

'Centrist Soft-Liberal Feminism' - Presidentialising Hillary Clinton

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A Guardian [piece](#) last month described: 'How September 11 revealed the real Hillary Clinton.'

While even supporters recognise that Clinton's campaign has been notably cold, passionless and bereft of conviction, 'The Clinton who emerges from the WNYC [New York Public Radio] tapes is passionate, raw and unrestrained.'

The Guardian quotes sources who reveal how Clinton 'showed herself to be a fighter', demonstrating a 'personal care' that 'made a profound impression'. She was 'kind and gentle', the 'most vivid memory' being of 'the senator's eyes'. Her behaviour was 'the mark of somebody who is sincere, who you want on your side'. All in all, 'she came across as an effective and empathetic leader'. Tragically, the public has seen little of this:

'I regret that sometimes she doesn't come across well in front of a crowd as people don't know her as so many of us do.'

This presidentialising of Clinton is a key, structural function of 'left-liberal' media like the Guardian, the Observer, the Independent and the BBC. Establishment candidates like Bill Clinton, Obama, and now Hillary Clinton are presented as awesomely benevolent, brave and wise. Even George W. Bush – derided as a buffoon both before and after he held office – was depicted as a calmly authoritative humanitarian. An ITN news report talked of Bush 'losing patience' with the president of crisis-hit Haiti. (ITN, 10:15 News, February 28, 2004) This was Bush as benign father figure, fierce in his determination to help the poor.

Propaganda of this kind exploits the human tendency to revere authority and celebrity. If leaders have an aura of benevolence, when their turn comes to 'intervene' with great violence in far-flung countries, few will be willing to question their good intentions.

In our time, this benevolence is often said to be indicated by a leader's alleged passion for gender and sexual rights. Why 'alleged'? Machiavelli explained:

'It is not essential... that a Prince should have all the good qualities which I have enumerated above, but it is most essential that he should seem to have them...' (Nicolò Machiavelli, 'The Prince,' 1513, Dover publications, 1992, p.46, our emphasis)

Gender and sexual rights are favoured because they can be presented as almost apolitical:

a state-corporate executive can believe in gay marriage *and* bomb Iraq to smithereens; she can smash whole countries with bombing, invasion and ethnic cleansing, *and* support equality for women.

Writing on Clinton in June, senior Guardian columnist Polly Toynbee [commented](#):

'This is a time to celebrate. At last, a woman leads a major US party to fight for the presidency.'

Moreover:

'Clinton is not some token woman who has inched into place by offending no one. All her life she has fought the feminist cause...'

Clinton, indeed, is 'a feminist with a long track record of standing up for the right causes'.

In September, Laurie Penny, contributing editor to the New Statesman, [backed](#) Clinton 'because she is a woman and a feminist, even if her feminism is unlike my own'. For Penny, Clinton is not just 'a proud feminist woman', she is a representative of something called 'centrist soft-liberal feminism'; a claim to which we will return.

Toynbee argued that: 'Rarely has any candidate so deserved their place.' Penny agreed:

'The presidency of the United States does not belong by right to anyone... If it did, though, it would belong to Hillary Clinton.'

Toynbee asked readers to carefully inspect their minds for traces of hidden gender bias:

'If you are naturally left of centre, especially if you are a woman, yet you find you instinctively dislike her, ask yourself why.'

Penny did the same:

'If you would truly prefer a Trump presidency to this... then you may want to take a look in the mirror and ask yourself, truly, if you might not be a little bit sexist.'

Toynbee emphasised Clinton's credentials:

'if she wins, what an added bonus that, as the first woman to enter the White House, she will also step through the door as by far the most qualified and experienced arrival there for generations... this first woman would also be the safest pair of hands in decades'.

So did Penny, noting that Clinton has 'a career whose length and breadth would make her the most qualified presidential candidate in history'.

The Causes For Celebration

These, then, are the four causes for celebration: Clinton is 1) a woman, 2) a 'feminist' with 3) 'a long track record of standing up for the right causes', and 4) she would be 'the safest pair of hands in decades'.

And yet Toynbee is dismayed by a curious lack of enthusiasm:

'But among too many who should know better, her success has been greeted with a jaundiced yawn - or outright contempt... Why so fierce, so unreasonable, so vitriolic?'

Why indeed? Some explanations were proposed:

'she's not as radical as Sanders; she is not a natural rabble-rouser at rallies; she is the wife of a past president; she's called "robotic" in her careful choice of words; and as a flesh-presser she warms the cockles of few hearts. After Barack Obama's effortless charm and sublime speech-making, she is bound to seem leaden-footed in comparison.'

Really, one could hardly find a better example of a senior journalist viewing the world through a Guardian lens that filters out almost everything that matters.

Of course it is true that Clinton's success would encourage women facing prejudice and inequality around the world; notably, white, mega-rich, American women belonging to great political dynasties. But what of the claims that she is a 'feminist' who has 'a long track record of standing up for the right causes' and would be 'the safest pair of hands in decades'.

The ultimate test of the last claim is the developing 'climate emergency', by far the most serious and immediate threat of our time, which could literally [end human life](#) on this planet in the next few decades. Naomi Klein [commented](#):

'Hillary Clinton's campaign... has received a lot of money from the employees and registered lobbyists of fossil-fuel companies. There's the much-cited \$4.5 million that Greenpeace calculated, which includes bundling by lobbyists.'

And:

'Then there's all the cash that fossil-fuel companies have directly pumped into the Clinton Foundation. In recent years, Exxon, Shell, ConocoPhillips, and Chevron have all contributed to the foundation.'

Last year, IB Times [reported](#):

'At the same time that Clinton's State Department was lauding Colombia's human rights record, her family was forging a financial relationship with Pacific Rubiales, the sprawling Canadian petroleum company at the center of Colombia's labor strife. The Clintons were also developing commercial ties with

the oil giant's founder, Canadian financier Frank Giustra, who now occupies a seat on the board of the Clinton Foundation, the family's global philanthropic empire.

'The details of these financial dealings remain murky, but this much is clear: After millions of dollars were pledged by the oil company to the Clinton Foundation – supplemented by millions more from Giustra himself – Secretary Clinton abruptly changed her position on the controversial U.S.-Colombia trade pact. Having opposed the deal as a bad one for labor rights back when she was a presidential candidate in 2008, she now promoted it, calling it “strongly in the interests of both Colombia and the United States.”’

Bill Moyers [added](#) some detail:

'Between 2009 and 2014, Clinton's list of top 20 donors starts out with Citigroup and includes JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, whose chief Lloyd Blankfein has invested in Clinton's son-in-law's boutique hedge fund... They're also among the deep-pocket outfits that paid for speeches and appearances by Hillary or Bill Clinton to the tune of more than \$125 million since they left the White House in 2001.'

Klein strongly emphasised the point that matters on Clinton:

'[T]aking on powerful corporations goes against her entire worldview, against everything she's built, and everything she stands for'. (Our emphasis)

This is very, very bad news; in fact, it is a disaster that will affect every single person on this planet – you, us, your children, our children. Why? Klein concluded:

'If the next president wastes any more time with these schemes, the climate clock will run out, plain and simple. If we're to have any hope of avoiding catastrophe, action needs to be unprecedented in its speed and scope.'

The next US president will be Clinton or Trump (a self-declared climate change denier), which suggests that we indeed, now, do not have any hope of avoiding catastrophe.

The Candidate Of The Military-Industrial Complex

What about the problem of Perpetual War, the endless US-UK 'interventions' that have created millions of corpses and refugees around the planet? David Sirota [wrote](#):

'Under Clinton's leadership, the State Department approved \$165 billion worth of commercial arms sales to 20 nations whose governments have given money to the Clinton Foundation.'

Jeffrey Sachs [added](#):

'There's no doubt that Hillary is the candidate of Wall Street. Even more dangerous, though, is that she is the candidate of the military-industrial complex.'

Moreover:

'Hillary was... a staunch supporter of the Iraq War, which has cost the US trillions of dollars, thousands of lives, and done more to create ISIS and Middle East instability than any other single decision of modern foreign policy.'

Immediately prior to the 1999 war on Serbia, while travelling in Africa, Hillary called husband Bill: 'I urged him to bomb,' she told a journalist.

Investigative reporter Gareth Porter has [written](#) of the 'active effort' made 'by the US military to mitigate Obama administration regime change policies'. In 2011, the Joint Chiefs of Staff 'had been strongly opposed to the effort to depose the Muammar Gaddafi regime in Libya led by then secretary of state Hillary Clinton'.

Clinton, then, was *more* hawkish even than the US military. Writing in the Sunday Times, James Rubin, former Chief Spokesman for the US State Department, commented of Libya:

'Former defence secretary Bob Gates has written that it was secretary Clinton's "considerable clout" that tipped the balance in favour of action.' (Rubin, 'Why Hillary Clinton would make a better president than Obama,' Sunday Times, April 12, 2015)

Sachs added:

'Perhaps the crowning disaster of this long list of disasters has been Hillary's relentless promotion of CIA-led regime change in Syria. Once again Hillary bought into the CIA propaganda that regime change to remove Bashir al-Assad would be quick, costless, and surely successful. In August 2011, Hillary led the US into disaster with her declaration Assad must "get out of the way," backed by secret CIA operations.

'Perhaps more than any other person, Hillary can lay claim to having stoked the violence that stretches from West Africa to Central Asia and that threatens US security.'

In her memoir, 'Hard Choices', Clinton [revealed](#) how she had also played a key role in supporting the coup in Honduras. A former sergeant in the Honduran military recently told the Guardian that, months before her death, he saw environmental activist Berta Cáceres on a hitlist distributed to U.S-trained special forces. The soldier said: 'I'm 100 percent certain that Berta Cáceres was killed by the army.'

In 2014, Cáceres [said](#):

'We warned that this would be very dangerous. The elections took place under intense militarism, and enormous fraud. The same Hillary Clinton, in her book "Hard Choices," practically said what was going to happen in Honduras.'

Clinton [commented](#) on Israel's 2014, 'Operation Protective Edge' war on Gaza, in which 2,220 Palestinians were [killed](#), of whom 1,492 were civilians (551 children and 299 women):

'I think Israel did what it had to do to respond to the rockets. Israel has a right to defend itself.'

Did Israel do enough to try and avoid killing civilians? Clinton replied that mistakes were made, 'but ultimately the responsibility rests with Hamas'. Shamelessly apologising for the massacre, Clinton added: 'it's impossible to know what happens in the fog of war. Some reports say, maybe it wasn't the exact UN school that was bombed, but it was the annex to the school next door where they were firing the rockets'.

Clinton blamed criticism of Israel's vicious policies on anti-semitism:

'we do see this enormous international reaction against Israel, and Israel's right to defend itself, and the way Israel has to defend itself. This reaction is uncalled for and unfair... You can't ever discount anti-Semitism, especially with what's going on in Europe today.'

Raised In Power Above Another

Remarkably, Toynbee omitted *all* of the above in locating the source of the 'jaundiced' and 'vitriolic' reaction to Clinton in the fact that 'she is not a natural rabble-rouser' and can't compete with 'Obama's effortless charm and sublime speech-making'. This is the great lie of the world as seen through the Guardian lens.

Consider the third of the claims: that 'All her life' Clinton 'has fought the feminist cause', according to Toynbee, and is 'a proud feminist woman', according to Penny.

So what is feminism? The dictionary definition is straight forward enough: 'the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes'. Wikipedia [summarises](#) the goal:

'to define, establish, and achieve equal political, economic, personal, and social rights for women. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. Feminists typically advocate or support the rights and equality of women.'

Hannah McAtamney [added](#) an important observation on Huffington Post:

'Feminism is not the belief that one gender should be raised in power above another. The very definition of feminism shows a complete opposition to this belief.'

This is key: feminism is indeed in 'complete opposition' to the idea that one gender should be raised in power above another. And yet it could hardly be clearer from Clinton's ruthless service to elite power, notably the military industrial complex, and from her leading role in the destruction of whole countries like Libya, Honduras and Syria, that she does just that. Clinton has certainly acted to ensure that the interests of elite Western men and women are 'raised in power above' men and women in these target countries.

A high-level state executive who manages [a system](#) that destroys and damages millions of lives in systematically subordinating *both men and women* to state-corporate power cannot be described as a representative of 'centrist soft-liberal feminism', if the words have any

meaning.

We strongly support authentic feminism as an obviously just response to the inequality, exploitation, prejudice and violence facing women the world over. The deepest support for equality of the sexes is found in the practice of 'equalising self and others' propounded by many ancient spiritual traditions, notably Mahayana Buddhism. This 'equalising' begins when we accept that no person's happiness or suffering can be considered more or less important than anyone else's. It is obviously irrational and unfair to suggest that 'my' happiness matters more than 'your' happiness. When we reflect repeatedly on this equality of importance, we can actually come to feel a sense of outrage at the idea that 'I' should benefit at 'your' expense. 'I' can actually come to take 'your' side against 'my' own egotism.

From this perspective, it is absurd to suggest that a woman's suffering matters less than a man's. Similarly, it is absurd to suggest that the suffering of a Libyan or Honduran man or woman matters less than that of a male or female member of the American 1%.

The idea that Clinton is a 'feminist', that her presidency would represent a victory for feminism, is a fraud. In reality, it would involve the exploitation of that vital cause by violent, greed-based power.

At one point in her New Statesman article, Laurie Penny appeared to be overcome with emotion:

'...Hillary Clinton. Hillary Clinton! The very personification of steely-eyed, iron-jawed, soft-neoliberal feminism, a woman with short hair and pants...'

But in the strange way of so much corporate 'leftism', Penny also passionately insisted that she was opposed to the establishment grandee she was presidentialising:

'Hillary Clinton is the sort of enemy I've been dreaming of over ten years of political work... I look forward to fighting her on her commitment to climate protection, on workers' rights, on welfare, on foreign policy. Bring that shit on.'

Really? Why wait? Just three weeks after a committee of British MPs exposed one of the great war crimes of modern times – the cataclysmic orgy of death and destruction [known](#) in Washington as 'Hillary's war' – Penny made no mention at all of one single, telling word: ['Libya'](#).

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