutions for 2016? Ours is to keep working toward the principled left unity in a Marxist party. That task includes building up a robust space for debate on the left, which means we need you to send in your letters! This issue is carrying my response to a letter

sent by a comrade on campaign finance reform, so if you have a view on that or any other issue then feel free to share with us.

Oh, and by the way - we had a little under 400 readers in November, so if you'd like to share this paper or its individual articles with friends (or liquidate your unwanted Christmas sweaters and send us the proceeds) we'd appreciate it.

The Red Vine!



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WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Red Party is a U.S. political organization that fights for working class unity in a single socialist party-movement. A united organization, based on a Marxist program, would turn politics as we know it upside down, injecting the labor and social movements with a renewed sense of confidence and strength.

- * A united workers' party-movement would combine political action with economic and social action, including running socialist candidates for office, protests, strikes, co-operatives and mutual aid societies.
- * Our organization has the word party in its name, but we recognize that in the world-historic sense there is no revolutionary party in the U.S. today. Instead we have a fractured array of competing sects organized on a bureaucratic basis. Their work is hampered by hyper-activism with little to no long-term strategy, lack of internal democracy and lack of deep roots in the working class. The Red Party organizes day-to-day resistance against injustices spawned by capitalism within the context of strengthening working class organization and building support for socialism.
- * Marxists operate through democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we

seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form factions to advance their views.

- * Marxists oppose all imperialist wars and interventions, from Iraq to Syria, but recognize that ending war permanently means ending capitalism.
- * Marxists are internationalists. We strive for the closest unity of the working class and oppressed peoples everywhere. We oppose nationalism in all its forms. We advocate a new revolutionary workers' International. Without an International (a world party), the struggle against Capital is weakened. Capital organizes across borders; so too must we.
- * Marxists support industrial unions (organizing workers by industry) rather than the more narrow trade union structure. We support the highest possible level of pan-American union coordination for workers' rights. Bureaucratic leadership and class collaboration, particularly support for the Democratic Party, in the unions must be replaced with democratic revitalization and class independence.
- * Marxists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, racism, national oppression and LGBT/QI

oppression are just as much working class questions as are higher pay, union rights and struggles for quality health, housing and education. Marxists demand self-determination for American Indian nations, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and all other territories.

- * World capitalism, based on exploitation and a reckless quest for profit, is increasingly putting the future of humanity at risk through war and climate change. World capitalism must give way to world socialism - a society based on freedom, solidarity and a radical extension of democracy.
- * Marxists oppose Stalinism, a system of bureaucratic dictatorship that rules in the name of socialism the same way the capitalist class claims to rule in the name of liberty.
- * Socialism itself is the first stage of the global transition to communism - a society where war, exploitation, money, classes and states exist only as museum pieces. Communism is the negation of class society and provides the maximum individual and collective freedom.

If you agree with these principles, join the Red Party!

red-party.com | (319) 654-4621
party@red-party.com
facebook.com/redpartyusa