

The 2020 Election

What to do while waiting for the Revolution

Peter Werbe

2020

The 2020 Michigan presidential primary on March 10 marked the end of the progressive fantasy that the American political landscape could be altered by supporting U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders as the Democratic Party nominee.

Instead, it was bye-bye, Bernie, as Joe Biden swept every county in the state as voters overwhelmingly went for a candidate they thought had the best chance of defeating the execrable Trump in November.

The Democratic Party establishment was determined not to allow Sanders to transform it from its traditional center-right, pro-corporate, militarist policies into even a tepid social democratic one. Biden is the perfect candidate for the party. He is of the same mold as Obama, Clinton, Carter, Johnson, Kennedy, or Truman, all who harken back to Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s. They all recognized capitalism as the heart of economic policy and defense of the empire as the keystone of foreign policy. That is not going to change through the electoral system and certainly not through the Democratic Party.

These are considerations when thinking about the relationship of anarchists to the 2020 election. We are a small, very loosely affiliated movement of people who think the political state and contests for its power are the problem. So, how do we engage in this period when the presidential contest will be the major political focus at least as presented through the media?

Saying we are loosely affiliated is even an exaggeration. As small collectives, we work in local projects and struggles, organize info shops, book stores, theater festivals, performance spaces, book fairs, and produce publications and online news sites. Anarchists are involved in any number of admirable resistance and revolution-building efforts, and often have influence in excess of our numbers.

Think of how often mass movements such as Occupy or pipeline defenses utilize the techniques developed over the generations of collective leadership, affinity groups, and direct democratic decision making.

However, our efforts have little or no impact on the current crisis within the state governing apparatus where a civil war has broken out between sectors of the ruling class. This is not to say both sides are equal, although there is much more fundamental agreement than often seems obvious.

Although committed to empire and capital, the Democrats come closer to European social democratic political formations that advocate reforms to reduce the worst features of the economy and the social structure it produces. Whatever we may say about the function of reforms being the co-optation of revolutionary demands, life within capitalism is less miserable with the reforms that have been fought for and granted over the last century and a half.

Although many changes have been enacted, the struggle to bring reforms into being often exacted a great toll from those who campaigned for them, such as the labor movement and in the Civil Rights era.

As long as the fundamental rules are followed by reformers, that is, not challenging capitalism or the state, the system has enough flexibility to grant at least a portion of what was being demanded. Ultimately, it was to the benefit of the rulers to allow reforms. From 1848 to 1939, intense class warfare grew to such proportions that it made revolution a possibility had reforms not been granted.

Today, that is ancient history. The Trump administration is committed to rolling back many of the elemental reforms won over generations. His election has also energized a resurgent fascist movement.

Anarchists are quick to state that Trump should be contested or removed through direct action, but it's clear that large demonstrations and occupation of public space aren't enough to stop political rulers once they are committed to a policy, such as war.

So, what are our alternatives while waiting for new forms of radical struggle and formulas for resistance to emerge? Undoubtedly, there are many being created within small venues that are prefigurative, post-capitalist relationships, and innovative forms that can be effective in the real world eventually. But, there's an election in November that at this moment appears to be the only mechanism by which the U.S. can rid itself of the damage Trump has done, and which will increase if he is re-elected.

As anarchists, we can vote, but that brings shudders of indignation to those demanding adherence to a generations old principle of non-involvement in electoral or party politics. The point has been made previously in these pages that there are so few anarchists in America, whether we all vote or none of us vote, little or no difference in outcome will occur. The best argument against voting is that it erodes the traditional anarchist critique of the state if one participates in its processes.

However, it's a secret ballot and with permanent absentee balloting increasingly available, it allows you to do the dirty deed with anonymity from your home while still proudly wearing a circle A on your jacket.

Whatever the result of the election is, political disaster could still lie ahead. In 1936, members of the CNT, the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union, voted in large numbers to elect a liberal government to hold off the repressive policies of a rival right wing party. The results were tragic. The election of the left brought on a fascist revolt and victory leading to destruction of the left and anarchists alike under a 36-year dictatorship.

Many radicals in 1964 urged voting for a liberal Democratic presidential candidate because the Republican, they feared, would involve the U.S. in a land war in Southeast Asia. The Republican lost, but the Democrat, President Lyndon Johnson, brought about what they feared most.

In February this year, U.S. intelligence agencies reported to Congress that the Russian government was intervening in the coming presidential election in the manner they did in 2016 on behalf of then-candidate Trump. They did so out of national self-interest since the Obama administration, with Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, had severely threatened Russia's territorial security by installing missile shields in Europe and sending U.S. tank and troop divisions close to its border.

Trump, whether in Putin's pocket, or showing uncharacteristic common sense, advocated peaceful relations with Russia. He was seen by the Kremlin as much less threatening than Clinton who expressed fealty to the Military/Industrial Complex by launching Cold War II.

It was also revealed that the Russian intelligence apparatus was aiding the candidacy of Bernie Sanders. They probably figured it was a win-win situation. Correctly or not, the Kremlin undoubtedly viewed the senator as the weakest candidate as did the Trump campaign. However, if the socialist had prevailed, they figured he would be the Democratic candidate least likely to initiate militarist moves towards Russia.

Sanders would perhaps have been less aggressive than some of the centrist candidates, but he would be an American president, the chief operating officer of the Empire in charge of defending it. If you think he would be of a different breed, a recent interview is instructive.

As if to signal to the war hawks that they needn't worry about him dismantling the imperial war machine if elected, Sanders, in an interview on CBS's "60 Minutes" in February, laid out the criteria under what circumstance he would deploy U.S. military forces.

He listed: "Threats against our allies. I believe in NATO," he told the interviewer.

NATO, a looming military threat to Russia, an alliance thousands of miles away from the U.S. that the Soviet Union was assured would be dismantled at the end of the Cold War. The progressive darling says, "I believe in NATO."

Sanders was asked if he would order military action if Taiwan came under attack from China. He replied, "Yeah. I mean, I think we have got to make it clear to countries around the world that we will not sit by and allow invasions to take place, absolutely."

"Yeah," he says, In other words, yeah, I'll start World War III. Absolutely.

What's the choice, though, more of the Trump regime and what that will unleash on the most at-risk people and the environment?

The most we can do is what the anarchist movement has done throughout our long history: organize for revolution.

The future could depend upon it.

Peter Werbe is a member of the Fifth Estate editorial collective.

fifth Estate

Peter Werbe
The 2020 Election
What to do while waiting for the Revolution
2020

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/406-spring-2020/the-2020-election>
Fifth Estate #406, Spring, 2020

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net