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## What Kind of Left Are We?

By Bruce Lerro

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This 2016 election invites a rare opportunity for the radical left in the United States to define itself and play a constructive part in the crumbling infrastructure of capitalism along with the bankruptcy of both major parties. The main issue is whether the radical left will continue to allow itself to be defined by identity politics as it has for almost 50 years, or whether it will adopt a class politics towards these elections.

## Obama and the Victory of Identity Politics

The election of Obama in 2008 and 2012 was the culmination of identity politics. Obama, playing the race card by not overtly playing the race card, kept radical critics more or less mute for eight years. Over these years Obama has started more wars than George W Bush. It is under his watch that the NSA has been caught spying on the American public. He has expanded drone warfare overseas and drones are now also operating for domestic surveillance. He has done nothing to help black communities fight against the attack by the police. He has done nothing in prison reform and he has never spoken publicly about Mumia Abu-Jamal, to our knowledge. In summary, in the area of military aggression, invasion of privacy (NSA leaks, Apple) and police harassment, Obama would be the envy of any bible-thumping conservative.

Economically Obama has done nothing to introduce a radical restructuring of the banks to prevent the last economic crisis from happening again. Not only have the ten leading capitalist institutions not been forced to pay heavy fines, let alone compensate the public for our losses, but those bankers are making more now than they did before the last crash in 2008. In Iceland the bankers were put in jail! If the minimum wage were at *poverty* level it would be about \$15 dollars an hour. Obama has advocated for nothing close to this. Obama has not introduced any progressive tax on the rich, which would shrink the gap between the rich and the poor (now the highest in the world). Economically Obama has been a market fundamentalist, following Milton Friedman and the University of Chicago.

Why has Obama not been torn apart by the left for continuing the policies of Bush? It's because for the identity politics of the left, you cannot severely criticize a non-white person in public office without being called a racist. In the discipline of critical thinking, identity politics is claiming that if the *source* of authority seems credible (in this case race), then any condemning information about their policies (the *logos* part of the rhetorical triangle) doesn't count.

Obama has spent the last eight years carrying out a moderate Republican agenda doing the bidding of Council of Foreign Relations (the Rockefellers), The Business Roundtable and the National Association of Manufacturers (see Political Sociologist G. William Domhoff in *The Powers that Be* and *Who Rules America*). When people voted for him, most of them thought it would be a change towards the left on the political spectrum – to end the wars, build infrastructures, reign in the banks, raise the minimum wage or lower the cost of education. Those who voted for him assumed he would do all these things without him ever making an explicit commitment or a plan to do them. Yet Obama talked in the vaguest of generalities: promoting “change”, “hope”, and “yes we can” slogans. Why has he gotten away with this?

Because grounding themselves in identity politics, many of those who voted for him assumed that a black man in high office is automatically a liberal. But the American public is not called the “United States of Amnesia” for nothing. Right in front of their faces that had examples of professionals in high places, black politicians who were *arch conservatives* – Clarence Thomas of the Supreme Court; Secretary General Colin Powell and perhaps the most conservative of all, Condoleezza Rice. Is this not proof that blacks can be just as conservative as Pat Robertson, Ronald Reagan or Ted Cruz?

## **Ready for some more identity politics? Here comes Hillary**

For eight years financial capitalists in the United States have not had to pay for the damage they've caused economically or in the military because they've changed the color of the president. This has allowed them to carry on their predatory pillaging of middle class, working class and poor people because the symbolic head of state was not a rich white man.

The same Council of Foreign Relations that selected Obama has selected Hillary Clinton. They are counting on the American public being too stupid to have learned anything from the trick played on them with Obama. This time instead of the race card being played, it will be the gender card.

Hillary Clinton, the ruling class millionaire and hawk will be presented to women as if she had something to do with feminism. Is Hillary a liberal feminist? If she is, what would she promise to deliver? Here are some things liberal feminists want. She would promise equal pay for equal work and institute laws accordingly. She would promise affordable childcare centers for women. She would put teeth into laws that criminalize sexual harassment and rape. She would insist that capitalists pay for all the domestic housework women now perform for free in the process of raising generations of workers for capitalists. She would open up more Planned Parenthood clinics and settle the abortion rights issue once and for all. Will Hillary promise these things, let alone deliver on them? No. Her campaign doesn't think she has to. She is counting on women being so enthralled with a woman being president that they won't expect and demand that she do anything in particular. Hillary is so confident that women are so naïve that she sings the praises of conservative women like Nancy Reagan who are about as anti-feminist as you can get. Will she get away with it? That depends mostly on the intelligence of the women in this country.

## **Here's the Soap Opera**

Since the early 70's, every four years the real economy (the production of goods and services) has been sliding. The Republicans react by promising to bring back that Old-Time Religion and *family values* to a decaying modern life brought to you by the sex, drugs and rock-and-roll of the evil 1960's. The Democrats simply stand in the middle promising nothing, arousing no one. Then when the elections heat up and Republicans begin screaming, the Democrats' program comes alive. What does it consist of? "You should elect us, not because we stand for anything, but because if you don't this horrible Republican will win." Hillary will play the same game with Donald Trump.

Bernie Sanders has harshly but accurately been named as a sheep dog. What this means is that his job is to round up moderate leftists who are disgusted with the Democratic Party over the years and bring them back to the party. From the beginning, Bernie Sanders promised Hillary not to worry because if she won the nomination he would support her. He has not threatened to leave the party and take the Sandernistas with him. His program is not socialist in any meaningful use of the term. His program is virtually identical to a New Deal liberal. It's a good program, but it's not socialist. Every real socialist knows that *there are more differences between a liberal and a socialist than there are between liberals and conservatives*. Liberals and conservatives support capitalism. Socialists do not. Acting as if what Hillary Clinton stands for is

quantitatively different from a democratic socialist program is like saying if socialist Eugene Debs did not win a nomination for president in 1912 he would tell his followers to vote for Andrew Carnegie.

So as the scene unfolds, Trump and his followers will be attacked on all sides from the ruling class, from the press and by the Democrats. Decrepit republican lawyers in high places will find technical means that no one understands to steal the Republican nomination from Trump and his followers. They will change the rules of the game as it is being played. The identity politics left will continue to attack and confront Trump and his followers acting as foot-soldiers for Hillary. There will be riots at the Republican primaries and the members of the identity politics left will think they are the heroic defenders against fascist Trump and company. Hillary will not lift a finger. She will intervene after blood has flowed in the streets as the “voice of reason”. Middle and upper middle class women will be inspired by her “non-violent” leadership and she will win the election in a landslide. The identity politics left will be stuck with another moderate Republican presiding over a rapidly declining capitalism for another four to eight years. Hillary will deliver the same thing to women that Obama delivered to non-whites. Nothing. She will serve the bankers just as Obama did during his 8 year run.

### **But if we don't vote for Hillary, Trump will get in**

This issue comes down to what we think the electoral process is all about. If you believe that who gets the most votes from the people for the presidency will win, then you believe that the electoral process is democratic.

We believe the electoral process is rigged from the start and has been for more than 200 years. What we are witnessing and will witness until November 2016 is political theatre among candidates who have all been selected for us by the ruling class. Since many of you might not believe this, let me lay out a scenario and let's see what happens.

The ruling class has selected Hillary and this has been in the works for at least sixteen years, if not longer. Usually the ruling class puts their money on both parties, but because Donald Trump and his followers represent such a threat to them, many modern conservatives within the Council of Foreign Relations, the Business Round Table and the National Association of Manufacturers will move their money into the Hillary campaign.

Bernie Sanders will do his part. He will genuflect and tell his supporters to fold their tents, support Hillary and send money. Some liberal feminists will congratulate the Sandernistas for being “politically correct” in supporting Hillary. They will all be united in a grand show of unity in the great baptism of identity politics. Women will be crying in public, just as many were crying when Obama won for the first time. The identity politics of being a woman will triumph over the class politics of her being as an upper class woman, committed body and soul to finance capital. Women will be told and tell each other “ You’ve come a long way, baby!” The irony is painful.

### **It Ain't Over Yet: Wild Cards on the Left**

Both Donald Trump and his followers are hated by the upper classes mostly because they are not controllable. Trump has so much money that he doesn't have to kowtow to the corporate sponsors who are expressions of big business interests. In part because some of the Trump followers are white working-class who may not have voted before, they are not controllable either.

However there is another variable to be considered – and that is the white working class who is on the *left*, many of whom will feel betrayed by Sanders' recommendation that they simply give up and vote for Hillary. Very few working class people identify with Hillary Clinton. Bernie Sanders has gotten support from 80 unions. Maybe a significant portion of those unions will decide to go on as a movement beyond Bernie Sanders. In addition, *Labor Notes* tracks the activities of *rank and file* unionists around the US who are unhappy with the lack of militancy of their union leadership. These unionists could become allies. Lastly on the labor front, there are those workers in the fast food industry who have struck out on their own, without unions, that might be brought into the fold.

Secondly, Bernie Sanders has not done a good job with the Black Lives Matter movement and they might be recruited as a second ally on the left. Then are also all those who participated in the Occupy movement, most of whom are anticapitalists. Remember that the Occupy movement had a presence in 150 US cities four years ago. Occupy was initially formed in reaction to the economic crisis caused by the banks. Capitalism has gotten worse since then and the Occupy people are too young to have simply sunk into apathy. Lastly there is a growing cooperative movement that is for work-place democracy and for the most part, against capitalism. If these and many other groups can form a unified movement *beyond* Bernie Sanders, then we will have the makings of the kind of political revolution that Sanders talked about, even though it might go beyond anything he would advocate.

The real political revolution would be between the followers of Donald Trump who will be furious that their candidate was robbed of the Republican Party candidacy and will be furious at Hillary before she is even sworn in. On the left might be those renegade Sandernistas and other leftist groups without a political candidate who have the political savvy to know that it is possible to be a movement without participating in electoral politics. Whether you like them or not, the Bolsheviks never participated in electoral politics and they rose to power.

What matters here is what these two forces on the right and left do collectively during the next seven months – as well as after the election. The “election” itself is not very relevant because it is a *selection*, not an election. The selection will be the coronation of Hillary Clinton who will preside over a rapidly decaying empire and a global capitalist system that has seen better days. She will govern like Margaret Thatcher.