

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدين بوم وېر زنده يک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهيم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهيم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/08/10/hillary-clinton-and-the-big-neoliberal-lie/print/>

Hillary Clinton and the Big (Neoliberal) Lie

By Eric Draitser
August 10, 2016



This election season has brought to the surface an issue that, until recently, seemed to have become a neoliberal sacred cow, the holy writ of the lords of capital: free trade. And while this cornerstone of US economic hegemony has come under fire from a deeply reactionary, and to varying degrees racist and xenophobic, perspective, as expressed by Donald Trump, it has nevertheless sparked a much needed conversation about free trade and its destructive impact on both the American working class, and the Global South as well.

But free trade having become a campaign issue has also spotlighted for the umpteenth time the breathtaking hypocrisy of Hillary Clinton who I have previously referred to as the high priestess of the Church of Free Trade and Neoliberalism. For it is, in fact, Hillary Clinton who has for more than two decades been one of the loudest and most resolute voices championing neoliberalism and free trade. And still, despite her record, Clinton today presents herself as a friend of the working class. The same working class that has been all but eviscerated by the policies she herself has supported.

This is, of course, not to say that Trump is somehow the great defender of workers and the poor – his long track record as a predatory, racist real estate developer illustrates his complete lack of concern for oppressed communities and workers. Still, like a sadistic dentist, Trump has deliberately struck a nerve in the body politic of the US. For Trump has managed to eschew the typical right wing cultural wedge issues of gay marriage, abortion, and the like in favor of the core economic concerns of the working class.

Whatever one's opinion of Trump, one can say with certainty that his reintroduction of the free trade into the national conversation has forced Hillary Clinton onto the back foot.

Hillary Clinton, NAFTA, and the Attack on American Workers

“I think that everybody is in favor of free and fair trade, and I think that NAFTA is proving its worth.” Or so Hillary Clinton said in 1996, more than two years after the North American Free Trade Agreement was enacted under her husband's administration. At the time one could still labor under the illusion – or perhaps it was delusion? – that NAFTA was going to benefit workers in the US, Canada, and Mexico by allowing for the free flow of goods (and capital) leading to decreased prices for many consumer goods. Indeed, that was precisely the mythology that was peddled at the time.

While it's true that many experts and workers alike, especially those on the Left, were deeply suspicious about the inflated claims of the glorious benefits of the NAFTA utopia of the future, the concept was made into policy, and the policy translated into a grim reality for US workers. As the Economic Policy Institute noted in 2013:

By establishing the principle that U.S. corporations could relocate production elsewhere and sell back into the United States, NAFTA undercut the bargaining power of American workers, which had driven the expansion of the middle class since the end of World War II. The result has been 20 years of stagnant wages and the upward redistribution of income, wealth and political power.

Without question, NAFTA was a direct assault on the US working class. Its repercussions are still being felt today. As the Economic Policy Institute further explained, NAFTA had four major negative impacts:

1. The loss of at least 700,000 jobs due to production moving to Mexico. Some of the heaviest losses were felt in California, Texas, Michigan and other manufacturing-dependent states, particularly those in the Rust Belt.

2. Allowed employers to drive down wages, slash benefits, and undermine and destroy unions. Because capital could always threaten to simply close up shop and move to Mexico, workers had little recourse but to accept the assault on their standards of living.

3. It devastated the Mexican agricultural and small business sectors which led to the dislocation of millions of Mexican workers and small farmers, many of whom were forced to migrate to the US in search of work, thereby creating the immigration “problem” that Trump and his reactionary base have seized upon.

4. It was the model free trade agreement, the blueprint upon which others were based. It laid the foundation for the neoliberal trade model wherein capital reaps the benefits while labor shoulders the costs.

Obviously, one could point out myriad other negative effects of NAFTA. But perhaps even better than that, one could simply take a drive down Interstates 80 and 90 – crossing through New Jersey, upstate New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, etc. – and get off almost anywhere and see the impacts for one’s self. Countless shuttered factories, depressed and often nearly abandoned towns and cities, and populations blighted by unemployment and the social breakdown that goes with it. The bleakness of the post-NAFTA industrial landscape is difficult to articulate, and is often completely hidden from view, especially for many working people in the population centers on the East and West coasts.

And this depression, both economic and psychological, is what Donald Trump has rather cynically exploited. The scapegoating of Mexican immigrants as economic parasites feasting on the blood of the American worker is a fairly predictable, though highly effective, means of marshaling support from the working class, in particular the white working class.

However, the political opportunism notwithstanding, it was not Donald Trump, but rather Hillary Clinton, who consistently was the unyielding supporter of NAFTA. As White House documents from the Clinton administration revealed, Hillary was one of the principal salespeople for NAFTA, going so far as to speak at a confidential White House briefing on NAFTA in November 1993, just a few days before it was approved by Congress. The documents also prove the fact that Hillary was, as John Nichols wrote in *The Nation* in 2008, “the featured speaker at a closed-door session where 120 women opinion leaders were hectored to pressure their congressional representatives to approve NAFTA.”

Clinton lobbied for NAFTA all throughout the halls of power in Washington, but also before the American people on television and in the major media. In short, NAFTA can be seen as one of Hillary’s crowning achievements; heavy is the head that wears such a crown.

Hillary the Hypocrite

Today Hillary Clinton shamelessly presents herself as a friend of working people. She trots out the elites of organized labor, concerned primarily with their own positions atop demoralized and fragmented unions, and trumpets their endorsements of her. And even these working class

backstabbers have to grit their teeth and smile as they kneel before the high priestess herself in hopes of eight more years of privileged relations and fine dining.

But behind closed doors, everyone in America who even casually follows politics knows the truth: Hillary Clinton is a crusader for free trade and neoliberalism.

And that's precisely why Hillary's anti-free trade posture at election time is so deeply cynical, to say nothing of the insult to working people. In 2007-2008, in the midst of a hotly contested primary campaign against then Senator Barack Obama, Clinton repeatedly claimed that she was anti-free trade, and critical of NAFTA. In a debate in late 2007, Clinton admitted that NAFTA had been a mistake "to the extent that it did not deliver on what we had hoped it would."

Of course, these were just the populist sentiments that Clinton knew she needed to utilize in order to deceive organized labor, and the working class in general, that she was an ally, rather than a devout worshiper at the altar of the god of neoliberalism.

After Obama became president and appointed Clinton Secretary of State she immediately reverted to being the great champion of free trade. Indeed, in her position as America's top diplomat Clinton traveled the world preaching the gospel of free trade. And by this point she had a new holy scripture to tout: the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Clinton unabashedly lied during Democratic national debates on the issue of the TPP, saying that she now opposes it, despite having been in favor of it as late as 2012 when she said the TPP "sets the gold standard in trade agreements." While she now masquerades as a protectionist opposing a deal that would be bad for working people, she has demonstrated her unflagging support for this type of so called free trade in the past.

To get a sense of just how insidious the TPP is for American workers, and in fact citizens of every country involved in the deal, consider the words of the Grand Poobah of the American Left, Noam Chomsky, who correctly explained that the TPP is "designed to carry forward the neoliberal project to maximize profit and domination, and to set the working people in the world in competition with one another so as to lower wages to increase insecurity." In his characteristically soft-spoken manner, Chomsky manages to encapsulate the overarching danger that the TPP represents. And in so doing, he further implies that Hillary Clinton represents a serious threat to American workers.

Similarly, as Secretary of State, Clinton vocally backed the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), hailing it as an "economic NATO". Leaving aside the terrifyingly ironic turn of phrase, Hillary's support of TTIP represents support for yet another massive free trade deal that would have serious negative effects on workers, and indeed the majority of citizens, in the US and Europe. As Politico noted, "TTIP covers around a third of global trade. It would create an open market of 829 million consumers and expand a trade relationship that's already worth €2 billion every day."

And, just as with the TPP, TTIP is as much a political and geopolitical weapon as it is an economic arrangement. While TPP is aimed at economically isolating China (despite the raving

lunacy of Donald Trump who argues just the opposite, that TPP will unfairly benefit China), TTIP is directed against Russia in hopes of depriving Moscow the chance at deepening economic ties with Europe.

And this is precisely why Clinton is the darling of both Wall Street and the neoconservative establishment. From the right wing financier Koch Brothers' admission of support for Hillary, to the obvious backing of George Soros, Warren Buffett, and countless other liberal (and some conservative) Wall Street ghouls, Clinton has the near unanimous endorsements of the One Percent. It should be added that she is also being supported by arch-neocons such as Max Boot, who described Clinton as "vastly preferable," Robert Kagan who sees Hillary as "saving the country," and Eliot Cohen who described Clinton as "the lesser evil by a large margin."

The reason for the near unanimous support is simple: Clinton will deliver all the economic policies, including TPP and free trade, that the Masters of Wall Street demand. And she'll do it all while coldly smiling at every worker she meets on the campaign trail. She will also pursue just the sort of aggressive and belligerent foreign policy that makes neocons salivate at the prospect of more and bigger wars.

Ultimately, Clinton represents the very worst of the American political class – a cynical manipulator whose thirst for blood and war is matched only by her thirst for power. Lies flow from her mouth into the US political scene like water into a vast ocean. And, like water, she erodes the once sturdy rock of the working class in the United States.