

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

by ROB URIE
15.09.2019

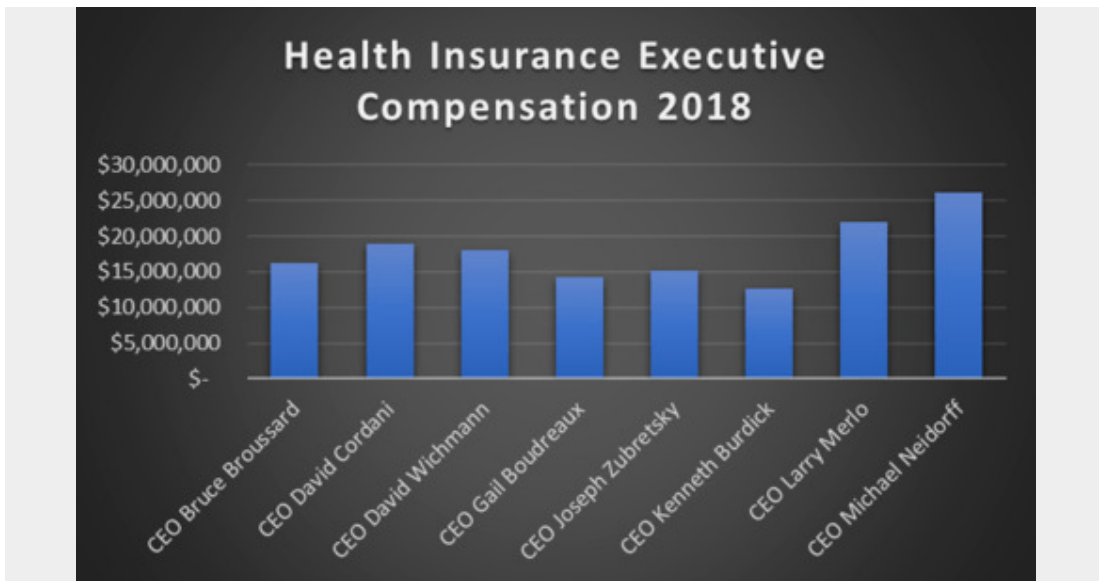
Bernie Sanders and the Realignment of the American Left



Drawing By Nathaniel St. Clair

The neoliberal revolution that has been underway since the mid-1970s fundamentally reoriented American governance toward the interests of capital. While the distance between government and the so-called private sector was never that great, all pretense that government served the broader public interest was cast aside in favor of state-corporatism. This wasn't simply a matter of privatizing the public realm— it overlaid a capitalist rationale on all public undertakings.

This re-conceptualization of the public purpose turned state functions into profit making opportunities for private interests. Defense of the realm became producing, selling and deploying arms for profit. Public education, already variably and poorly funded, was redefined using bogus metrics to be bled dry by private corporations. American health care, the most expensive in the world with close to the worst health outcomes, now funds a parasite class of multi-millionaire health insurance executives.



Graph: The U.S. has the most expensive health care in the world with close to the worst health outcomes. Health insurance executives are richly rewarded for looting and pillage. Obamacare was Barack Obama's neoliberal 'solution' to this dysfunctional system. He left capitalist incentives in place with while adding regulations. Today, the U.S. still has the most expensive health care in the world with close to the worst health outcomes. In other words, little changed. Source: Fiercehealthcare.

Whether the result of naivete, ideological blinders, ignorance of history or cynical calculation, for four-plus decades the view has been that the public interest is best served by private interests. And while political spectacle has been concentrated in and around the presidency, neoliberal ideology and practice have been instantiated at every level of government. While this facilitates capital-friendly policies, it creates a near impenetrable barrier to challenging rule by capital.

As plausible as accidental history is in many realms, this isn't the case with the instantiation of neoliberal state-corporatism. From the think tanks funded by rich capitalist ideologues in the 1960s and 1970s, neoliberalism has been programmatically

embedded into every nook and cranny of American governance. Engineered so that nothing short of wholesale insurrection can dislodge it, this is exactly what the resulting maldistribution and social dysfunction are now making inevitable.

With the background problems of environmental crisis, unhinged militarism and political economy that long ago ran off the rails, the upcoming presidential election offers the potential to be significant for the first time in decades. With Bernie Sanders in the running, the choice is no longer just between figureheads who front for capital and the oligarchs, but between said figureheads and a fundamental realignment of political priorities back toward the public interest.

This is to grant a lot to Mr. Sanders and the broader context of American politics. Partly as a result of the pre-neoliberal age in which he spent his early years and partly through a moral compass centered on the public interest, Mr. Sanders alone amongst modern presidential candidates is capable of expanding the idea of the public interest to include the large swath of the U.S.— and importantly, outside of it, whose economic fortunes were cast asunder through neoliberal reforms and plunder.

Through his frame of class divisions, the liberal universalism that previously ended at national borders can be rendered visible for what it is— capitalist imperialism to benefit the wealthy by treating the rest of the world as so much cannon fodder, indentured labor and expendable impediments to the accumulation of wealth. This is to make the point that it was always a convenient fraud, a wall to separate related interests ‘externally’ so as to render them all but invisible internally.

Without an internationalist vision with American militarism exorcised from it, challenging the rule of capital and forming the alliances needed to resolve environmental issues will be all but impossible. Militarism is the enforcement function of capital, an enterprise that profits from death and destruction while securing resources and control by capital. Land reform, a necessary prelude to the agricultural reforms needed to resolve climate change and species extinction, will require bringing both capital and American militarism to heel.

Mr. Sanders is the only candidate who appears to understand the political moment. Mainstream commentary poses what is politically possible against program proposals that stand little chance of being enacted in forms that will accomplish their intended goals. In other words, having solid program proposals is but an initial step in the direction of

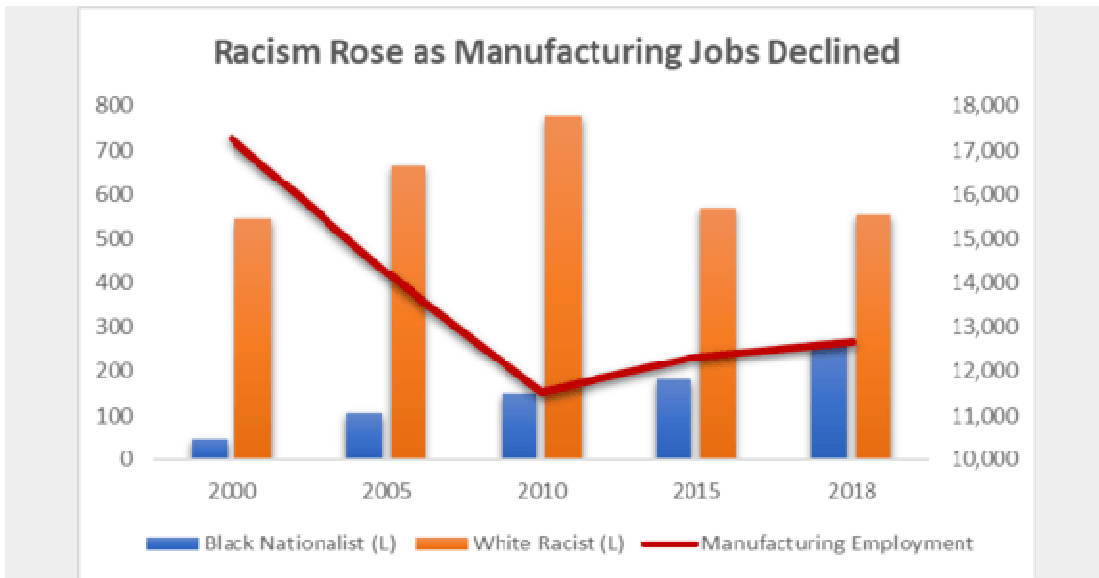
accomplishing political goals. The programs that matter— a Green New Deal, Medicare for All and a Job Guaranty, will all require confronting capital. In fact, doing so is a prerequisite for recovering any meaningful politics.

It is hardly incidental that the American left, with the exception of Mr. Sanders, is busy groveling at the feet of the lords of capital while telling prospective voters that this is the pragmatic route to getting needed programs passed. Were this in fact true, none of the myriad dysfunctions of the present would be happening. For instance, prior to passage of Obamacare, the U.S. had the most expensive health care in the world with the worst health outcomes. After Obamacare, the U.S. has the most expensive health care in the world with the worst health outcomes. So much for assuaging capital. If you want to lose elections, this is how to do it.

Not only is half of the eligible electorate so alienated from the political ‘process’ that it chooses not to vote, but 98% of the eligible voters who do vote hold no sway over outcomes. The political power of the bourgeois, the richest 9.9% of the polity, comes through its role as functionaries for capital. Whatever the opinions of its constituents, and some fair portion are liberal-left, it is this acting on behalf of capital that is its expressed politics.

This role of the bourgeois— for who else were the functionaries who dispossessed the American working class, explains the shift in the measure of virtue from political outcomes to opinions and sentiment. Capitalist functionaries see themselves as virtuous— again, many are liberal-left, while viewing those on the other side of their actions, the people they spent four decades dispossessing, as morally depraved. How else could they be viewed with dispossession the goal?

Bernie Sanders appears to understand this political tension. Barack Obama fronted Obamacare for his neoliberal masters and the 2016 election was the consequence. By reports, Mr. Sanders successfully sold the idea of Medicare for All to the reactionary right that watches Fox News. This is socialism in action— using social resources to improve the lots of the poor, working and middle classes— and thereby bringing them into the socialist fold, regardless of prior political affiliations.



Graph: As if to reinforce the labor decimating impact of NAFTA, the Clinton administration left an overvalued U.S. currency as its legacy. From 2000 through 2010 U.S. manufacturing was effectively gutted as goods produced in the U.S. were first too expensive, and then later the Great Recession took hold. Coincident with this decline in manufacturing employment was a rise in racist groups as defined by the SPLC (Southern Poverty Law Center). When manufacturing employment began to rise, the number of racist groups fell. Source: SPLC, FRED.

The election of Donald Trump exposed the class composition— and with it the political interests, of the American left. The rich and the bourgeois already vote. With his program to expand the electorate— to bring disenfranchised and dispossessed voters into the political process, Bernie Sanders can right this imbalance in democratic representation. The Weimar-esque alternative— which establishment Democrats appear to prefer, is to leave critiques of capitalism to right-wing demagogues until goose-stepping in public finally takes hold.

Mr. Sanders’ outreach to dispossessed working class voters is the only plausible answer to the rising threat of far right, neo-fascist, ideologies. The U.S, and much of the West with it, is but one recession away from wide-scale unrest. As brilliant a political strategy as labeling the 70% of the population that the bourgeois have systematically dispossessed ‘deplorables’ may seem, unless sharpening the guillotines is the goal, treating people as if they are human beings is worth trying.

In contrast, establishment favorite Joe Biden is unfit to hold elected office. Not only has senility rendered him incapable of putting together a coherent sentence, he spent his entire career on the wrong side of every political issue that came his way. He opposed school busing, wrote the Clinton's 1994 Crime Bill, still supports mass incarceration, supported deregulating Wall Street, was a vocal proponent of the Iraq War and he worked to cut Social Security and Medicare. His treatment of Anita Hill makes Donald Trump look like a feminist by comparison.

Elizabeth Warren is a Harvard technocrat in the Obama tradition who is basing her policy success on the liberal fantasy of distinct realms between the state and capital. As a self-proclaimed capitalist who lived through the only ten-minute period in the last five decades when capital was bowed (2009), the plausibility of her plan to re-regulate capitalism through the legislative process suggests that she hasn't had a meaningful conversation with her legislative colleagues in recent memory.

None other than House Speaker Nancy Pelosi made it known that nothing resembling 'a green dream, or whatever' will ever get through congress. Ms. Pelosi privately assured health insurance industry executives that 'Medicare for All' is DOA (dead on arrival) in the House. Additionally, she assured them that they would write whatever legislation did get proposed. Ms. Warren's plans to regulate legislation passed by establishment Democrats to benefit 'private' interests seems like pretty weak tea.

Lots of thoughtful people have had kind words for Elizabeth Warren. However, her approach to politics make her absolutely, positively the wrong person for this political moment. Without a political movement on the ground to support her programs, neoliberal instantiation at the state and local levels will severely limit their reach. And without a demilitarized internationalism, capital will undermine even the milquetoast environmental proposals that make it through congress.

This relationship between state and corporate interests is more than just a philosophical talking point. Through lending to fund overseas purchases of American goods and equipment, Wall Street lies at the center of state-corporatism. The U.S. is the largest supplier of arms in the world, and therefore profits from geopolitical conflict. Since the late nineteenth century, American imperial adventures have been in support of business interests. And likewise, American militarism in the Middle East has been coordinated with, and in support of, oil and gas company interests.

A robust Green New Deal will require funding and engineering a transition away from everything that makes 0.01% of Americans, a/k/a oligarchs, rich. For Medicare for All to work, the profit motive must be taken out of health care. And the entire point of a Job Guaranty is to use state mechanisms to provide the half of the work force that is under and unemployed with viable employment at a living wage with robust benefits because 'private' market capitalism has failed to do so.

Bernie Sanders is building a political movement to serve as a platform for his program proposals. He has solid and well-reasoned programs for the environment, for health care, for ending militarism and for creating economic justice. If he can bring some fair portion of the 90% of the polity that has heretofore been excluded into the political process, then the details and any holes in these programs can be worked through. Without doing so, no other candidate in 2020 is serious about seeing their programs through.

The Democrat's 'anyone but Trump' campaign is Weimar-esque in the sense that if they believed their own rhetoric, 1) they would have opposed Mr. Trump's political program in fact, instead of just rhetorically and 2) they would be running credible candidates instead of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. With an apparent nod from capital, Elizabeth Warren is now ascending as the favored candidate of the Democratic establishment.

Liberal fantasies to the contrary, Mr. Trump ran political circles around Democrats in 2016. The problems that he identified— the dispossession of the poor, working and middle classes caused by four decades of neoliberal policies, are real to the people who are living them. That they are invisible to establishment Democrats is a testament to the ignorance of establishment Democrats, and not to the facts as they are being lived.

This isn't to argue that these working-class voters elected Mr. Trump. The rich elected Donald Trump. It is to argue that they could elect Bernie Sanders. Through his class analysis and programs, this leaves Bernie Sanders as the substantive candidate who can ouster Donald Trump.

SEPTEMBER 13, 2019