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Anti-Democratic Structure of Two Party Elections: Chomsky, Bloomberg and and the VotePact Solution

By Sam Husseini

January 29, 2016

And the parting on the left

Is now the parting on the right

And the beards have all grown longer overnight

And I'll tip my hat to the new constitution

Take a bow for the new revolution

Smile and grin at the changes all around

— “Don’t Get Fooled Again,” The Who

I was nearly moved to tears this week hearing WTMD in Baltimore, which barely gets into Washington, D.C., play Richie Havens’ rendition of “Won’t Get Fooled Again.” It was a good week to hear that as Nature seemingly attempted to intercede and ground Washington, D.C. to a halt.

By officialdom knows no rest — and has built and used over and over the edifice of the two party system that virtually assures non-choice. That's exactly the problem attempted to solve with VotePact.org — whereby populists from the left and right join together in voting.

The establishment onslaught was made clear in a number of recent events and statements, perhaps most vividly in a piece by the *Washington Post* in which Dana Milbank writes “I adore Bernie Sanders” while the point of the piece is “Democrats would be insane to nominate Bernie Sanders.”

I should clarify at the top, before showing how rotten this thinking is: I've been a critic of Sanders. I think his main problem is a *lack* of radicalness, especially on foreign policy.

But the logic that is being employed by Milbank and others is that as a “strategic” matter, one shouldn't vote for Sanders because he won't win in the general election. Milbank notes that the polls don't bear that out, but argues that when the Republican propaganda machine gets through with Sanders he will be unelectable.

One of the main things that this ignores is that if indeed Sanders becomes unelectable, the culprit will not be simply Republicans, but the establishment media which has shifted from largely ignoring to largely deriding Sanders, including the *Post* itself. And Milbank does not take it upon himself to debunk the notion that Sanders will raise taxes to pay for healthcare and save millions of people a ton of money in the process by stopping their hemorrhaging of dollars to the health insurance giants, Milbank simply says that mythology will win out — so you'd have to be nuts to vote for Sanders. Resistance, even of the limited Sanders flavor, is futile.

But beyond that, what Milbank is explicitly arguing for is, at its heart, a renunciation of the slightest pretense of democratic process that has long been implicit in electoral thinking: The Democrats and Republicans must field the most establishment candidate so that they win in the general election. It's the pundification of the populace.

A corollary to this line of thinking — which has, implicitly or explicitly, dominated political thinking in the U.S. — is that one should not vote for a third party candidate in the general election. Doing so is “throwing your vote away” and is “nonstrategic.”

So you, dear voter, are a fool by this establishment logic if you voice your views in the primaries and you're a fool if you voice your preferences in the general election!

While such establishment logic may be very strategic for the status quo, it is not “strategic” at all from the voter's point of view because the end result of this course of action is to further and further mute the power of the anti-establishment voter — which now seems to constitute a working majority of the public. The establishment of each party becomes stronger and stronger, even as it becomes less and less popular, and dissent from the establishment becomes weaker and weaker because it always has to cave in no matter how huge it gets.

Unfortunately, Noam Chomsky plays a part in this farce, since he granted an interview to Al Jazeera which apparently put out a rather skewed bit of his election analysis that some other

mainstream and social media ate up — and did so several days *before* releasing the full video on Friday. As Ben Norton notes: “Essentially the only time Chomsky gets a mainstream platform in the media is when he is talking about partisan politics.”

When I emailed Chomsky about reports that — in the words of the seemingly ecstatic *Politico* headline: “Chomsky: I’d ‘absolutely’ vote for Hillary Clinton,” Chomsky stated “I never said I’d rather vote for Clinton” and indicated that he’d rather vote Green. Of course, Chomsky lives in Massachusetts, which is not a “swing state.”

But at one level, of course, Chomsky must know the media will use his statements as they do, which is to corral progressive Democratic voters to pull the lever for Clinton where Clinton needs it, part of the “sheepdogging” role Sanders plays as put forward by Bruce Dixon.

But even Sanders — flawed as he is — is in fight mode, yet Chomsky has allowed himself to broadcast the progressive terms of surrender already, which are virtually unconditional. While the media somewhat skew Chomsky’s words, the underlying capitulation is plain — though he did in my exchange with him tacitly accept the logic of VotePact.

Contrast this effective waving of a white flag with what billionaire Michael Bloomberg did this week. The *New York Times* reported on Jan. 23: “Bloomberg has instructed advisers to draw up plans for a potential independent campaign in this year’s presidential race. His advisers and associates said he was galled by Donald J. Trump’s dominance of the Republican field, and troubled by Hillary Clinton’s stumbles and the rise of Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont on the Democratic side.”

I predicted this, tweeting several days earlier, on Jan. 19: “Prediction: if its Trump-Sanders, the establishment will run a ticket as a perversion of @votepact.”

Thus, if the anti-establishment wings, limited as they are, on the Republican and Democratic side gain the nominations, the media mogul Bloomberg will attempt to unite the establishment.

Or at least threaten to. It’s quite possible that Bloomberg is just threatening this in order to scare primary voters into voting for Clinton.

In either case, what Bloomberg is actually doing the perverse inverse of what I have been advocating with VotePact.

The idea behind VotePact is that a populist, anti-establishment center can rise. It would draw support from both principled progressives and conscientious conservatives.

That is, VotePact is an electoral strategy — a voting manifestation of the overdue populist anger. The commonalities between the left and right are continually treated like aberrations, but they now compose a great many political issues, from anti war to anti Wall Street to anti corporate trade deals to anti surveillance. Certainly left and right use different language and reasoning to come to some of those conclusions and their affirmative solutions often vary, but they could,

with hard work, come to sensible consensus if they engaged in honest dialogue without demonization and were somewhat freed of the perennial manipulation of the establishment.

As events show, the emergence of an anti-establishment center is more desperately needed than ever: There are massive rallies for Sanders. And for Trump. Much of the public wants an end to the Democratic and Republican establishment regime.

Many thoughtful people are itching for a debate between Sanders and Trump. I'd like a dialogue. They could talk about both things that they agree and disagree about. Indeed, real media would now be facilitating a dialogue between their supporters.

But the current electoral and media logic pushes away such a dialogue and pushes voters — and ultimately candidates — toward the establishment center.

It's past time that structures give rise to anti-establishment center candidates that skillfully appeal to both the left and right.

Chomsky in my exchange with him did accept the notion of VotePact, especially its potential as an organizing tool — that is, it encourages those on the left to dialogue and cooperate with those on the right who are also against the establishment — that is, fellow populists of various orientations. He regards the potential number of people who would embrace that approach as very small and I think he's very wrong on that; especially if "notables" embrace the concept and that facilitates proliferation of the idea.

In either case, part of Chomsky's line of argument is to unite against the "lunatics" of the Republican party, based largely on their denial of human-caused global warming. At one level, this ignores commonalities even on issues where the left and right disagree: Trump and Rand Paul might not believe in global warming, but they might oppose subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, which may do more to slow global warming than the actions someone of like Clinton, who claims to oppose global warming, but will almost certainly continue to back fossil fuel subsidies.

There's other threatening lunacies coming from the establishment of both parties, as Robert Parry notes in his recent piece "A Crazy Establishment Demands 'Sanity'" about the perpetual war stance of both Democrats and Republicans. Is the immediate threat of global warming really more than the threat of nuclear war from continuing wars and even provoking Russia?

And there's a lunacy ultimately driving this: Saying you want the system to change when you signal from the onset that you will capitulate. Or that you should capitulate at all. The insanity of year after year having an alleged set of beliefs but then, using the vote, which people sacrificed and died to get this paltry tool, to in effect back establishment candidates you say you regard as criminal.

It's past time to stop allowing election years to be when much organizing takes a rest and instead use the election — in part by fomenting a greater left-right alliance.