

I'M FOR BERNIE

It is December, 2015, eleven months before the presidential election. Candidates for the Democratic and Republican nominations have already been campaigning for close to a year. The GOP had about 16 candidates and is now down to half that number. The Democrats started with five and are down to three.

Actually there are only two—Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders—and I suspect many Sanders supporters doubt that Bernie can get the nomination. 2016 is supposed to be Hillary's coronation. If Bernie's people are like me, they are excited that a democratic socialist is getting the kind of coverage, crowds and contributions that he is getting. What Bernie is doing is educating America, and pushing Hillary to the left. Nobody has done anything like that before. Bernie is giving Hillary a run for her money. And she has big money behind her. It was supposed to be a shoo-in. The DNC is for Hillary, and they stacked the debates for her. Still, Bernie might even take New Hampshire.

In 2008, we elected a black president. In 2016, we are supposed to elect a woman. Why not a Jewish socialist? I should note that Bernie made it clear from the start that he is in this race to win, not to educate America or push Hillary to the left. When he started, the polls gave Hillary over 60% to Bernie's less than 5%. By July, Hillary was still over 60% and Bernie at 12%. As of this writing, it is 56% to 34%. And 43% of Democratic voters say that Bernie shares their values.

Bernie has raised real issues, and the crowds are coming out to cheer him. He is talking about what many of us have been talking about most of our lives: Income and wealth inequality, decent paying jobs, a living wage, free public higher education, getting big money out of politics, civil rights, women's rights, single payer health care. And he has an impressive resume: Mayor, Congressman, Senator.

Come on. Did we ever, in the furthest stretch of our imagination, envision a nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn, and a democratic socialist, running for the Democratic presidential nomination, and having a chance of getting it and being elected?

In 1932, and I assume in 1928, my mother voted for the Socialist Party candidate, Norman Thomas. After FDR was elected in 1932, Socialists accused him of stealing the Socialist Party platform. Almost everything that FDR did to get America out of the depression had been originally proposed by Thomas.

In 1936, my mother's union, the ILGWU, together with several other "socialist" unions, formed the American Labor Party in New York to enable workers to vote for FDR without having to vote the capitalist Tammany star. Dubinsky was a practical man. America wasn't going to elect Thomas. Support Roosevelt, and we will have a president who will support organized labor.

Many of us used to accuse our parents of voting for any candidate who is Jewish. What is wrong with that if the Jewish candidate is concerned with advancing Jewish concerns

and protecting Jewish interests in a period of racism and anti-Semitism? They emphasized Rabbi Hillel's "If I am not for myself, who will be for me..." The next generation emphasizes "But if I am only for myself, what am I?" A good democratic socialist position. Bernie is fighting for Tikkun Olam, to repair the world; for a Shenere un Besere Velt, a more beautiful and better world.

I regret that the two democratic socialist thinkers and writers who best articulated the position that Bernie holds, my heroes Michael Harrington and Irving Howe, are not around to enjoy Bernie's success. Thanks to Bernie, socialism is no longer a dirty word, and no longer equated with communism. And people are finally getting the message that America's millionaires and billionaires are really calling the shots, and it does not have to be that way.

For years, we have been voting for the lesser of two evils. We went to the polls and held our nose and voted. We had to be practical. With Bernie, we have someone who is everything we could want in a candidate. And if he gets the nomination, he won't be a third party candidate. He will be running as a Democrat. A Democratic Socialist! I'm for Bernie.

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