

The Utopian

A Bulletin of Anarchist &
Libertarian Socialist Thought



Volume 19, No. 1 January 2020

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Statement of the Utopian Tendency

Why We Do Not Support The Impeachment and Conviction of Donald Trump



Drafted by Ron Tabor

Adopted as a Statement by the Utopian Tendency
(December 2019)

Although we are not legal or constitutional scholars, from what such scholars have said, we are convinced that President Donald Trump has, in fact, committed impeachable offenses under the United States constitution. As we understand it, Trump abused his office by using his power over the executive branch of the government, not to promote the

interests of the country (read, the ruling elite), but to pursue his personal gain, namely, to improve his chances of getting re-elected in 2020. Specifically, he held up military aid to Ukraine - public funds that had been appropriated by Congress - as leverage in an attempt to gain political "dirt" on Joe Biden, who he assumed would be his most dangerous opponent in the 2020 elections.



As anarchists and revolutionary libertarian socialists, we are not supporters of the constitution and do not base our political orientation on constitutional considerations. Although there are parts of the constitution, we do believe are worth preserving (such as the Bill of Rights), we do not defend the constitution as a whole, nor the political system it established and sustains. The constitution is a reactionary document that was explicitly designed to limit popular sovereignty in order to ensure the rule of an elite. While, over time, the constitution has (usually under pressure) been modified to make it less reactionary, its ultimate function and purpose remain the same. It is worth remembering that it was one of the more questionable features of the constitution, the Electoral College, which enabled Donald Trump to win the presidency in 2016, despite the fact that his opponent, Hillary Clinton, outpolled him by nearly three million votes. So, the mere fact that Trump's actions violated the constitution does not, by itself, convince us that Donald Trump should be impeached, convicted, and removed from office.

Moreover, the nature of Trump's action, (that is, attempting to muscle the president of Ukraine to help him win re-election), when viewed in the context of the other things US presidents regularly do without risking impeachment - e.g., wage war on and invade other countries, kill innocent civilians as "collateral damage" in drone strikes and other military actions, interfere in the political processes of other nations,

deport millions of people, promote the interests of self-serving powerful corporations and banks as they plunder the resources of the United States and other countries, etc., etc. – does not, in our opinion, warrant Trump’s removal from office via impeachment.



In fact, impeachment is a highly undemocratic process; it is pursued without any direct involvement of the American people. In the present context, its effect is to nullify the votes of the millions of people who voted for Trump in the 2016 election. This is, in fact, an attack on their democratic rights (and therefore on the democratic rights of all of us). As a result, impeachment will intensify, rather than mitigate, the tragic political and cultural polarization of the country. And if a militant movement of the vast majority of the people of the United States - a movement that recognizes that both political factions of the ruling class are its enemies and its targets - is ever going to be built, then overcoming this polarization is essential. In a nutshell, impeachment is a bureaucratic maneuver played out among the members of the political elite, with even less popular input than what occurs during elections.

On purely personal grounds, that is, the type of human being he is, Donald Trump certainly deserves to be ejected from office. He is a truly disgusting individual: a “malignant narcissist,” a pathological liar, and a borderline sociopath who has no concern for or empathy with anything or anybody beyond himself and his immediate family, someone with few, if any, redeeming personal virtues. But similar things can be said of many of the men who have been president (Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, the Bushes, and Bill Clinton, come to mind), of the other men and women who have held and still hold mid-to-high-level political

office, and of the people who have dominated and still dominate the corporate/financial structure of the country. One does not get into powerful positions in the elite by being a "nice guy." In our view, all of them should be removed from their positions by a popular revolution and the entire economic and political system overthrown.



Despite their protestations of concern to defend the constitution, the Democrats are pursuing the impeachment of Donald Trump for two, narrowly political, reasons. One, they lost the 2016 election, which they had been confident they would win. Although they blame the outcome on the interference of the Russians, the reality is that Trump would probably have won without such help, largely because Hillary Clinton arrogantly assumed that she didn't need the votes of the people in the economically declining rural and semi-rural areas of the country, many of whom had long been loyal supporters of the Democratic Party, and made no effort to win their support. They sensed her disdain and decided to vote for someone who, however demagogically, spoke to their concerns and, as an added incentive, posed as a rebel against the (Democratic and Republican) "establishment" that had left them high and dry. (Remember, Obama bailed out the banks, the insurance companies, and the automobile industry, but did nothing to address the needs of millions of people who were "under water" on their homes and faced the loss of those homes and even bankruptcy as a result.)

The second reason the Democrats are pursuing the impeachment of Donald Trump is that he got his hand caught in the cookie jar. Knowing that the Democratic Party and much, if not most, of the federal government (the state department, the defense department, the

intelligence organizations, the top military officers) were looking for a way to get rid of him, Trump was too smug and/or stupid not to realize that his Ukraine-Biden maneuver would eventually come out and give his enemies the ammunition they were looking for to institute impeachment proceedings against him. In other words, Trump's cloddishness offered the Democrats a huge opening through which to target him, and they've barged through it.



In effect, the Democrats are utilizing impeachment as an attempt to reverse the outcome of the 2016 elections: to tarnish Trump and the entire Republican Party, and through this, to regain control of the presidency (and, if they are lucky, the House of Representatives and the Senate) in 2020. This effort has particular urgency for them, and for their allies in the federal government and among other segments of the elite, because of their concern to defend the international system of states and alliances (aka US imperialism) that Trump, through his irresponsible rhetoric and erratic behavior, has destabilized. Since, as anarchists and revolutionary libertarian socialists we oppose all sectors of the ruling elite, as well as its global empire, we refuse to give this (deeply undemocratic) maneuver any support.

We understand that there are people who find Donald Trump, his actions, and especially his rhetoric so vile that they want him removed from office as soon as possible and by any means necessary. However, we see no way to support impeaching and convicting Trump without also supporting the Democratic Party and the other establishment forces that are behind this move. Now, this is a legitimate political position, and one

that most of the left seems to have chosen. But it is not ours. Our Who We Are statement explicitly states that we oppose both political parties since they both represent the elite and the social system over which it rules, which we wish to overthrow. To abandon this position means to abandon a revolutionary perspective in favor of a reformist one. This is not a step we are willing to take.



Discussion of Impeachment

November 2, 2019

Ron and All,

I appreciate Ron's thoughts on the impeachment of Trump. I think the logic of Ron's position is that support for impeachment, no matter how qualified, is support for the US Constitution, and is also interpretable as support for whatever the 'other' political party is. This view is most clearly expressed in Ron's statement: "In a nutshell, impeachment is a bureaucratic maneuver played out among the members of the political elite, with even less popular input than what occurs during elections." I don't say this to take issue with Ron, but rather to draw out the logic of his position.

I have personally, that is to say emotionally and privately, been favorable to Trump's impeachment. I root for it, as opposed to against it. This flows from feelings Ron describes well: "Donald Trump certainly deserves to be ejected from office. He is a truly disgusting individual: a 'malignant narcissist,' a pathological liar, and a borderline sociopath who has no concern for or empathy with anything or anybody beyond himself and his immediate family, someone with few, if any, redeeming personal virtues." Ron points out, correctly, that much the same can be said of many, citing Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, the Bushes and Clinton. (Ron omits Carter, perhaps accidentally, though I doubt this. My own view, emotionally and personally, is that Carter was a cut above.)



The only way I could defend my private, emotional view as a public view would be to assert that I am for the removal, by any means necessary including impeachment, of *any* president. However, even if, from a formal point of view, this means that I don't support one party over the other, and, additionally, that I don't support the constitution, I think in the current situation, it muddies the water more than clarifies it. For this reason, I support Ron's statement. I agree that favoring the impeachment of Trump implies more agreement with a system that we oppose, than it conveys opposition to Trump, *et. al.*

Some areas of questioning or possible disagreement with Ron: Ron writes that, "Although there are parts of the constitution I do believe are worth preserving (such as the Bill of Rights) ..." I think a consistent position would state that there are things in the constitution that we

support--freedom of speech, press, assembly, petition, and religion--but we support these things for what they are, not as clauses in the constitution, per se. I don't see how we can pick and choose parts of the constitution that we support. Ron may agree with this (i.e., it is semantics), and he can clarify.



Ron writes: "In fact, impeachment is a highly undemocratic process; it is pursued without any direct involvement of the American people. In the present context, its effect is to nullify the votes of the millions of people who voted for Trump in the 2016 election. This is, in fact, an attack on their democratic rights (and therefore the democratic rights of all of us)." I am not persuaded by this argument. An election that is a sham in myriad ways (let's cite the electoral college and money, both established by the constitution and the courts) is, according to Ron, subverted by a 'highly undemocratic process.' But what is being 'subverted' is a process that is supported by the same constitution and courts. I am not clear why this constitutes an attack on (non-existing) 'democratic rights.'

Ron writes that "impeachment will intensify, rather than mitigate, the tragic political and cultural polarization of the country." So many things I can think of in the political process 'intensify rather than mitigate, the tragic political and cultural polarization of the country.' In fact, the political process is largely (overwhelmingly?) played as a zero-sum game--so *everything* winds up being a tragic political and cultural polarization of the country. Ron may say, 'that's my point.'

The points I raise above are not challenges to the fundamental position that Ron outlines, which I agree with. Rather, they are probes/questions in areas that the statement could (perhaps) be strengthened.

Rod

November 7, 2019

All,

Ron raises important arguments about impeachment, from our common perspective of revolutionary anarchism. However, on balance, my current thinking is that of "critical support" of impeachment of Trump, something like what Rod says he used to feel.

The reasons to oppose impeachment (or to be neutral towards it or to be critical of it): It is a conflict between two wings of the ruling class refracted through the political parties--and we oppose both wings. Indeed, a large proportion of the population feels that this is essentially an inter-party squabble, with little if any relevance to themselves and their lives. (This is part of the reason why Pelosi and the moderate Democrats resisted raising it.) It focuses on Trump and his idiosyncrasies (trying to prove that Ukrainians hacked the 2016 elections rather than the Russians!), rather than real issues such as healthcare. It does not even raise his most important evil deeds, such as caging children, banning Muslims, or betraying the Kurds. To the extent it goes beyond Trump, it only effects the Republicans (who defend him or are silent), making the Democrats look good. It promotes illusions in the professional bureaucrats of the military, foreign service, secret police, etc. (the "deep state," which radicals have called the "permanent government"). It overlooks evil deeds by previous administrations of both parties.

Positive aspects: It is good to see tumult and uncertainty among the ruling parties, exposure of crimes, airing of scandals, leaders held up to ridicule, stupidity and buffoonery demonstrated, etc. There is a large part of the population which is furious about Trump and has demanded impeachment; this is the militant left-liberal base of the Democrats which is sympathetic to "socialism." It is important to be able to talk to these people. Without denying that revolutionary forces

may come from the presently "conservative" or "independent" parts of the population, these people are likely to eventually include more radical tendencies.

In many ways, Trump is a peculiarity, a freak, far worse than anyone who has gone before. Yet he is also the result of a chain of developments of capitalist politics. The Republicans have been the cutting edge of the attack on the working class and the environment, while the Democrats have been further up on the blade, so to speak. And the Republican leadership has become a far-right party over the decades. (That this is not simply a matter of Republican evolution, is shown by the world-wide tendency toward authoritarian, nationalist, pseudo-populism, in countries with very different political cultures and personalities. It is a systemic development.) The Democrats have remained ever so slightly to their left, where they have become the center-right party which the Republicans once were in the main. But the Democrats have now been pressured to their left by popular upsurges, if only to try to incorporate and kill these forces.



The fury at Trump and his policies is a good thing. That it is channeled through the Democrats is not so good, although to be expected at first. This unprecedented upheaval is a symptom of underlying discontent. I welcome the popular outrage, but not its expression through the vile Democrats. So, overall, I would say I have a perspective of "critical support" to impeachment.

Wayne

November 7, 2019

Wayne,

Thanks for your comments. I am giving them some thought, though my initial reaction is that you overstate the degree to which a 'popular upsurge' is driving impeachment. I also have more reservations than you do about the 'sympathetic to socialism' forces--I suppose this depends on whether you are speaking of young people who may not even vote (and who are certainly not part of the Democratic Party in any meaningful sense), or others who are what I would term 'FDR-ists.' We can discuss these issues.

I did want to correct one thing that you wrote. I said that "I have personally, that is to say emotionally and privately, been favorable to Trump's impeachment. I root for it, as opposed to against it." You described this as 'what Rod says he used to feel.' I didn't say that I used to have these sentiments--I still do. But I don't think these sentiments should lead us to support, however critically, impeachment. How do I square this circle? My personal belief is that Woodrow Wilson is the vilest president the US ever had. I despise him. I acknowledge this to my students, and explain that my feeling come from the degree to which I find Wilson to be a monstrous hypocrite (imperialism, *Birth of a Nation*, World War I, and on it goes.) Of course, I think Teddy Roosevelt was an especially despicable person. And Trump is up there in the running. My point is that I distinguish these private, personal, and largely emotional feeling from political positions to be advocated. I don't think we should 'rank' US presidents or put them in categories such as 'good or bad' (nor am I suggesting that you think we should). I am simply drawing out the difference between how I prefer my tea and what we should stand for and advocate. On that point, I believe that 'critical support to impeachment' becomes very hard to distinguish from 'critical support to the lesser evil.' And we both know what that is and where it goes.

Rod

November 7, 2019

All

I agree with Ron's position. I agree with him that the impeachment proceedings are mainly an intra capitalist parties fight in which the Democrats, with support from some establishment Republicans, are trying to regain political power. I think it's clear that Nancy Pelosi was waiting for Trump to commit overt acts egregious enough to gain a clear majority for impeachment in the House, and that's what a combination of Trump's Ukraine and Syrian blunderings did.



I think that it's crucial to not fall into the trap of lesser evilism: believing that the Democrats provide hope for humanity. I don't have to remind people that Obama was responsible for deporting 3 million people; that Hillary Clinton was the architect of murderous regime change in North Africa and Southwest Asia; that Bill Clinton turned away the Haitian boat refugees when he was president, and then acted as de facto Viceroy of Haiti years after the earthquake and years after his presidency. I believe that Hillary Clinton's foreign policy would have been worse for the world than Trump's. We need to impeach the system, not Trump.

Here's what I wrote to Ron last week when he forwarded an earlier draft to me:

I have read your document. I agree with what you wrote. However, I think that two more points could be emphasized more. I made these

points from the floor two weeks ago in Bologna where I attended an academic panel on impeachment, and it had a pretty big effect:

First, that the Democrats -- and the establishment ("moderate") Republicans -- have long been the advocates of the U.S. imperialist policies that have savaged the world, and of the corporate policies responsible for the growing inequality and the destruction of the living standards in the former industrial core of the country. The establishment politicians of both capitalist parties' real objection to Trump is that he is too erratic and unreliable. In particular, his abrupt announcement of a pullout from Syria convinced many of them to try to get rid of him.

Second, that the establishment "center" also worry that Trump will discredit all of them by making it too clear just how corrupt and cynical nearly all of our "elected leaders" are. Trump will spill the beans on any and all of them when he comes under attack. Thus, his trumpeting how Biden's sons are using his name to get, essentially, big payoffs in Ukraine, China, etc. No question that Trump is far filthier, but most of them are cynical and corrupt. The system has counted on this being obfuscated. Trump threatens this, that is, he threatens to expose it, by revealing the corruption of his critics, even if he is more corrupt. It's as though the side of a building is ripped away and the squalid proceedings inside are revealed for all to see.

Jack

November 8, 2019

All,

I fully support Ron's statement. I believe the comments on the constitution, Trump's nature and actions, the undemocratic and divisive character of the Dem's impeachment moves and that this factional intra-elite strife is generally devoid of any meaningful popular character to be on the mark.

Jumping to Ron's closing remarks, I am in agreement that to embrace impeachment is "to abandon a revolutionary perspective in favor of a reformist one." Given Trump's repulsive character and the turmoil of his erratic rule I think we need be on guard against losing sight of the

big picture and succumbing to the overwhelmingly liberal/statist character of the of the popular sentiments against him and the political and media elites directing and shaping the "Resistance".

Critical support to impeachment would, whatever the intention, be a step back from laying the groundwork for a political project that is clearly seen as a truly independent third camp/position (apologies) from the dominant array of conservative, liberal and nationalist politics. Our project is for an alternative society, organized on libertarian-egalitarian lines and arising from a radical-revolutionary rejection of capitalism, imperialism and behemoth states. We are not for a post-Trump return to somewhat refurbished practices of what preceded and engendered his rise. This must be unequivocally expressed and to my mind requires a clearly perceived physical and political distance from the impeachment movement.



Obviously, this "movement" is directed from and centered in the Congressional Democratic leadership and off-stage party influentials. Other key components of this "movement" are to be found in the print and televised media. MSNBC being one representative of this ilk. Hopefully all of us have noticed that MSNBC serves not only as a propaganda arm of the progressive wing of the Democrats but also a forum to showcase the so-called Resistance's ongoing alliances with many figures from the pre-Trump Republican establishment, ex-Federal prosecutors, FBI, CIA and important retirees from the upper

echelons of the military.* This “movement” does not just exhibit illusions in these forces but is under their control and actively shaping and imbuing the popular supporters of impeachment with its outlook. To endorse this so-called movement in any fashion would be providing a left cover for what we have fought against our entire lives. It means support for the neo-liberal elites’ reasserting control over directing the world’s leading capitalist and military/imperialist power. They fumbled the ball and allowed a third-rate team of self-serving, unstudied elements with irresponsible politics seize control of the field. Let us keep our heads and use the present moment to hopefully advance our ideas and perspectives. Even a small advance in this regard may leave something valuable for the future. Jumping on the impeachment bandwagon is a violation of our foundational principles. A high price to pay to piss in the wind. Given our next to zero influence the only card we have to play and possibly gain some visibility and consideration for our ideas is our difference. That is to be refractories. As we used to say to “say what is”.

I am in full solidarity with Ron’s comments in his paragraph dealing with impeachment as a highly undemocratic process. It’s being pursued “without any direct involvement of the American people” is true in two

**One MSNBC regular former Republican Fla. Congressman Jolly is a board member of a conservative group STAND UP REPUBLIC. This organization, founded by a relatively young ex-CIA Field officer/operative and a woman of some standing in cyber circles is anti-Trump. State coordinators of this outfit also tend to be young with some diversity and many have backgrounds in the FBI or other security/intelligence services. The Washington state coordinator is a Latina veteran of a U.S. Army intelligence battalion that is stationed in Germany and served in Iraq. Last winter she took out membership in the IWW. In short order she was vying for a national office responsible for membership records. Her candidacy was backed by figures in the IWW identified with a conservative wing of the IWW trying to unseat a person with ties to the First of May Anarchist Alliance and the Lucy Parsons/ Frank Little caucus representing the left wing. The left was under fire for “endangering” the IWW by engaging in clashes Nazis and drawing too sharp of lines against the AFL-CIO bureaucracy in locals these left elements had influence in. I cite this not to make too much of this but all should be aware of this small but instructive example.*

senses. On one hand as Ron asserts and outlined above impeachment is a maneuver controlled and played out amongst the elites. The pro impeachment sections of the population by and large remain spectators. The only stepping forward, dissent, self-generated or solicited in a careful manner is from the ranks of the federal bureaucracy active or retired. On the other hand, as Ron states it is the direct nullification of the votes of those millions who voted for Trump. This attack on their democratic rights will as Ron states serve to further polarize the country. It would be far better for Trump to fall at the ballot box. This attempted removal from office by bureaucratic maneuver, whether successful or not, only heightens this polarization and is a gift to the hard right and fascistic currents attempting to organize amongst his supporters. Our hands need to be clean in this regard if we are to gain any serious hearing for as Ron states a militant movement that targets both political factions of the ruling class amongst those that supported Trump. This holds true to his critical supporters and in my experience those who are have already broken from him.



We need to combat stereotyping Trump supporters. Millions of individuals cannot be reduced to one, two or a few caricatures. Undoubtedly there are numerous problematic people amongst his supporters. In my extended family in Pennsylvania there are more than a few who backed Trump. I only find one to be particularly trying and I would hesitate to declare him irredeemable. At my recently retired workplace there were eight Trump backers. Only one was a real problem. The other six I consider to be friends and remain in touch with

them all and I can say they all had my back. They are all well-liked by their 30 other coworkers and two of them number amongst the most cooperative collective folks I have ever met.

Mike

November 8, 2019

All

I agree with Ron's document, but want to make a point I don't think anyone has made. In my view, the Democrats are not pursuing impeachment because they think it can succeed in removing Trump from office. (Unless I'm mistaken, they don't believe they can get enough Republican votes in the Senate for the required 2/3 majority.) Rather, I think they aim at (1) adding to the perception of Trump as the greater evil and so increasing support for the Democratic nominee next year, particularly among moderates; (2) laying the basis for an election strategy of "get the job done"; (3) also laying the basis for a campaign against Republicans in the Senate on the grounds that they obstructed impeachment.

On nuance points, I would add to Ron's list of constitutional provisions he supports, amendments 13, 14, 15, and 19, or rather (per Rod) the rights they supposedly guarantee. 13 and 19 are the only ones that stood up; 15 was nullified in the South for 70+ years; 14 is on and off even today.

Chris

November 9, 2019

Everybody,

I'd like to thank Wayne, Jack, Mike, Rod, and Chris for their comments.

I'd like to speak to Wayne's points.

First, Wayne states that from a revolutionary perspective, tumult is good. I agree. But this is really an argument for NOT removing Trump

from office but instead leaving him in power. The longer Trump is president, the more tumult there's likely to be. In fact, I can make a case for why, from a revolutionary point of view, it would be better if Trump were not impeached and then got re-elected!! Five more years of chaos, yay! Aside from the chaos, it might convince some people, both anti- and pro-Trump, that it's useless to try to address their concerns by working through the system.)



Second, Wayne argues that giving critical support to impeachment is a way to talk to younger and other left-liberals, most of whom are gung-ho for impeachment. I am (and have been) less optimistic about reaching these people (for a variety of reasons) than Wayne seems to be. But even if we do think it's worthwhile to try to talk to them, isn't one of the things we want to do when we do talk to them is explain what we think is really going on with this impeachment mess? Unless I am mistaken, we all agree that impeachment represents an effort on the part of the Democrats, the federal bureaucracy (particularly, the state department, the intelligence agencies, and the military leadership), and those Republicans who are openly or privately rooting for impeachment, to reassert Establishment control of the executive branch before Trump does any more damage to the interests of the elite, particular his efforts to dismantle or at least disrupt the system of international alliances that is the embodiment of US imperialism. So, if we do manage to convince any left-liberals of our view of what is going on behind the impeachment process, why

would we want to tell them that they/we should be in favor of impeaching Trump? That is, why would want to tell them that we and they should be in a bloc with the Democrats and the Establishment in general to defend the American empire? In other words, if what we think the impeachment process represents is true, why would we want to convince anyone to support it, however critically? So, do we pretend to give critical support to impeachment in order to get the ear of the left-liberals, and then, once we have gotten them to listen to us, turn around and tell them that we do not really support impeachment at all and neither should they?

Ron

November 9, 2019

Everyone,

This may be a difference inasmuch as while I agree with the perspectives of Ron, Rod, Chris, Mike and Jack in not supporting impeachment, I also don't oppose it, either. I liken the process to watching a football contest between two teams in which I have no interest in whichever wins. I have to admit, however, that I would smile if the Impeachers do win, but that doesn't mean that I would cheer for them. Like me, the crowds are spectators to the game, and I feel that my role is to try to get them all to leave the stadium.

Also, I believe that it's unlikely that Trump will be convicted *unless* events begin breaking out as they have in Hong Kong, Chile, Lebanon and Iraq. This may be far-fetched here, but the mobilizations in those other countries took off very quickly. The initial issue may have nothing to do with Trump--extradition bills, taxes on WhatsApp, subway fare increases--but inevitably popular organizations will spring up, and the Democrats will try to divert their energy to dumping Trump and the Republicans while the centrists dither. I think it's clear that the only revolutionary orientation should be toward maintaining the political independence of those organizations even if they don't exist today.

Peace,

Bill

November 20, 2019

Hi all,

Rod said that his personal sentiments lie with "getting Trump". Mine do not. I see the impeachment proceedings as aimed at reassertion of control by (a) the Democrats and (b) the imperialist apparatus. Although I consider Trump a despicable human being, I see the impeachment proceedings as a partisan political activity on two levels: First, as Ron says in his document, partisan politics on the part of the Democrats. Second, as the imperialist establishment pushing back to reassert its long-entrenched policies against Trump's erratic policies and isolationist tendencies, and doing so through the testimony of a small army of the foreign affairs, defense, and intelligence operatives who have provided hands on control of the world for decades. I'm not going to side with their power bid, nor will I side with Trump. I have a gut level reaction against Trump, and I have a gut level reaction against the state apparatus that's out to get him.

That's the basis on which I support Ron's document, and that's at least my interpretation of the thrust of Ron's analysis.

Jack

November 20, 2019

All,

Trump is entirely unfit for the role he occupies. That outweighs other considerations for me.

Robin

November 20, 2019

Yes, he is not fit like Obama, who deported three million human beings, who every Tuesday decided who would be killed by drones, who bailed out the banks. But he was "presidential". Fit. Bill Clinton?

Hillary Clinton (architect of regime change, chief proponent of fracking).

They are fit to be tried as war criminals. All of them. But we won't hear that from the establishment media, who are the voice of the American establishment and its preferred method of ruling the world.

Trump is indeed a vile human being, and let's everyone know it. I am not rooting for him. But I am also not rooting for the "lesser evils". They all make me sick.

Jack

November 21, 2019

Everybody,

I'd like to support some of the arguments Jack has been making on the issue of impeaching Trump and to offer some additional ones.

First, in contrast to Robin, I think Donald Trump is very fit to be the president of the United States. He's a scummy guy, who heads a scummy government, that expresses and defends the rule of a scummy elite, that presides over and profits from a scummy economic system. In contrast to the other scumbags who have been president, Trump doesn't hide his scummy-ness; he revels in it and parades it. This is one of the reasons why the Democrats, the intelligence and military "communities," the state department bureaucrats, experts, and operatives, the silent anti-Trumpers among the Republicans, et. al., don't like him. Trump refuses to honor the verbal bullshit, the "boilerplate," the "cant," that serves to disguise the brutality, the corruption, and the grossly unjust nature of the system under which we live. In other words, he lets the cat out of the bag: he reveals who they all, really, are.

Second, I am not convinced my statement has majority support in our group. There are two reasons why I suspect this is the case: 1. Quite a few people on our list have not indicated an attitude on the question one way or another. This leads me to believe that they support the impeachment and conviction of Trump. 2. Some of the people who have said that they support my statement have also hinted, often in the

same emails, that they really do not. Rod has said, at least twice, that he supports my position and then, immediately afterward, has suggested that he is rooting for Trump's impeachment and conviction (what he calls "getting" Trump). In like manner, Roni has written that she agrees with my statement but wants Trump removed from office as soon as possible. This is not my position; it is the opposite of what I am saying. Why not just come out and say that you do not agree with my statement, that, instead, you believe we should support the impeachment and conviction of Donald Trump, even if this means a bloc (however temporary) with the Democrats and the other forces behind the impeachment campaign? Wayne has indicated that he thinks we should give critical support to the impeachment process, but he has not responded to my criticism of his position, particularly, that it involves misleading the young left-liberals he is hoping to influence. He has also questioned whether the Utopian group should come out with a formal statement of its position, which I would like to do. So, let's have an honest and open discussion of the issue rather than the shadow-boxing that's been going on.

One of the reasons I oppose impeachment is, as I wrote in my statement, that it is extremely undemocratic. As undemocratic as voting under the US constitution is (e.g., the Electoral College, gerrymandering, various forms of voter suppression, etc.). impeachment is much more so. It's a maneuver, a faction-fight, carried out exclusively among a tiny group of politicians, with only indirect input from ordinary people, via polls and letters and phone calls to "their" political representatives. More narrowly, impeachment is an attempt to nullify the votes of those who voted for Donald Trump. Since I do not believe that all such voters are unredeemable racists, sexists, xenophobes, and fascists, I think it matters that we defend their right to have voted as they chose, rather than merely disparage them, write them off, and trample on their democratic rights. The liberal media has worked overtime to demonize the Trump voters. We should not join them in this.

I also oppose impeachment because Trump and the Republicans will use it as an excuse for why Trump wasn't able to carry out everything he promised: stop illegal immigration ("build the wall"); renegotiate "unfair" trade agreements, particularly with China; withdraw from interminable and unwinnable wars; get US allies to pay "their fair share" for US military protection; repeal Obamacare and replace it with

something better; bring industrial jobs back to the Midwest, "Make America Great Again." This was a pile of crap, and Trump knew it. But instead of allowing Trump to expose what a bullshit artist and con-man he is, impeachment, following upon the Mueller investigation, will give him an excuse, political cover; it will allow him to claim that he would have done everything he promised if it weren't for all the "do-nothing" Democrats who attempted to undermine and delegitimize his "historic" administration from the beginning. If Trump is not ultimately convicted in the Senate (and even if he is - as far as I know, there is nothing in the US constitution that prevents an impeached and convicted president from running for the presidency again), impeachment may well play into his hands.

Ron

November 21, 2019

Friends,

Wayne has indicated that he thinks we should give critical support to the impeachment process, but he has not responded to my criticism of his position, particularly, that it involves misleading the young left-liberals he is hoping to influence.

I refer to "critical support" of impeachment (which I put in quotation marks because the phrase is only semi-appropriate), meaning that I (like others on this list) find Trump's impeachment and (unlikely) expulsion to be--*on balance*--A Good Thing. It exposes bad acting at the highest levels of government, which I am for. Similarly, if Trump were to be tried for some of his many crimes in a federal court, I would be happy if he were convicted. But the "critical" part is not a suggestion that someday, when the event is over, I would mention to others that I thought that the Democrats are also bad actors and that the government agents who are being so highly praised are really agents of imperialism. I am for saying this *right now*, before, during, and after the impeachment events. Nor am I calling for mass actions in support of impeachment, as some on the left are doing. (If there are some mass actions, during the Senate hearings, perhaps, organized perhaps by the DSA, I would consider participating--with a revolutionary leaflet and signs.)

My general opinion was laid out in my article "Trump is Not the Problem," <https://www.anarkismo.net/article/31473> (also printed in ASR)--even though it did indirectly discuss impeachment. This spelled out both why I hated Trump and why getting rid of him would not solve our problems, since the problem is capitalism, served by both parties. Trump, in all his horribleness, must be shown to be more than a freak accident, but rather the outcome of the general direction of U.S. and world capitalism.

Incidentally, if the Senate finds a president guilty, it does not automatically prevent him or her from running again--*unless* the Senate explicitly includes this as one of their conclusions.

The loss of democracy since the Trump voters will "lose" their votes, strikes me as Ron's weakest argument--considering that Trump came into office with a minority vote, not to mention all the undemocratic parts of the election (voter suppression, Comey, the Russkis, etc.).

I agree with Ron that the majority of white Trump voters were not racists in the sense that they did not want African-Americans to lose their rights, nor did they vote for Trump *because* of his racism. But they are mostly anti-Latinos, anti-Muslims and Arabs, and, most importantly, *they did not care* that Trump was racist and had overtly racist followers. We want to win them over, but not more than the African-American and Latino working class (and also to win over the "middle class" white-collar workers).

Wayne

November 22, 2019

Everybody,

I thank Wayne for his comments. Here are some thoughts by way of a reply.

Wayne did not address my argument that to support the Democrats' impeachment effort means, in fact, to put ourselves in a bloc with the long-time defenders of the policies and structures of US

imperialism, including the State Department, the military establishment/top brass, and the intelligence organizations. It means furthering their effort to regain full control of the federal government and attempting to prevent Trump's erratic behavior from further eroding the United States' global power and status.

For this reason, removing Trump from office is not a "good thing," since the current vice president, Mike Pence, will then become president. Although he will likely continue to pursue Trump's domestic agenda, which is supported by the Republican establishment, he will most likely discontinue Trump's international stance and line up with the traditional foreign-policy and military establishments, the intelligence agencies, etc. For all the noise, Trump has not elaborated a consistent foreign policy vision; his "foreign policy" is a mix of bluster and impulsive moves. With Trump out of the way, the old neo-liberal global imperialist strategy will reassert itself. If the current secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, doesn't get in line with this, I suspect he will be removed.



Wayne, in hindsight, do you think it would have been a good thing if Bill Clinton had been convicted and removed from office? After all, his behavior toward women was as bad as Trump's, his administration was extremely corrupt, and he did lie under oath, leaving aside the gross dishonesty and misogyny of his statement, "I did not have sex with that woman (Monica Lewinsky)." Or do we only give "critical support" to impeachment when it's a Republican president who's getting impeached and we need an excuse to talk to the young (and not-so-young) liberals who have been tricked into lining up behind the Democrats? Are liberals the only people we wish to talk to, or do we

also want to reach some of the Trump voters/supporters, many of whom are much more hostile to both the Democratic and Republican elites than the liberals, even the "socialists"?



Wayne says that the impeachment process exposes government wrong-doing. Compared to the many grotesque things that presidents do (and the US government does) on an ongoing basis (invading countries, staging or backing coups in other countries, imposing sanctions on other countries (thus inflicting hunger and disease on innocent populations), killing civilians as "collateral damage" in drone strikes and other bombing campaigns, subsidizing and supporting giant corporations in the plunder of the natural resources and the exploitation of workers of other countries and in the US), without incurring the risk of impeachment, what government wrong-doing are you referring to? In fact, the impeachment carnival is serving to obscure the many horrible things the US government does on a daily basis while presenting the agents, operatives, and "experts," and leaders of US imperialism as heroes who deserve to be admired and emulated by the entire American people.

Yes, I do think removing an elected president via impeachment is far less democratic than holding another election, even if the electoral process is grossly flawed, as we know it is.

Arguably, one of the only positive things removing Trump would do would be to eliminate (or at least tone down) the racist, sexist, xenophobic rhetoric that is Trump's trade mark. But all this

would do would be to bring back the dishonest cant and blather that is the stock and trade of most US politicians, including and especially Barack Obama. Obama's bullshit ("inspiring") speeches (it always seemed to me to be the same speech, practiced in front of a mirror, with the words more or less interchangeable), combined with his deeds (bailing out the banks, the insurance companies, the Wall Street executives, yet holding nobody accountable for their actions; continuing the eternal [and unwinnable] wars in the Middle East and elsewhere; deporting millions of people [far, far more than Donald Trump], while doing little or nothing to help the millions of people being destroyed by the "grim reaper" of American capitalism, probably did as much to stoke the anger and despair that is consuming so many people in the United States today as anything Trump has done. It's easy, and superficial, to blame it all on Trump and forget what came before. Making Mike Pence, or even a Democrat, president is not going to make things better.

Ron

November 22, 2019

Everyone,

Worth reading for confirming (in reverse order): (1) that the impeachment process is aimed not only at supporting Democrats, but also, and even more specifically, moderate Democrats, and (2) that, as I've maintained before. it is not aimed at actually removing Trump from office but at leveraging damage to his reputation, among moderates, into an election victory.

Chris

November 22, 2019

Everybody,

I thank Chris for that.

To set the record straight, my statement does not make the claim that the Democrats think they will actually remove Trump from office.

It states that the Democrats' goal is to "tarnish" Trump and the entire Republican Party in order to win the presidency, and hopefully the House of Representatives and the Senate, in 2020. See the paragraph that begins "In effect..." I thank Chris for clarifying and emphasizing the point.

Ron

November 22, 2019

Ron and All,

I appreciate Ron's further thoughts on impeachment, including his responses to people who have commented on his motion.

I understand that Ron finds my comments contradictory, and they may be. Nonetheless, I continue to believe that a) impeachment is a fight within the ruling class; and b) we do not and should not support one wing of the ruling class over the other, or one of their political parties over the other; and, c) we should not advocate or support Trump's impeachment, or organizing in any way to make it happen.

When I have discussions with the relatively small group of people, I have political discussions with (mostly teacher colleagues and a small group of friends), I say the following: "I don't object to impeaching Trump. Have at it. He's a despicable guy. But I see the impeachment process as a fight within the ruling elites and their parties over their individual and party influence and position. I don't support either side in this conflict. I also think they are all fundamentally despicable, given what they stand for."

However, I recognize from Ron's most recent comments that we likely have a disagreement over not supporting or advocating Trump's impeachment vs. *opposing* Trump's impeachment. Ron titled his paper, 'why I don't support the impeachment (or conviction) of Donald Trump.' At several points in the paper, he uses words such as 'this is why I don't support the impeachment of Donald Trump.' In fact, Ron opposes Trump's impeachment. (I am not suggesting that Ron has hidden his position, or been misleading; his original position paper and his subsequent comments advanced arguments as to

why impeachment is an inherently undemocratic process.) However, I didn't fully recognize the centrality of this argument to his position paper, and therefore didn't see a lack of *active opposition* to Trump's impeachment as a disagreement with Ron's point of view. I am undecided about this issue, and would like to see further discussion.

Some core arguments in favor of neither supporting or opposing impeachment include:

The entire US electoral process--two parties organized, financed, controlled and in the service of ruling class interests--is a sham. There is little that is truly democratic about this shell game (I say 'little' because the right to vote, and various 'First Amendment freedoms' that are associated with it, are not to be dismissed lightly--more on this below.). Opposing impeachment because it may negate votes in a system that is rigged is more than a bit of picking and choosing which aspects of the system to support. At the same time, supporting impeachment of a specific individual is supporting one element or wing of the ruling elites vs. another.

Some core arguments in favor of opposing impeachment in general, and therefore the impeachment of Trump specifically (these arguments generally follow Ron's line of thought, as I interpret it):

Impeachment is extremely undemocratic. While elections in a bourgeois-democratic state are themselves undemocratic, impeachment is qualitatively more so. We supported a civil rights movement that fought many forms of discrimination, including the systematic denial of the right to vote. The impeachment process is akin to other forms of denial of the right to vote.

To date, I have seen impeachment as a 'neutral function' of the ruling class--similar to its votes on legislation, actions in various spheres, etc. I am open to reconsidering this view, and look forward to further discussion.

Some practical considerations:

Is 'Down with Trump,' a reasonable statement? ('Down with Trump, Down with Capitalism, For a People's Society' is a fuller statement, to

be sure.) Is 'Down with Trump' different from 'Impeach Trump?' There is little question but that people might interpret it in the current climate to be the same thing. Does this implicitly or explicitly put us in a bloc with people who favor impeachment? And, along some of the lines that Wayne has raised, is this a good, or a bad thing? Put another way, is it a bridge to more fully explain our views or a bloc with the Democratic Party. Was the headline 'Down with Nixon! For a Worker's Government!' wrong? If not, where does it fit in the issues raised in this discussion? If so why?

Is the fact that impeachment *may* play into Trump's hands politically a sound reason for one view or another? First, will it or won't it? We don't know. Would our predictions on this determine question determine our attitude toward impeachment? I don't think so.

Is believing that Trump exposes the ruling class for what it is more than 'someone else' might (i.e., someone more 'effective') a reason for picking and choosing, i.e., favoring Trump being left in office? I don't think so. At the same time, I fully agree with Ron's comments that we don't oppose Trump because he is an 'inept,' 'immoral,' other 'unsuitable' leader of US capitalism/imperialism. This view only makes sense if one sees the current system, ruling elites, and their parties and politicians as 'ours.' I see them as 'theirs.'

Finally, a question for Ron: Do you have any personal feeling that you would like to express as to whether you would like to see the continued rule (Presidency) of Trump, in the context of the various outcomes that are likely in the current situation?

I look forward to discussion of any of these questions that others see merits in.

Rod

November 23, 2019

Everybody,

Thanks to those who have contributed to the discussion.

At the moment, I feel very close to the people who have expressed complete neutrality on the question of impeaching and convicting Donald Trump, and I would happily support a resolution that expressed this point of view. Right now, I would describe my personal position as being neutral with a slight tilt in favor of opposing impeachment/conviction, for the reasons I expressed in my statement and have repeated elsewhere, that is, the particularly undemocratic nature of the impeachment process. However, I do not wish this to be taken as giving any kind of political support to Trump, whom I consider to be politically and morally completely revolting.



For whatever it's worth, as far as I can tell (based on recent polls), support for impeachment/conviction among the general electorate seems to be slowly declining, after having topped out at a little over 50% in favor. I believe it is now slightly below 50%. I think most people believe Trump did what he's been accused of but don't care that much about it (they are not outraged) but do not believe it warrants the fuss that's being made over it, let alone removing him from office. I don't think this is likely to change very much in the future; if anything, I expect support for impeachment/conviction to continue to ebb. In particular, I see no sign of a wave of popular revulsion against/support for removing Trump, let alone a mass movement.

Ron

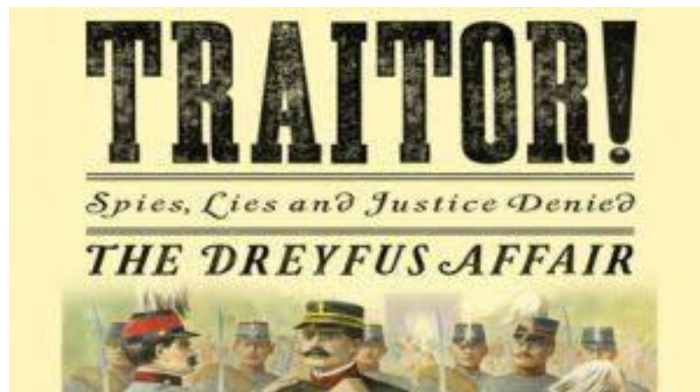
November 24, 2019

Utopians.

(1) For general background: From the beginning I have argued that Trump is something new, different and worse than standard U.S. politics. See "Not My President"

https://www.anarkismo.net/article/29862?search_text=Wayne+Price

But that Trump (or something like Trump) is the result of the political-economic development of capitalism in this period. Therefore, the problem will not be solved by just getting rid of Trump or electing Democrats instead of Republican. An independent, non-electoral, mass movement is needed. (I do not claim great originality for these views.) Given my (and our) limited leverage, there is not much we can do. Certainly, I would not lift a finger to impeach Trump or to vote him out, but I can express my views.



(2) Consider an historical example: the Dreyfus affair. This was a conflict between two wings of the French ruling class, reflected in splits in the state and even in the military. Therefore, the revolutionary Marxists (Guesde) and most anarchists did not support either side. The reformist socialists (Jaures) **did** join with the liberal Dreyfusards. In my opinion (with the advantage of hindsight) both were wrong. Revolutionaries should have participated in the pro-Dreyfus side, supporting the call for the government to admit its error and reinstate the falsely accused (Jewish) officer. But they should have used the issue to attack both the liberals and reactionaries, to attempt to expose the whole state and ruling class.

Obviously, there are many differences between this famous case and our situation. In particular, there developed mass movements on both sides, pro and anti, which needed to be related to, whereas with impeachment now the public is passive (whether pro or con) watching the politicians act (although this would be just as true if there was a real court case, *The People vs. Trump*). But just as it was better for the French working class for Dreyfus to be reinstated into the army (!), so it would be better (on balance) for the U.S. working class if Trump and his anti-democratic moves are condemned one way or another.

(3) No, in hindsight I do not think that it would have been good for the disgusting Clinton to be removed from office. The issue was so phony (lying about sex) that a victory for the Republicans would have been clearly a meaningless partisan event. On the other hand, the forced removal of Nixon was A Good Thing, despite liberal illusions. For a time it expanded the post-60s openness and skepticism toward government.

Wayne

November 25, 2019

Wayne,

Thanks for these thoughts. I hope a rich discussion of the issues raised by Trump and impeachment continues.

I don't find a parallel between opposing the blatantly anti-Semitic campaign against Dreyfus and supporting the impeachment of Trump. I just don't find a parallel. But I'm listening.

My emotional reaction to the Clinton impeachment was like yours, that it was shallow, hollow and fraudulent. And my emotional reaction to the Nixon impeachment was, like yours, 'get him.' And my emotional reaction to the Trump impeachment is 'get him.'

I have, through the discussions within the Utopian milieu, been led to examine these emotional reactions. I find them unsatisfactory as a guideline for a revolutionary anarchist/socialist/libertarian socialist/gezuntentplaat point of view. They reflect a bias toward the 'liberal side of thing.' Nixon's impeachment WAS based on nothing more

than a third-rate burglary—and, yes, a coverup. But the successful offensive against him was based on a combination of the revenge of the (liberal) press and the revenge of the liberals. And the defense of Clinton, his lies to Congress, and his immorality (of which his predatory sexual act was but a glimmer), was led, largely by a defense of the (liberal) press and a defense of the liberals. Trump has trampled on the boundaries of decency (but there is quite a bit of picking and choosing over what is and isn't decency—the British imperialists saw themselves as a very decent lot; the Southern plantocracy similarly). More significantly, Trump has trampled on (and to a degree made a mockery of the boundaries and stability of the system ('bourgeois democratic norms')). But the struggle against Trump embodied by impeachment is not being led one whit by people who want to tear and immoral system down; quite the contrary, it is being orchestrated by people who are fighting to make the norms of (bourgeois-democratic) capitalism more efficient, more effective, more palatable to their own sense of decency. Switching email threads, wasn't a 'sense of decency' (or the lack thereof) the fatal blow to McCarthy in Army/McCarthy hearings?



My overall point is that I think impeachment has to be seen through the same lens as our attitude to the range of bourgeois politics, from a conservative right wing to a progressive left wing—we're not with any wing, even if the term 'left' seems to put us closer to one wing (a problem of our own terminology, I think). As well, our attitude toward 'decency' and a 'healthy functioning of the system' has to be that this is a thoroughly fraudulent framework, and impeachment is window-dressing, at best.

I have suggested in the past that perhaps one could be for impeaching all presidents—bring in the clowns...and then more

clowns. But I have also said that in today's context, and in the broader context of not having had an 'impeach them all' stance at the time of Clinton, raising this now would only serve to obfuscate, giving cover to a pro-Democratic Party tilt. Additionally, it would be in conflict with those in our milieu who believe that impeachment is inherently undemocratic. (This is not my view, but I think it has a great deal of merit.)

It would be interesting to discuss the case of Andrew Johnson. As I see it, Johnson was impeached on more of a technicality than the other cases we are discussing (he violated a contrived rule that kept him from removing a member of his own cabinet.) Yet, as contrived as it was, the underlying issue was completely bound up with questions related to the effects of the Civil War and the character of Reconstruction—no small matters.

Thanks again,

Rod

November 27, 2019

Everybody,

I agree with Wayne that there are times (indeed, many times) when we ought to be, and in fact are, in a bloc with one or another sector of the ruling elite. When Eugene McCarthy and Bobby Kennedy came out against the war in Vietnam in 1968, we were in a bloc with them insofar as we marched in anti-war demonstrations. Similarly, once the northern Democratic Party decided to support the civil rights struggle (then, mostly in the South), we were in a de facto alliance with it. Likewise, in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, there were huge demonstrations against the war, which were supported by virtually the entire liberal media, along with General Wesley Clark and many other members of the elite. I also agree with Wayne that during Dreyfus' ordeal, we should have been in support of Dreyfus, who was framed up on a charge of treason, tried, convicted, publicly humiliated, and sentenced to imprisonment on the hell-hole known as Devil's Island. (Those who saw the film, *Papillon*, might have some impression of the horror that was.) As a captain in the French army, Dreyfus was not a member of

the elite but an innocent victim of French anti-Semitism, national chauvinism, imperialism, and militarism.

None of this affects my attitude toward the impeachment of Donald Trump. It is worth remembering and being very clear about a point that Jack has consistently stressed. This is that the forces behind the impeachment are overwhelmingly motivated by the desire to defend US imperialism (the system of military and political alliances, along with international institutions, that were erected at the end of World War primarily to stop the spread of "Communism," and today, to contain Russia, Iran, North Korea, China), against Trump's efforts to dismantle it, or at least to cut it back. In other words, it's the militarists -- the State and Defense Departments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other top military officers, the leaders and rank-and-file of the intelligence agencies (remember them, the FBI, the CIA, the NSA, the ONI, DARPA, etc.?) -- who are providing most of the muscle, and revealingly, most of the witnesses, behind the impeachment process. It is only on the surface that the impeachment is about Trump's efforts to get "dirt" on Joe Biden or whether Trump is or is not violating the Constitution. That's merely the excuse Trump so conveniently, and stupidly, handed them.



So, aside from the other arguments I and others have raised, do we wish to be in a bloc with those sections of the ruling elite that want to defend US imperialism from an erratic and "irresponsible" member of that elite, someone who managed to get himself elected by hijacking a sector of the electorate that was particularly alienated from and hostile to the elite as a whole (the Democratic and Republican "establishments") for taking care of themselves (the banks, insurance companies, the automobile corporations) while leaving the rest of the country to suffer the ravages of the Great Recession? I do not. In

France, the Dreyfusards were the anti-militarists. Today in the United States, it is the Democratic Party that represents the militarists, who, in contrast to traditional militarists, disguise their war-mongering under the slogans of "peace," "democracy," "human rights," "the rule of law," and the US Constitution.

If there were truly a mass movement in favor of impeaching Trump, one that involved militant demonstrations involving thousands of people, I would be in favor of looking for a way to relate to it, particularly to try to get it to break from the Democratic Party. But I see no such movement today, largely because whatever mass movement that once existed, the so-called "Resistance," has been completely coopted by the Democratic Party (with the active help of such "democratic socialists" as Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the DSA). All that's left, as far as I can see, is an exclusively electoral effort designed to get the Democrats into the presidency and in control of Congress in 2020.

Ron

November 28, 2019

Ron, Wayne and All,

I appreciate this discussion. It has many ins and outs in my view. I have some questions for both Ron and Wayne:

Ron:

1) Was our role and participation in the antiwar movement a bloc with a section of the ruling elite?

Perhaps, but I would describe it differently. Many of us (you included) opposed the war from the get-go, certainly from 1964 forward as it became a major issue, and before that as issues were posed in the Goldwater-Johnson race. Our opposition to the war was centered on opposition to US imperialism/militarism and a recognition of the right to self-determination of the Vietnamese people. Those who rejected 'part of the way with LBJ' did not view the Democratic Party as an ally. Major protests, beginning with the SDS-organized demonstration in 1965,

were independent of any wing of the US ruling class (even while they were rife with illusions in the Stalinist/state capitalist North Vietnamese leadership). As the antiwar movement grew and the war saw no 'light at the end of the tunnel' (and particularly after the January 1968 Tet offensive), a wing of the Democratic Party (led by the more principled McCarthy, and followed, based on McCarthy's success, by the far more opportunist Robert Kennedy) moved into opposition to the war. At about the same time, or shortly thereafter, many of us developed a more explicitly anti-capitalist and revolutionary point of view, and by 1970 or thereabouts, as we joined the IS, also developed an explicitly anti-Stalinist point of view. We continued to oppose the war, of course, in all the ways we could. I don't easily accept that, because we participated in mass protests—under our own banners, and with our own slogans and program—that we were in a bloc with the ruling elite. Yes, the proportion of liberals in the movement increased, and the speakers on the platform were increasingly DP-oriented. But we never gave any support to the Democratic Party—and, in fact, openly criticized and condemned it—and continued to express our revolutionary opposition to US capitalism, and capitalism generally, including state capitalism/bureaucratic collectivism. Yes, we were marching alongside people who did not share our point of view, including liberals and representatives of the Democratic Party. Is this what you mean by a 'bloc' with a wing of the ruling class? If so, I think it is important to see it in its context, an extraordinarily different context than any bloc with the Democratic Party's current, narrow, constitutional, procedural, Congressional 'movement' against Trump.



2) Do we bloc with the ruling class when the issues are to our liking?

This seems to be an interpretation of how you present things (even if it's not your view). Thus, you seem to suggest that we bloc with a

section of the ruling class on opposition to the Vietnam War if that section moves, for whatever immediate and short-term reasons, into opposition to a specific expression of US imperialism. You argue we bloc if the issue is civil rights. And so on. I recognize that you call it a 'de facto bloc' (in terms of the civil rights movement), but it seems important to me to differentiate between a coincidence of interests (a union calls a strike; we support strike; we are in a bloc with the union leadership) and making a bloc with a wing of the ruling class. In the case of Trump, we oppose Trump, as we oppose Obama, Bush and Clinton. Joining with the Democrats (actually not joining, because there is no movement to join, no independent perspective to raise, no mass struggle whatsoever to be a part of) to impeach Trump would only make sense if we said we would join with any section of the ruling class to oppose any other section of the ruling class. This would be far more compromising than politically effective. Would the equation change if, in a given conjuncture, we would be joining with a section of the ruling class that opposed something we opposed? If impeachment of Nixon had begun two years earlier, while the US was waging war in Vietnam, would this have led us to bloc with the Democrats to impeach Nixon?

Wayne, one question:

Do you see Donald Trump as the rough equivalent of slavery, the Klan, the Black Codes, acute anti-Semitism, fascism or Nazism? I ask because all the examples you give of situations that might lead to one form of a bloc or another with one wing of the ruling class or another (the Radical Republicans, for example) occur in these contexts. How is the Trump context parallel?

Thanks again to both of you for the discussion.

Rod

November 28, 2019

All,

Just to weigh in... I am finding the discussion on impeachment very interesting and it has caused me to think more deeply about the issue.. My gut reaction was yea, get rid of this disgusting human being on every level possible, that Trump's overt racism and support for white

supremacy represented something different, poisoning societal "norms." While this is true, that what used to be the fringe is now acceptable, getting rid of Trump would make no difference. I do not believe that all Trump voters are all out racists. I am neutral on his impeachment, let the ruling elites do what they do. I am disappointed that the breaking of norms which so many have watched has led to so few independent movements, instead all opposition just collapsing into the Democratic Party which is just as evil, not a lesser evil. Support for impeachment allies us with the ruling elites. As anarchists, and given where the left is at, I think it is important to issue a statement using Ron's document as a basis for amendment, further clarified and explained by others contributions.

Sally

November 29, 2019

(1) Before responding, let me repeat my opinion: While there are negative aspects to the impeachment of Trump, on balance I think (and say) it would be A Good Thing if (at best) A Limited Thing.

(2) Suppose a bunch of liberals organize a mass demonstration against an ongoing war. Or, as happened in the Vietnam War movement, a bunch of self-styled revolutionary socialists (Communists, Trotskyists, Maoists, etc.) organized such demonstrations (since the Democrats were running the war!) The organizers had varying goals: the liberals wanted to shore up imperialism. The "revolutionary" state socialists (whatever their subjective desires) want to shore up the liberals, who are strengthening their wing of the bourgeoisie (that is, so long as the Communists, Trots, etc. cannot take power and set up their own state capitalism). We, on the other hand, agree with these folks only in a **limited and negative** fashion: we too want the U.S. to stop its war. Otherwise we have completely different goals. We have no intention of hiding our disagreements with the liberals and state socialists, even when working together.

But we will organize a contingent to join the demonstration. Whether or not we officially endorse the demonstration, we are de facto building it. I would not say that we "support" the leadership of the demonstration, although we would be "in solidarity" with the rank and

file demonstrators, who no doubt have all sorts of illusions and mistaken ideas (from our perspective). We would be in a "bloc" with the liberals and/or state socialists, and (in a way) indirectly with the wing of the capitalist class they support. (Similarly, in the example Rod gives, of a strike, we would be in solidarity with the striking workers and defend the union officials--agents of the capitalist class within the union--against the bosses and the state.)



(3) Sally and Rod put their fingers on the key issue. Is the Democratic Party "*just an evil, not a lesser evil*"? I disagree. The Democrats are the lesser evil--but unlike liberals I would insist that **a lesser evil is still an evil**, something to be opposed. Similarly, Rod asks if I "see *Donald Trump as the rough equivalent of*" all sorts of evil things in history.

I do not think that Trump is a fascist as such. Yet he is something new, a further extension of the decay of capitalist politics, to a new depth of depravity. I don't know how this can be denied. (a) His vile personality is obvious to all except his most fanatical followers. We expect leading politicians to be narcissistic and selfish, but Trump is way beyond that and beyond anything that has gone before, at least since Andrew Johnson. Not to mention the corkscrew characters he has surrounded himself with. (b) Not a fascist, he has opened the door for fascists and white nationalists and their movement. They appreciate this. In this he is way out ahead of the rest of the bourgeoisie and politicians. (c) While his anti-Black racism is not quite as open as it could be, his nativism and hatred of immigrants, Latinx, and Muslims is over the top. (His voters may not vote for him *because* of his racism, but neither are they turned off by it apparently.) (d) While the Democrats admitted that

there was a climate crisis and responded in an inadequate fashion, Trump seems committed to do *everything he can* to **increase and speed up** the looming ecological disaster. (d) His attacks on bourgeois democratic rights, in terms of the government and the press, are not just matters within the concerns of the ruling class and their minions. Revolutionaries and the working class need as much democracy and freedom as possible under this system in order to work towards revolution. His attacks on democratic norms are bad for everyone, not just the Democrats and the "mainstream media."

It has been argued that Trump is, if anything, less militaristic than the Democrats, or at least than Hilary was. Whether or not this is true, he has vastly expanded the already bloated military budget, threatened war repeatedly, withdrawn from the Iranian agreement, continued to support the Saudi war in Yemen, given the go-ahead for Turkey's attack on the Kurds, and generally acted in a dangerously unstable fashion internationally. He could easily get us all into a war through stupidity.

(BTW, what I was trying to say about the impeachment of Andrew Johnson by the Radical Republicans was that **this did not apply** much today since it was a different situation, almost a different era, where the main issue was slavery, in which the bourgeoisie played a progressive role for the last time--for a while anyway).

My analysis that Trump is a greater evil, something new in U.S. politics, does **not** lead me to conclude that all will be well if we only get rid of him (through impeachment or elections) or even if we vote out the Republicans. That is the liberal view. But Trump is (as I have argued before) the culmination (so far) of an historical development in which the presidents' quality are ratcheted down. And Trump (and his party) is only the U.S. embodiment of an international movement towards authoritarian, pseudo-populist, nationalist, and nativist politics--in countries with varying political cultures and personalities. Backing the lesser evil will not defeat the greater evil, at least not in the long run. Which is why I will not support the Democrats in the next election, and why I think that impeachment and removal, would be, at best, limited in effects.

Wayne

November 29, 2019

All,

There is one issue regarding the consequences of participating in the electoral system that has not been mentioned: reproductive justice.

In my view, that alone is sufficient reason to vote. But I think I differ from the rest of this group in that regard.

Every society/nation state that has improved the lot of women, has decreased domestic violence and increased reproductive justice, has improved overall justice in that society and decreased inequality. Would not such a society be a starting point for... actual and thorough change?

I agree that Trump is symptom and consequence of the problems with Amerika, and that removing him does not solve those problems. He is the acute manifestation of chronic problems long ignored.

I find it difficult if not impossible to imagine a sufficient number of people in this country rising up to cast out and replace the current system with something... better. The most underrepresented of Americans are also the poorest and poorly educated. They don't know that their needs are not represented in government because they believe what Fox News tells them and Fox News is solidly in support of kleptocracy, kakocracy, those at the top of the capitalist heap, etc.

So, how can such a movement arise? Who would populate it? How would it achieve its ends?

Anyone?

Robin

November 29, 2019

Robin,

You raise two central issues, in my mind:

1) Is there one particular issue that rises to a level that suggests support for the Democrats (which is overwhelmingly what you mean by "participating in the electoral system ") is warranted?

2) Is there any evidence that a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism is on the horizon?

Let's take the first issue first. Reproductive justice is a critical, essential issue. I think that everyone in the Utopian milieu would passionately agree. If we take the issue seriously, then we look at it on a worldwide basis—women everywhere are entitled to reproductive justice, are they not? I could write paragraphs (and I'm sure you could write pages or more) about the denial of reproductive justice to the women of the world. Such denial exists and has long existed, in a variety of ways, many of them heinous beyond description. It is part of the social order, 'the way of things.'

Since, approximately the end of World War I, one country above all has been the enforcer of this order—the USA. At times it has acted as if it occupies the moral high ground (there is no bigger hypocrite than Woodrow Wilson, if we're talking about presidents), and at times it has been the direct agent of the subversion and overthrow of popular, nationalist (and possibly progressive) regimes in favor of ruthless dictatorships that supported US interests. Most of the time, it has used its dollars and military threat to sustain a hierarchical, exploitative, oppressive, oppressive to women, oppressive to women, world order. This is the role of the US on the world stage, it's pretensions and propaganda notwithstanding.

There have been 8 Republican and 8 Democratic Presidents since WWI. Do you seriously argue that a graph would show eight periods of reproductive justice and eight periods of reproductive injustice? Few facts would support this. In fact, the oppression of women—and the oppression of the majority of people worldwide—has been a CONSTANT throughout this period (and before). Any differences in the various US administrations based on political party pale—pale—in relationship to the constants. (And that leaves the side a host of instances where the political party that you favor is, in fact, far worse.)

If I were conversing with women in many, many, many countries of the world, I would be inclined, first, to apologize for the role and policies of

'my' government and country. And I would also apologize for those who support a wing of the ruling class of that government that, at best and at times, gives US women some crumbs while enforcing an obscene oppression of women around the world.

2) Few if any could argue that there is evidence of an imminent revolutionary upsurge, or that the overthrow of capitalism in the immediate offing. Quite the contrary (and unfortunately), almost all opposition to the system today is channeled into the Democratic Party. This is another way of saying that the opposition will be with rendered harmless and useless. (This is what you are for, though not by intention.) But it is important to recognize that periods of change become more, or even decisively more, revolutionary (or reactionary) when least expected or predicted. I could cite numerous historical examples. This does not mean that I am predicting that an anti-capitalist, libertarian socialist/anarchist wave is around the corner. I have no crystal ball, nor do my (elderly) emotions support this. But if you offer me the choice of fighting for change that actually means something to the overwhelming majority of people of the world vs. settling for crumbs from the table that benefit a small layer of the better off, I don't need to think twice about my choice.

Leaving aside 'Don't Think Twice, It's Alright,' I'm with Hattie Carroll.

Rod

November 29, 2019

Wayne and All,

Wayne raises many issues. I will only address many of them here. But first let me say that I very much appreciate the unfolding discussion.

1) Wayne point #1:

I think it's difficult, if not impossible, to predict what's 'a good thing.' Do times of prosperity or times of poverty and want give rise to radical upsurges? Does greater freedom or greater repression give rise to movements of liberation? (Both, or we don't know in the specific, are the correct answers, in my view).

2). Wayne point #2

The anti-Vietnam War demonstration Wayne describes is: a) directed in its thrust to opposition to the Vietnam War; and, b) is organized by forces other than the Democratic Party. Its official slogans, however limited, do not call for support of one wing of the ruling against another. We were free to oppose the Vietnam War on our own basis, and raise any other issues we wished to raise. In the main, we were marching against the Vietnam War, not in support of the Democratic Party. Impeachment supports a specially Democratic Party thrust.

3) Wayne point #3

Wayne writes: "Sally and Rod put their fingers on the key issue. Is the Democratic Party *"just an evil, not a lesser evil"*? I disagree. The Democrats are the lesser evil--but unlike liberals I would insist that **a lesser evil is still an evil**, something to be opposed. Similarly, Rod asks if *"I see Donald Trump as the rough equivalent of"* all sorts of evil things in history."

Leaving aside that I can't find myself in this point, I think Wayne's argument is that the Democratic Party is a lesser evil, but still an evil. I suppose Wayne means by 'lesser evil' that the Democratic Party supports 'progressive positions' more often than does the Republican Party. In many senses, this reverts to point #1. Does the Democratic Party's limited (I deliberately avoid the use of the word 'false') support for 'progressive positions' outweigh the deception that it is actually in support of these positions in a meaningful, thoroughgoing way? Are you sure where the 'lesser evil! lies here?

4) Wayne point #4

Wayne's point here is that Trump is a qualitatively new evil (in contest to previous presidents of either party). His arguments center on the authoritarian tendencies Trump has exhibited and the fact that Trump can be seen as part of a worldwide authoritarian movement. I am not going to work through all the arguments that could be made here, but: Trump exhibits myriad tendencies, most of them narcissistic and, arguably, power-hungry. What norms of US bourgeois democracy have been overthrown? The legislature overthrown? The Supreme Court suspended? Martial law declared? Impeachment convictions defied? Not

remotely. This could happen? Impeachment is needed to prevent it?? Balderdash. If Trump makes one move in any of these directions. it's game over for Trump.

Wayne agrees that impeachment is not the solution. But I question his analysis of the problem.

Rod

December 3, 2019

Hi Rod and all Utopians,

This discussion may have reached its limits, for me anyway. It has helped me to clarify my thinking anyway, and perhaps helped others to think through their opinions. Apparently, I remain a minority of one on this issue, although several people acknowledge a special gut distaste for Trump.

Some last comments: (1) When I say that Trump and his party are the "greater evil," I am not referring to the possible effects of their continuing in power. As Rod says, we cannot see into the future. I mean that they are on the extreme reactionary end of the U.S. political spectrum, the cutting edge of the attack on the working class, People of Color, and the environment. I don't see how this can be denied. My argument with liberals is that I think that the Democrats are also evil, if "lesser," and no solution to the overall problem.

(2) As Rod says, we are not immediately threatened with the overturning of bourgeois-representative democracy, such as it is. That is, fascism is not in power or an immediate threat. And of course, "normal" bourgeois-representative democracy is not very democratic, especially in the U.S. Aside from the electoral college, the gerrymandered House, the Senate with its two Senators for each state no matter the size of the population, the judges for life, the elections which run on money, etc., the system is really the rule of the capitalist minority, a "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie."

Yet I see Trump as pulling the system in an even more authoritarian direction, even aside from his encouragement of fascists and quasi-

fascists which should not be ignored. The impeachment indictment, as limited as it is, will note that he overrode a decision of the legislature (aid to Ukraine), sought to use a foreign power to interfere in the next national election (again), and has refused to accept the oversight of the legislature (non-response to subpoenas). He has repeatedly attacked the free press, the courts, and the legislature (also the "permanent government" of the intelligence agencies, but I don't care about that). Meanwhile the Republicans have used their power to suppress voting, especially from People of Color. All this is clearly a right-ward attack on our limited democratic rights. Again, the Dems are not to be trusted on this, and they have chosen to focus on the least of his crimes. But I think an impeachment and expulsion (which won't happen) would be a bit of a push-back, even if minimal and limited.

Solidarity,

Wayne

December 3, 2019

All,

Here are my thoughts on impeachment:

First of all, Trump is being impeached for weakening "national security" (often this is said directly, sometimes a phrase like "America's interests" is substituted or added) —as in, "By withholding (or delaying) aid to Ukraine, Trump was weakening U.S. national security" or "threatening America's interests". To hammer this point home, the House panel has produced a parade of ranking government officials to testify on how Trump's actions are unprecedented, make their work more difficult, threaten to put national security at risk, etc.

But who are these people, and what is "national security" anyway?

The parade of witnesses at the impeachment hearing are all — or nearly all — high ranking representatives of the national security state, many of whom have served through Democratic and Republican administrations alike. When they speak of "America's interests" they mean U.S. global hegemony. When they say that "national security" is threatened, they mean that the U.S. state machine's ability to play cop

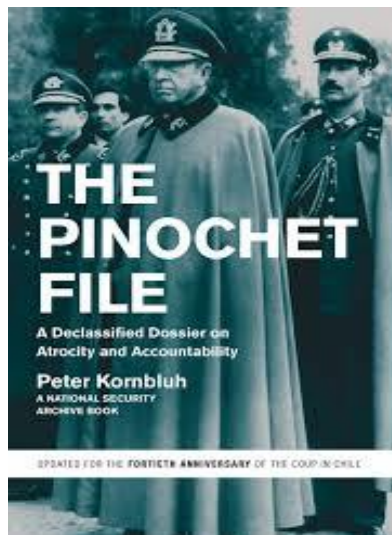
of the world and guarantor of the bond holders' returns (among other returns) is jeopardized by Trump's erratic frivolity and his putting his personal profiteering (and indulging his whims) first. In other words, Trump is making it difficult for the state apparatus — foreign affairs, war ("defense"/military"), surveillance/coups/rigging elections etc. ("intelligence" — CIA/NSA/FBI) to function effectively. In other words: making life difficult for the way in which U.S. imperialism has functioned for decades, and for the state apparatus that has been responsible for — at least — its day to day functioning.



It is my opinion that a major goal of these impeachment hearings is to rehabilitate the image of the national security state and, in doing so, of the global strategy of the U.S. establishment. The "civil servants" responsible for implementing (and in many cases planning) the surveillance of tens (hundreds?) of millions in this country, of detention, torture, assassinations and other murders around the world, of subjugating billions and enforcing the conditions in which the vast majority of people of the world struggle for daily survival — these gray bureaucrats and military martinets are being lionized. Not a word about what their jobs really entail. Instead they are hailed daily in the establishment press for bravely putting 'our national security' ahead of their personal interests, with no mention of what their jobs really entail, nor of the history of the US national security state."

Isn't this what we should be stressing? Isn't this what we should be stressing as opponents of statism, of state centralism, etc.? They are glorifying the imperial state, its ranking aides and the core of that state. We ought to be saying who these people are who are being hailed in the press: former heads of the secret police (domestic and international);

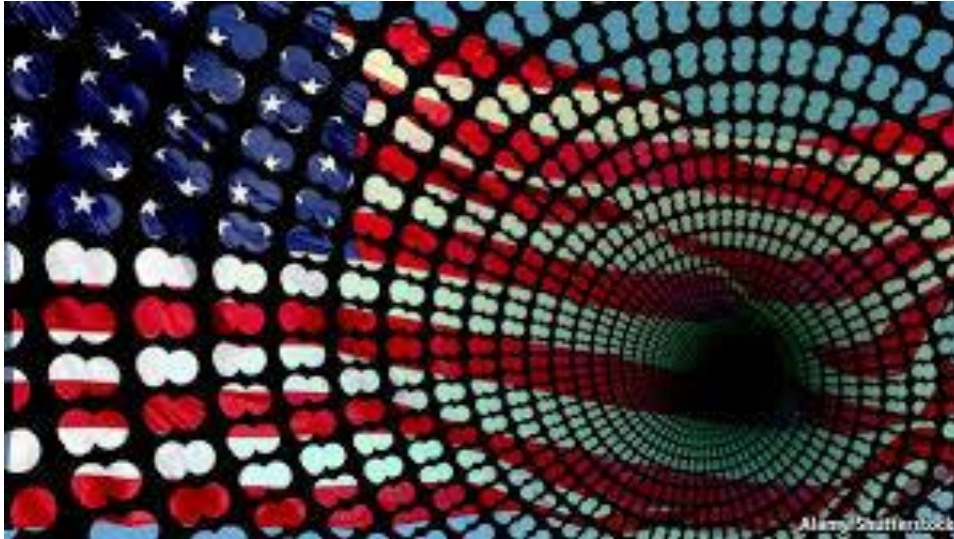
ranking generals and admirals who rained death); state department pros who assiduously worked to provide lists of civilians to detain, torture, and / or kill (by drones or otherwise). Who planned and participated in coups, assassinations, etc. Who put the interests of corporations /capital first (America's interest; national security).



Of course, Trump is not opposed to U.S. imperialism. He's all for it, but wants to get his cut first and his family's cut second. And he needs to play to his base, many / most of whom are opposed to the U.S. establishment, many for worse reasons. But not all. There are millions of "Obama/Trump" voters and "Trump/Sanders" supporters. They blame the policies of the U.S. state establishment for the widening inequality and demographic deindustrialization that they believe has stolen their jobs, their homes, and their children's' futures. They may not have degrees from prestigious universities, but they are not stupid and they can see for themselves that the impeachment hearings — and the mainstream media spin around them — are all about rehabilitating that establishment and its state bureaucrats, and indeed lionizing them as heroes.

So now that we've gone over what is being emphasized in and by the impeachment hearings, let's briefly look at what isn't. Here's a sample of what Trump isn't charged with: gross racism — calling Mexicans rapists, calling Muslims terrorists, winking at violent anti-Semitism, disgusting misogyny, gutting environmental regulations. There's no question that Trump is an awful human being. But the question is: How do we approach this impeachment process that is all about rehabilitating

the image of U.S. imperialism and making those who have implemented it for decades into heroes? It's clear to me that we should be focusing on the opportunity this gives us to discuss what the U.S. state is, what it has been, and how U.S. imperialism has been a bipartisan project. To be clear: I surely do not want to side with Trump, but I surely do not want to side with the U.S. national security state nor support the rehabilitation of its strategy for global hegemony.



I'll close with this: In Ron's document — the one that started this discussion — he emphasized that the impeachment hearings are really part of the 2020 electoral campaign. The Democrats are organizing this fight, but they are being supported by elements of the "center/right" establishment Republicans. For example, lifelong Republican power George Shultz (Reagan's Secretary of State, long time CEO of construction multinational Bechtel) was quoted in the November 24 **San Francisco Chronicle** as saying "We have to beat Trump", adding that his focus wasn't convicting him via the impeachment process but beating him in the 2020 elections. Shultz, the consummate establishment insider, wants Trump out because he's getting in the way of the U.S. establishment's strategy for maintaining its global hegemony.

Jack

December 5, 2019

Hi Jack and all,

I agree completely with Jack's analysis of the Democrats and their goals in the impeachment. He says it very well. However, I feel that he underestimates the Republicans and their rightward goals. But as I wrote, I do not want to, or feel up to, discuss this further. (This is a personal statement, not an effort to stop anyone else from further discussion.)

Solidarity,

Wayne

Notes on the Syrian Revolution



A Presentation by Bill B. (Utopian Gathering, July 2019)

Despite 200-300,000 people killed and millions more displaced; despite whole cities bombed into ruins; and contrary to assertions in the corporate media and anarchist outlets like Crimethinc, the Syrian Revolution is still alive, though very, very weak. Among other reports, the one by Leila al-Shami recently reposted here, confirms this. What follows is a write-up of a presentation I made on the subject at the Utopian conference in July. I trust that it will provide a useful background. I don't deal with recent events in the northern part of the country; issues in that area are covered in 'It's Going Down (A Rabbit Hole in Rojava)', also on the Utopian website.

The revolution began in 2011 during the Arab Spring, after mass mobilizations had toppled the governments of Tunisia and Egypt, and almost did the same in Bahrain. Those revolts appeared as sudden events in the Western corporate media, but their roots traced back a long time. Syria's was the same.

Those roots could go back at least to the Ottomans, but I'll start with Hafez al-Assad, Bashar's father, who seized power in a 1970 coup. He proceeded to build an extremely repressive state based on patronage and crony capitalism. Its pillars were the state apparatus itself; the military; merchants and other business; and the Ba'ath Party, which itself had seized power in a 1963 coup but was neutered by the Assad family.

Before Hafez, the Ba'aths, inspired by the Soviet model, had nationalized much of the economy. Afterward, however, Hafez slowly turned over sections to private interests that were closely connected to him and his family. This process greatly accelerated under son Bashar, who after succeeding his father in 2000, introduced the International Monetary Fund's and World Bank's neoliberal programs. The result was a vast increase in economic inequality as merchants and capitalists connected to the regime made fortunes while the living standards of ordinary Syrians stagnated. In the countryside well-connected investors, businessmen and even some of the pre-nationalization landlords took over huge swaths of the countryside to the detriment of hundreds of thousands of peasants. Between 2002 and 2008 40% of them—some 600,000 people—were forced from the land.



Adding to the peasants' misery were the effects of global warming. Between 2007 and 2009 Syria was hit by a drought so severe that international agencies were called in to distribute food to a million starving peasants while 300,000 were driven to the cities.

During Hafez's rule, the regime succeeded in co-opting Syria's numerous religious minorities; in particular, the Alawis to which his own

family belonged. But it also neutralized large sections of the majority Sunnis, who had dominated Syrian society before the Assads. One way the Assads did this was through a program of gradual Islamic revival; in particular, letting Islamic charities grow to fill the economic and social gaps caused by the regime's neoliberalism.

However, one minority which Assad didn't co-opt were the Kurds, tens of thousands of whom had been stripped of their citizenship in 1962 and were unable to regain it until after the revolution began. Nevertheless, Assad did use the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) as a proxy to attack Turkey, permitting the group in 1983 to establish camps on Syrian soil to fight its guerilla war over the border. This was the beginning of a long relationship between the Assad regime and the PKK.



The uprising that began in 2011 after successful revolts in Tunisia and Egypt is important to anarchists because it showed signs of genuine dual power, at least in embryonic form. (This is not to be confused with the 'dual power' strategy of many anarchists, which is more about building alternative institutions or 'organizing' community groups rather than putting forth a perspective of revolutionary democratic mass action). Indeed, the Local Coordination Committees (LCC's) which sprang up throughout the country to organize and coordinate the struggle were originally popularized by a Syrian anarchist, Omar Aziz (murdered by the regime in 2013). Partly as a result hundreds of thousands of Syrians repeatedly took to the streets, struck, occupied and built blockades. And in a society checkerboarded with religious sects and other minorities, the demonstrators for the most part made a conscious effort to unite them all. One of the revolt's most popular chants was, 'One, one, one, the Syrian people are one!'.

The demonstrations began with demands for police accountability and political reforms, but quickly escalated to the downfall of the regime after Assad refused to concede anything and began shooting the marchers. Thus, began the militarization of the struggle and the bloody repression that continues to this day.

However, despite defeats and defections, significant sections of Syrian society continued to support Assad. These included obviously most of the army, security services and civilian state apparatus, but also the Alawi and a large portion of the Sunni and Christian religious hierarchies, and most of the business sector.

In addition to shelling, bombing, assassinations, arrests and disappearances, the regime pursued a policy of religious division. For example, early in the revolt in a gesture badly misinterpreted by the international media, Assad announced the release of thousands of 'political prisoners.' However, these were not 'normal' oppositionists, but Islamic fundamentalists who quickly went to work attacking the secular groups in the revolt while providing cover for Assad's story that he was defending the country against Islamist extremism.

In addition, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey aided the fundamentalists. All three states shipped in weapons, and Turkey let hundreds of veteran Islamist fighters freely cross its border with Syria. In addition, Daesh (ISIS), with a wink and nod from Assad, took over hundreds of square miles of Syrian territory. As a result, the secular revolutionaries and also the defectors who formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA) gradually lost ground to the better-equipped and better-trained sectarian extremists.

While the newly formed LCC's and similar groups formed the grassroots civilian resistance to the regime, many of the traditional opposition parties and the Muslim Brotherhood came together in Istanbul to form the Syrian National Council (SNC) and, later, the National Coalition of Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (known as 'the Coalition'—these were the so-called 'moderate' Syrians so much ballyhooed in Washington at the time). The Coalition pretended to be the legitimate opposition, but it was politically dead from the beginning. It kept its offices in Turkey away from the LCC's and other on-the-ground organizations within Syria; and it was riven by religious, personal and other divisions fomented by forces outside Syria.

Perhaps the most influential of those outside forces was the Turkish state. It had long opposed Assad. It also had conducted decades of genocidal campaigns against the Kurds in Turkey. This ethnic oppression carried over into the Coalition. At the beginning of the uprising masses of Kurds in Syria had marched against the regime. The PKK and its affiliate, the PYD, although significant, were at best passive toward Assad. They were politically isolated. However, in one of the tragedies of the Revolution, the Arab nationalist, traditionalist and bourgeois SNC and Coalition squeezed out the Kurdish representatives (and sidelined the women and the LCC's). This laid the tracks for the PKK/PYD to make a deal with Assad in 2012 to withdraw his troops from Kurdish areas, letting the PKK/PYD revive and begin repressing anti-Assad activists itself. Subsequently the PKK/PYD took over the entire Kurdish area, now known as Rojava, and began the 'social experiment' called 'democratic confederalism' now so highly touted by anarchists who should know better.



The Syrian Revolution has raised a number of important questions. For example, the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change, a coalition of traditional opposition parties within Syria, came together around non-violence, no foreign intervention and religious sectarianism. At the same time the SNC in Istanbul aided the FSA and was neutral toward foreign intervention. Within the LCC's and other grassroots groups, non-violence remained an issue literally for years. Also, while the LCC's exhibited characteristics of incipient dual power, they were never well-coordinated and their major demand was limited to a parliamentary democracy. Later, as the struggle deepened, the land question arose but only in a limited fashion.

Regarding my own views, I don't think the Revolution had any choice except to take up arms after Assad began massacring, bombing and gassing people. I also believe that intervention by foreign states (like the U.S. or NATO countries) would have come to no good end. One only can look at what foreign intervention by Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Iran and Israel already has done. As to the LCC's, my view would be to fight for their political independence with a perspective of them becoming the basic bodies of a revolutionary cooperative commonwealth.



Who We Are

(Originally printed in *Utopian* 2001. Revised 2016. Rev. 2019.)



To look for Utopia means providing a vision for the future – of a world worth living in, of a life beyond what people settle for as experience clouds their hopes. It means insisting that hope is real, counting on human potential and dreams.

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Utopians do not accept “what is” as “what must be.” We see potential for freedom even in the hardest of apparent reality. Within our oppressive society are forces for hope, freedom, and human solidarity, possibilities pressing toward a self-managed, cooperative commonwealth. We don’t know if these forces will win out; we see them as hopes, as moral norms by which to judge society today, as challenges to all of us to act in such a way as to realize a fully human community.

We can describe some of these possibilities: worldwide opposition to the imperialist domination of the global economy; struggles against dictatorship in China, Syria, Egypt, and Venezuela; fights for national liberation in Ukraine, Kurdistan, Palestine, and China (including those by Uighurs and by Tibetans); cultural movements for the defense and recovery of indigenous languages and histories; struggles throughout the world to guarantee women full sovereignty as a right, not a privilege, dismantling the patriarchal systems that institutionalize the domination and devaluation of women by men; changes in society’s acceptance of LGBTQ people and people with disabilities; and struggles against racism, for the rights of people of color, and for the rights of immigrants. There will — we hope — be similar utopian phases ahead in mass movements in the U.S.

But beyond these specifics, we are talking about something familiar to everyone, although difficult to get a handle on. In small ways, every

day, people live by cooperation, not competition. Filling in for a co-worker, caring for an old woman upstairs, helping out at AA meetings, donating and working for disaster relief — people know how to live cooperatively on a small scale. What we don't know, and what no one has found a blueprint for, is how to live cooperatively on a national and international scale, or even on the scale of a mass political movement. Nobody has described how the society we want will look, or how to get it, though we know what it will be: a society where people are free to be good, a society based on cooperation and peace, not dominance and aggression.

This is a good time to be publishing a journal dedicated to Utopianism, revolutionary socialism, and anarchism. Struggles of the red state teachers; activism in the Black and Latinx communities, and of women, lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and queer people, indigenous people, environmentalists, and people with disabilities — these, we think, are all harbingers of another upsurge coming.

But these are perilous times as well. Destructive effects of climate change are already being felt. They will get far worse. They demonstrate capitalism's disregard for life — human and otherwise — and for the ecosystem. It is a graphic illustration of the need to reorganize the way in which we (human beings) relate to and organize the world around us, as well as our relations with one another, with other species, and with the entire ecosystem.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the fact that China's Communist political dictatorship is state-controlled capitalism (with gross inequality) have done more than just discredit authoritarian Marxism. They have also discredited, for many, the very idea of changing society fundamentally. Instead, we see many turning in desperation to the demagogues of the right, while others look to the statist reformists of the social democratic left.

Meanwhile, the fabric of the post-World War II world system, already fraying, is unraveling at its core, the U.S. and Europe. Rising anger at the gross inequality and assault on living standards of the majority has resulted in the rise of right-wing movements throughout Europe and the U.S. Racist, anti-immigrant authoritarians have ridden this anger to electoral victory in the U.S., Italy, Hungary, Austria, and Turkey, to name a few.

In the U.S. and the UK, social democrats have also gained adherents (Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in the U.S.; Jeremy Corbyn in the UK). But these “democratic socialists” and “progressives” think that capitalism can be reformed, its rough edges smoothed. Their prescription to cure the predations of neoliberal privatization is to increase the scope and authority of the state, with their ideal being something resembling Scandinavian “socialism” (contemporary Denmark; Sweden of the 1960s) and/or FDR’s New Deal. So in the U.S. the leading demand is “single payer health care” — with no discussion of how this would not be a top-down, bureaucratic monstrosity, or how it would not come at the expense of another program.

But the cure for privatization is not to increase the power and authority of the state (be it by regulation, taxation, or nationalization) but to dismantle the state (the standing army and the cops; the nightmare bureaucracies) and to reorganize society, cooperatively and democratically from the bottom up, locally based and with emphasis on mutual aid. We are confident that new mass movements from below will rise again, in a massive surge, as did Occupy in 2011. And we hope and anticipate that, like Occupy (in its initial stages, at least), these movements will reject reformism and statism.

Another highly problematic phenomenon has been the rise of Islamist/Jihadist religious fanaticism, which exploits radical hopes for escape from western domination to build mass support for a tyrannical, socially regressive, and exceptionally brutal war against both non-Muslims and the great majority of Muslims. This development is partly a response to the collapse of secular anti-imperialism in Africa, the Arab world, and Asia in the past fifty years, and partly to continuing European/North American domination of these areas, now made worse by an anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim backlash in Europe and the United States. The road forward lies in rebuilding a democratic, radical anti-imperialism, but how this may occur we don’t know.

Moreover, with a few exceptions, revolutionary anarchist and libertarian socialist groups remain small and their influence limited. Various kinds of reformism and Marxism still attract radical-minded people. Indeed, the support for Bernie Sanders in the 2016 Democratic Party primaries and the growth of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) since the

November 2016 elections show that various strains of left statism, reformist and Marxist, still attract radically minded people. Reformism and Marxism, and their corresponding movements, accept the state, capital-labor relations, conventional technology, and political authoritarianism. Nevertheless, despite the dominance of reformists and statistes in the world of the organized left, over the past two decades the influence of anarchists and libertarian socialists has clearly increased (as was seen in the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization as well as the Occupy movement).

It is important to continue to work for freedom and to speak of utopia. This racist, sexist, and authoritarian society has not developed any new charms. It remains exploitative and unstable, threatening economic collapse and environmental destruction. It wages war around the globe, while nuclear weapons still exist and even spread. Even at its best — most stable and peaceful — it provides a way of life that should be intolerable: a life of often meaningless work and overwork; hatred and oppression within the family, violence from the authorities; the continuing risk of sudden violent death for LGBTQ people, women, and Black people; the threat of deportation of undocumented immigrants. The major reforms of the last period of social struggle, in the 1960s, while changing much, left African Americans and other Black and brown populations in the U.S. and around the world facing exclusion and daily police (state) violence, literally without effective rights to life. The videos we see every day (in which new technology makes visible what has always been going on) reveal, like sheet lightning, the reality of the system we live under. For this society, from its inception, to call itself “democracy” is a slap in the face of language.

This paradoxical situation — a society in obvious decay but without a mass movement to challenge it fundamentally — is, we hope, coming to an end. As new movements develop, liberal-reform and Marxist ideas will show new life, but so will utopian and libertarian ideas. We work with this in mind. We have to do what was not done during the last period of really radical social struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. Among other things, revolutionary anarchist and libertarian socialist theory very much needs further development, including its critique of Marxism, and its ideas about how to relate to mass struggles, democratic and socialist theory, and popular culture. And we need to reinvigorate the ideals of anarchism/libertarian socialism and the threads in today’s world that

may, if we can find them and follow them, lead to a future worth dying for and living in.

Based on all of the above, we state a few basic principles:

We fight for reforms, but we do not believe that capitalism can be reformed or transformed into socialism via reformism or reliance on the state, be that reliance via nationalization, parliamentarism, a social democratic New Deal, or any such statist scheme.

We are opposed to social democracy, electoralism, and the capitalist parties. Consequently, we are categorically opposed to supporting Republican or Democratic candidates (including “insurgent” Democrats such as Sanders, Warren, and Ocasio-Cortez), and third parties.

We are not pacifists. We are internationalists who, as well, support struggles for national liberation. We oppose neoliberal globalization, but also oppose the virulent racism and scapegoating being directed at immigrants, at women, at Black and brown people, at LGBTQ people, at religious and ethnic minorities. We are for fully open borders.

We support and encourage workers to organize. Organizing may take place outside the unions, inside the unions, or both inside and outside, depending on current situations and future developments. And organizing should not be limited to workplace issues, but should embrace broader social, environmental, and community concerns as well.

We are anarchists and libertarian socialists. We seek collaboration with all who share our core values, including those who consider themselves libertarian Marxists, although our view — of which we hope to convince them — is that Marx, far from being a libertarian, was an authoritarian centralist and statist.

This future, we state clearly, is an ideal, not a certainty. The lure of Marxism, for many, has been its promise that a new world is objectively determined and inevitable. This idea is not only wrong, it is elitist and brutal. If the new society is inevitable, then those who are for it will feel free to shoot or imprison everyone who stands in their way. That is the key to Marxism’s development from utopia to dictatorship, which everyone except Marxists is aware of. Nor do we believe in an inevitable

collapse of the present system — capitalism may be able to continue to push its way from crisis to crisis at the usual cost in broken lives and destroyed hopes.

We fight all oppression under capitalism and urge all oppressed people to work in a common struggle to end their own oppression and that of their sisters and brothers.

We believe people have to make ethical choices about whether to accept life as it is or to struggle for a new society, and then about whether the society they are for will be democratic or authoritarian. The only key to the future is a moral determination to get there, a dream of a world in which those who were obscure to one another will one day walk together. We do not know where this key may be found, but we know the only way to find it is to search for it.

That is who we are.
