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[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

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by NICK PEMBERTON  
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## *The Revolution's Here, Please Excuse Me While I Laugh*



Image by Nathaniel St. Clair

The revolution's here

No one can lead you off your path

You'll try to change the world

So please excuse me while I laugh

Yo, I heard it's said the revolution won't be televised

But in the land of milk and honey there's a date you gotta sell it by

— Talib Kweli, Beautiful Struggle

There was, at least in theory, a lot of stories to be had during the 2018 midterms. These days the news is on 24/7, but it says less in a whole week than a serious person could in five minutes. Drifting through the cracks was any notion of that “left flank” of the Democratic Party, given momentum by the imperialist Blue (sheep) Dog Bernie Sanders in 2016.

Where on earth were Sanders and the issues he brought to light during his campaign? Could the “socialist” Bernie Sanders really have been satisfied with Nancy Pelosi’s victory lap: “Let’s hear it for pre-existing conditions.” Where was single [payer?](#) 15 bucks an [hour?](#) Free college [tuition?](#) Was Wall St. even mentioned this [year?](#) We should check Bernie’s pulse to make sure this isn’t a Weekend At Bernie’s situation.

The issues that Sanders made popular were left for dead as he and everyone else scrambled to stop Trumpism in its tracks. A worthy opponent, at least. But just a week in, and we are hearing about compromise. Sanders, to his credit, is willing to stand up to Trump, but he has never mustered the courage to stand up to Trump’s co-conspirators in the Democratic Party. Sanders now is raising alarm about voter suppression, but where was he when the Democrats robbed him of two million votes in the California [primary?](#)

It is clear that the so-called left wing of the Democratic Party is merely an outlet to bring those displeased with the Democrats into the Party, while conceding little to nothing on the actual issues. The Democrats themselves play a similar role with the Republicans. Add it all up and the degrees between “revolution”, “resistance” and “fascism” remain murky.

Listen to the mainstream media and there is a real “progressive” resurgence in the Democratic Party. To make the resurgence seem real, the media urges us not to go for the progressive wing of course. But nonetheless, the split between moderates and progressives is emphasized and debated endlessly. Most often the debate is about what most people like. A needless debate. Just look at the polls. Sanders, and even the Green Party for that matter, reflect majority public opinion on most of the major issues. The only reason they don’t win is that they are outspent, and outspent by a large margin. Likewise, this is why Republicans can still beat Democrats.

The mainstream media is surprisingly infatuated with progressive characters as of late. Beto O’Rourke, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Stacy Abrams, Andrew Gillum. Why? Perhaps the only people getting more coverage than these sexy progressives are Trump’s posse of degenerates. In reality, these progressives, if that is the right word, are encouraging. But are they a misnomer when it comes to real trends within the Democratic Party?

The dominant player in this year's primary election season was not Bernie's Our Revolution or any of its cousins. Nay, it was the establishment Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, who won 39 of its 41 [primaries](#). In contrast, Our Revolution got less of a third of its candidates to the [primaries](#). This is not a criticism of progressive ideas, or even Sanders himself. These elections are mostly decided before they get started. We all know this. The issue is not so much that the progressives are losing, for the deck is stacked against them. The more troubling issue is that the sheepdog effect is working. Progressives may get a few (well-deserved!) crumbs from establishment Democrats as a result of Sanders and co., but by no means are progressives being given a shot in 2018.

The central disconnect I see is this. Mainstream media of the conservative or centrist variety point to centrist Democrats leading the way in 2018, which seems to be true, even if they cite the wrong reasons. More progressive outlets, such as the relatively feisty Huffington Post, argue that in fact, progressives have nearly taken over the Democrats, and any other opinion is an endorsement of a Clintonian strategy. I may not buy the Clinton strategy, but I'm not buying the Sanders strategy either.

It is true, that moderate adjustments to minimum wage, social security, and prescription drugs, are being largely talked about by the Democrats this time around. Surely a victory for Sanders, assuming talk leads to action, which is, as Barack Obama showed us, a mighty lofty assumption. Yet, amidst the largely legitimate crisis of Trumpism, issues largely ignored by the Sanders campaign were swept under the rug. Democrats of course are hopeless when it comes to Empire. But the environment has also largely taken a back seat, at a time when we can least afford for this to happen. The education crisis also took a back seat (the public to charter school crisis, not Bernie's colleges).

I do not mean to project pessimism here. I only remain skeptical of the new Blue Wave because I really do believe we can do far better. As the country becomes less white, less rural, and increasingly economically deprived, the chances for a racist party who cuts all social spending will continue to drop. This means more cheating and more dirty money by these thugs. They will continue to get support from a certain group of wackos. But, the fall of Trumpism seems inevitable.

Additionally, in the minds of the paranoid corporate class, the rise of socialism, in name at least, also seems inevitable. Yet, what have we gotten now in this new Blue Wave, that is supposedly a cause for jamboree.

What we have now is a united coalition of Democrats, a far more united group than we seemed to have when Sanders connected to disillusioned Democrats in 2016. There is a

sort of hodgepodge of issues they are talking about, with a few modest nods to the progressive wing, or so it appears.

And while I don't doubt that there will have to be a slight swing to the left as Trump loses steam, we should not lose track of a democracy that is gone, no matter who gets elected. 2018 proved to be another record year for campaign [spending](#). Super PACs contributed a whopping 815 million to this election cycle. Unions couldn't even get to 6 million. Even the political parties, no matter what you may think of them, took a back seat to these super PACs, as the parties themselves spent 230 million.

In the face of a country clearly lacking a democracy, debate over policy appears almost as theatrics, when it appears at all. But notice that most of anything that hangs on via Sanders really has to do with social entitlement programs and costs of goods (minimum wage, Social Security, health care, drug prices, college tuition, etc.). All alleviate suffering and curb profits, which are welcome. But none deal with the fundamental hopelessness of capitalism. The endless austerity, deregulation, war, pollution of air and water, selling off of public lands, monopolization. These things are beasts of profit and stand little chance of changing until the people gain enough power to stop the incentive of profit from outweighing everything else, including our survival as a species.

What a few of the new Democrats purpose is some sort of wealth distribution that is quite modest, albeit welcomed. However, the average citizen, let alone the collective one, will have no more power to curb the dilemma we find ourselves in. When the world is completely controlled by the 1%, what makes any of us worth keeping around? At best, the Democrats are thinking about sending some hush money. At worst, and this may likely be the case, the Sanders wing is basically left for dead. The specific nature of Sander's demands have been abandoned and replaced with Clinton-like vagueness.

Bernie Sanders' campaign should have proven that the Democratic primaries are rigged against progressive candidates who don't take corporate donations and who don't buy the neoliberal Clinton line. Instead, Sanders merely inspired a far higher turnout in the Democratic primaries themselves. Forget the 99%,. Bernie brought up his Democratic buddies [56%](#) in the turnout for the very same primaries that were rigged against him.

Unfortunately in these times where imagination is heavily dictated by the brands that capitalism sells us, the brand of socialism becomes a popular one for those disillusioned by the political system. The Bernie Branders movement, while well-meaning, turned out to be no more than another marketing ploy for that fake left portion of the duopoly system. Two years later, and the impact of the revolution remain unclear. Worse still, the

Democratic Party remains afloat, and this is surely thanks to Sanders and those like him who swept those disaffected back into a hopeless Party.

Many months ago I sent in a hit piece on the really annoying, Sanders-style magazine Jacobin (in fairness to them, I've never made it much past a paragraph on that website). I am grateful the CP editors were mature enough not to publish my piece. Still, I'll venture to include a paragraph here that may capture who I see Sanders et al. representing: What Jacobin and all their confused posturing proves is that among the upper and middle class there is no such thing as a revolutionary. There is the brand of being a class advocate but this is not so different from identifying with a certain religion or club. There is no doubt something wicked cool about universal health care, free college tuition and a minimum wage. Bernie Sanders' rallies proved to be an adequate substitution for the declining sex life of angsty millennials. But for the poor there is nothing cool about these things. They come as a necessity. Jacobin is not a voice for the poor. They are a voice for the middle class revolutionaries. Cool posters, obscure Marxist tributes and adorable irony lies behind their paywall. What does any of this have to do with working class people? Who knows. But it's the new fad. This socialism thing.

I say this as someone coming from this class, and as someone who was pushed into politics largely through friends in the Sanders campaign. The revolution is simply not coming from the middle class, whether or not we are in debt or struggling to pay off health care bills. The infrastructure of the United States and those it has benefitted is so conservative, we should not expect anyone from the inside to bring the revolution, or whatever that means, to us. The revolutionary spirit in Sanders' rallies was close to nil simply because most of these people were just frustrated Democrats, who had grown up Democrat, done all right themselves, and seen the possibility of success begin to decline these past years.

Jeffrey St. Clair makes astute observations about the heart of the Sanders movement: college campuses. I saw this to be mostly the same. And while certainly enthusiastic, the goal has always been Scandinavia, not Cuba. And this means many things. It means mixed economies rather than socialism, but it also means upper-middle class and white, rather than poor and brown. And I don't believe in identity politics, but I do believe that people tend not to bite the hand that feeds them. And for Sanders and his base, the hand that has fed them is still the Democrats. It may not be feeding them much, or much lately, but we remain part of what Noam Chomsky calls the 20%. That is the 20% of the population that could be called the managerial or professional class that needs to be fed propaganda in

order to use our privilege to subvert, rather than work with, the revolutionary spirit of the underclass.

That is, basically, that these revolutionaries will always count their victories by what The New York Times has to say (or not to say, they hope) about them. And, furthermore, their solutions will come from tweaking a Democratic Party that has treated them as a little brother (although they will grumble). And it will come from curbing wages and prices within a capitalist system run amok. Radical ways of envisioning the environment, educational and Empire crisis so engrained by these structures will be addressed once in a while, but not in ways that fundamentally detach ourselves from the virulent capitalist economy.

And Sanders has done his very best to subvert, rather than work with that revolutionary spirit of the underclass (and so has his own sheepdog, the very non-magical being Mr. Chomsky, for that matter). Think about this: the major accomplishment of the Sanders campaign was saving the Democratic Party. Record turnouts for the Democrats, record spending on campaigns, record wealth inequality. Should all those things really go together?

The revolution is a word so overused by political hacks that it is robbed of its soul—a soul ultimately based in the natural world, far away from any headquarters in Brooklyn or D.C., where human beings, moved by love, act in a communal, sustainable and responsible way towards one another. It is a word that could and should mean something as the world burns to a crisp. Alas, there is more of a revolutionary spirit in the polar bears pushed to the brink than these silly Democrats.

The reason? The Democrats will survive catastrophe after catastrophe simply because they remain tied, even when in conflict with, to the system of capital that is hell-bent at destroying us all. They will remain the side of the coin that gives half a crumb when two crumbs are taken, and they will remain the side of the coin that will hear a cry in the wilderness, only to whisper back, to no one in particular.

There are signs, we keep hearing, there are signs. Signs that the Democrats are getting it. As Claire Malone of 538 tells us, there was no cohesive narrative for 2018 (Claire may be the only one of that motley crew who can count to 538). We heard that Trump would be shown up by the Democrats. Democrats inspired, but only slightly. We heard that the Sanders wing would be taking over. Sanders at best, got a few bones. Most of all, we remain stuck in no man's land. Gripped by fear of Trump, but so weary of any other

option, it seems, for a moment, Americans, might be much smarter than their political commentators.

Sanders and company perhaps had an opening, but they missed it, and now, their lack of a strategy, combined with Democrat's lack of a message combined with Trump's lack of anything worthwhile at all, leaves us all in midair, unsure of what will happen next. The good news is that with great ineptitude, comes great opportunity for other actors. Now that Trump and both wings of the Democrats have proven to be full of false promises; inspiration, if only by necessity, could arise and take all of us, even Bernie, by storm.

The revolution is not here yet, and if it is to come, it will have to be without the Democratic Party. Alas, Talib Kweli offers wisdom later in that same song: "You try to vote and participate in the government / And the muh'fuckin' Democrats is actin' like Republicans". If I was to continue: The so-called socialists make a rumblin' / But get near the goal line, and they're fumblin' / 2 years later they're still mumbling / About what trouble Trump is in / The poor get poorer, the rich get richer / And the ways they fool us, get slicker and slicker.