

War Abroad, Equality at Home? Bernie Sanders and the Sandernistas

Review of Jeffrey St. Clair's Book

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For a straight-no-chaser interview with Jeffrey St Clair about "[Bernie and the Sandernistas: Field Notes from a Failed Revolution](#)," listen to [KPFA Radio's Against the Grain, 12.21.2016](#). The book itself is more like a series of acid dreams with added intoxicants. We live in a world of such acid dreamlike extremes that I wouldn't have bothered to read a more sober account. As the Democratic National Convention finally begins on cable TV, St. Clair summons the spirit of Hunter S. Thompson, the master of lucid acid dreaming, and they work very well together. [Margot Kidder](#), actress, Counterpunch contributor, and close friend of Hunter Thompson, helps, writing from her small town Montana home.

Everywhere is war

In his introduction, St. Clair writes, "Indeed, war has become the nation's permanent condition. There seems to be a new one every few months. Few can keep up. And who goes off to fight them? Not many of us, or even people that we know. A new warrior class seemed to have taken root. We noticed them mainly from the decals on their trucks or from their wheelchairs and prosthetic limbs, rarely encountered in the check-out line at Safeway. More and more, machines were doing the war's wetwork, killing nameless people in nameless regions on the far side of the world, hundreds of miles from any known base of operations. War has become the background noise, the ambient soundtrack of our time."

The Sanders campaign failed by failing to amplify and oppose that soundtrack. What kind of "revolution" fails to stop the wheels of the war machine? What kind of fool or con artist jabbers on about stopping climate change while promising to help freaky Saudi oil sheiks win their pipeline wars in Syria and Yemen? Does war abroad and equality at home mean that we should all own shares in the oil and mineral loot seized in U.S. wars? When hostile corporate journalists asked Sanders how the hell he was going to pay for free college tuition or "Medicare for All," why didn't he point to the war budget required to sustain more wars than we can keep track of, plus 800 military bases and the Unified Combatant Command with its nine global, cyber and space spanning sub-commands?

Trump isn't likely to keep his promise not to squander trillions of dollars more on wars that create more chaos and terror, but Sanders didn't even try to rally his team behind the idea. In a brief nod to the expense of permanent war, he said that we should have intervened in Rwanda, but that [Europe should pay their fair share of our next pseudo-humanitarian, imperial resource war](#).

Jeffrey St. Clair has tracked the sordid trail of every pro-war stance that Senator Sanders

took and every pro-war vote he cast on the way to his failed crusade for equality at home and war abroad. Each instance shines light on how we came to be “mired in debt and endless war” as Senator Sanders came to be where he is, from Vermont to the House, then the Senate and his new luxury vacation home on Lake Champlain.

It all began with his post-Vietnam War retreat to Vermont where the Progressive Alliance emerged to declare its independence from Republicans and Democrats and made him the Mayor of Burlington. That seems to explain why he put on a show of leaving the Democratic Party after it failed to give him the nomination last July, and why he still clings to his flimsy veneer of independence from the party, even after becoming its [“Outreach Chair,” a brand new position that Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer created just for him](#). I hope that’s not enough to fool anyone, especially the anti-war, anti-duopoly Green Mountain base that gave him his start.

St. Clair is far less cynical about the Sandernistas than about Bernie Sanders himself. On the morning after the Democratic Convention, he writes, “First things first. I want to apologize to the Sandernistas for any impolite things I may have written about you in the past 10 months. I especially want to apologize to those of you who rose up after your leader abandoned you, after Bernie wiped out your votes and muted your voices, after he turned you over to the DNC’s thuggish floor managers and security guards, after he sat passively as your brave chants of ‘No More Drones’ were drowned out by the fascist war-cry of ‘USA! USA!!’ I want to apologize for doubting your resolve. I want to apologize without qualification. You didn’t cry when Bernie betrayed you. At least, not for long. You marched right back into the Wells Fargo Center intent on spoiling the party. You didn’t sour on your ideals. You refused to be domesticated. You pissed on their carpet. You shouted down their war criminals. You made this squalid affair fun for a few precious hours. And that ain’t bad. Somewhere Abbie Hoffman is cracking a smile.”

What will the Sandernistas do now? St. Clair wonders. Build a real movement or “remain locked inside the entropic hothouse of the Democratic Party, where their hero has led and and left them?” Elsewhere in the book, he elaborates on what he thinks a real movement might do.

In the end, he concludes, “It’s your move, Sandernistas.”

“Bernie and the Sandernistas: Field Notes from a Failed Revolution” by Jeffery St. Clair is available from [Counterpunch Books](#).

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