

Why Bernie Loses

by G. Murphy Donovan (June 2016)

“The good is oft entered with their bones.” – WS, *Julius Caesar*



Monday morning quarterbacks are like book critics, they often confuse bestsellers with literature. So it is with politics. We often have trouble distinguishing entertainment from culture. 2016 is one of those years, where interesting and entertaining are well met. In the era of so-called “reality” shows, circus politics is probably just right for the times. After all, given all the [hours](#) of the day now spent in the virtual world or watching television, reality may not be that important anyway for many Americans. Fantasy football you say? Why not fantasy politics?

Most of the usual suspects, boring politicians, have fallen away by now and we are left with: a flamboyant parvenu who successfully hijacked a major political party; a spouse trying to run on her aging plumbing; and an animated, geriatric socialist from Brooklyn who found tenure and a bully pulpit in a Marxist corner of New England.

Of the three, Bernie Sanders might be the most interesting. He’s Ben, Jerry, and Trotsky in a bundle. Not the most virtuous or deserving, yet surely the most interesting.

Sanders is fascinating because he is the embodiment of Yankee confutation. If contradictions were hogs, Bernie would be Smithfield. If irony were Spam in a can, Sanders would be Hormel. Withal, the erstwhile mayor of Burlington is a branding success precisely because he is the mystery meat of modern politics. Say what you will about Clinton’s mendacity or Trump’s shape shifting, Sanders is the master of civic legerdemain, the kind of political magic that flies under the radar like a pot pilot on true north.

Bernie has never held any job in the private sector worth mentioning. He has migrated from small elected office to large and now seeks the bully pulpit. In many ways, Sanders is the very model of a social democrat, a career nanny.

Bernie's appeal might best be explained, in part, by those children, that millennial demographic, a cake-and-eat-it nonpareil if ever there were one. Millennials are often maligned as the "[me](#)" generation. A more accurate description might be "me two." If you square entitlement, the product must be a superlative.

Socialism is like that. Ask not what you can do for your country, but rather ask what your parents, your neighbor, your boss, your dog, or your government can do for you.

In this, Sanders is an anorexic Saint Nicholas. If you didn't get enough from Bill and Barack, Bernie promises more: free lunch, free housing, free health care, free education, free STDs, and literal freedom if you're a felon. Never mind that free lunches end up in the garbage or that public housing morphs into ghettos or that a parolee might end up in your face. It's the adjective that matters. Any goodie preceded by "free" is a kind of vote magnet. Alas, expecting Uncle Sam to be a wholesome provider is a little like hoping the box tastes better than the bon bons.

Sanders and millennials are peas in a pod. Both are joiners, a world view in search of acceptance, succor, and security. The virtual world of social networks is one where tweets, downloads, instagrams, pins, up votes, joining, and "likes" are the vocabulary of dependency and approval. Indeed, in a world of [musterbators](#), belonging is addictive.

The word "like" infests every millennial vocabulary like fleas: noun, verb, conjunction, punctuation, expletive – and shorthand for clueless. Like, what's not to like about like?

When Bernie Sanders talks about free stuff, the adjective is code for other people's money, your money if you pay taxes. When he talks about "revolution," he actually means bigger is better, better free stuff. Foxtrot the budget and the taxpayer.

The Sander's routine thrives on such head fakes and slights of hand. Take the "small [donors](#)" shibboleth. He milks the man-child demographic that insists on low interest student loans; the same debtors that expect the taxpayer or lender to then pay off frivolous student debt. Concurrently, young barnacles still have enough pocket change to finance Bernie's campaign. Irony competes with the

absurd in the Sanders' collective.

Big government, Bernie Sanders, and the Peter Pans are joined in a circle jerk, united by pervasive cultural puberty and all the absurdities of a dependent constituency that has come to believe that "free lunch" is the new normal.

More than any other generation, Millennials are used to getting their way. When they don't get their way, like children, public riot is the predictable response. "Occupy Wall Street" was just a preview. Between the criminal left and [punk](#) politics, mayhem in the streets is likely to be a feature of the 2016 general election.

Still, the Republican front runner is the ideal foil for Sanders. Donald Trump is the first candidate since FDR to question the federal sugar teat; foreign aid, DOD boondoggles, "humanitarian" interventions, and the host of domestic programs that throw money, not solutions, at social pathology. Dependents, lobbyists, contractors, non-profits, and NGOs across the political spectrum are understandably suicidal over Trump.

Nevertheless, Sanders is still a likable, and ironically, a telegenic guy; geriatric empathy in a rumpled Sears Roebuck suit. With years of practice, his big government rap comes across as the voice of reason. He's good on his feet too, oozing public sincerity like a socialist saint.

All of the foregoing may explain why Sanders is a success, but none of it explains why he will not be victorious. In short, Bernie may suffer from a lost soul's dilemma; too old too soon, too smart too late – or to put a finer point on it, too tough too late.

Sanders forgot his urban roots where politics is a contact sport. Bernie forgot Brooklyn where politics is a blood sport. Or maybe in a senior moment, he just forgot.

Just as Trump hijacked the Republican Party, Sanders blew a golden chance to seize the Democrat Party. He failed because he got tough with Hillary too late. He failed to exploit Mrs. Clinton's Achilles Heel. Bernie's socialism with a happy face gave the Clintons a pass on integrity and [trust](#). Trump, in contrast, never pulled his best punches to play the nice guy.

Just as the 21st Century began as the era of perpetual adolescence, the presidential election of 2016 might be the year of the Peter Pan counter-revolution; the year that independent, and angry, adults stormed the ship of state and took the bridge again.

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