

Who is on the Left?

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Much of what calls itself “left” in the United States is phony – “left” only in the most relative, but not substantive, sense. It exists only in juxtaposition to the Republican boogiemanager, and has made no real break with “America’s horrendous tale of conquest, race based terrorism and numerous other oppressions.”

What is a leftist? This question is always an important one but it looms especially large as another presidential election approaches in 2016. The confusion about this issue is caused by opportunism, wishful thinking, and by the need to feel comfortable within America’s narrative of dubious distinction.

In political discussions we often hear about disputes among those who claim to be on the left. Some may favor intervention in Syria or Ukraine or somewhere else targeted by the United States. Should leftists support Bernie Sanders instead of Hillary Clinton? Should leftists vote for Democrats who “disappoint” them?

Worthwhile debate can be separated from nonsensical chit-chat with a few hard questions. Does a policy in dispute promote neo-liberal schemes, increase mass incarceration, make war, steal other nations’ resources, enrich the already wealthy, impoverish the already poor or make one race dominant over others? If the answer is ever yes, then the issue in question is one that leftists can’t support and the people who promote these things can’t be supported either.

Why then do millions of people who think of themselves as progressives or left wing end up giving money, time and votes to people and organizations who continually flunk the litmus test? Some fear the status of “spoiler” even as the Democrats do less and less for their constituents. Some are opportunists who want to get a piece of the action. Others engage in fantasy and live in hope that the scoundrels will suddenly become ethical.

There is another very dangerous dynamic at work. Many people don’t want to find themselves outside of the popular narratives about America. They want to be included in the myth of a good and great country. They pin their hopes on someone they find acceptable standing atop a heap that is inherently corrupt.

Most people who call themselves progressives or who protested the war in Iraq didn’t really want fundamental change. They don’t have the stomach to challenge the assumptions upon which American aggressions are based. That is why they so quickly forgot their supposedly antiwar sentiments and clung so fiercely to Barack Obama. They want to wrap themselves in the flag or in being on a winning team but that means being a part of America’s horrendous tale of conquest, race based terrorism and numerous other oppressions.

The siren song of American superiority is strong. How often did antiwar activists or other progressives claim that a particular atrocity or outrageous act was “un-American.” Of course enslavement and genocide were very American so the claim always rang hollow, but the urge to want to be the good, patriotic American is still there and very, very strong.

Exceptionalism is a concept that is rarely questioned. Manifest Destiny and the violence that comes with it are still considered not just acceptable but noble and benevolent. That explains why Obama’s wars are accepted by the same people who protested against Bush.

It can be difficult to remain in opposition to the American state. It requires an ability to oppose not just war, or economic policy, but a desire for inclusion in a rotten system. The yearning for freedom expressed in the liberation movements was often little more than a yearning to be accepted or to have a seat at the table.

The black misleadership class is a perfect example of this phenomenon. They may have protested fifty years ago but they are now happy and comfortable getting big pay checks, recognition and occasional access to powerful people. The concerns of people behind bars in the American gulag or even poor struggling workers rarely cross their minds. That lack of concern is caused by political expediency for some and rank cynicism by others.

How many people who start out opposing the system really want to get rid of it and how many just want to be a part of it? There is always someone advising the resister to be “reasonable,” “pragmatic” or “realistic” and cling to the Democrats no matter what they do.

Leftists should want freedom from racism, freedom from predatory capitalism and freedom from imperialism. They should want that for themselves and for people all over the world. Anyone who gives the United States government a pass for intervening anywhere in the world is no leftist. It doesn’t matter if the intended target is a “dictator” or “tyrant” or “cruel to his own people.” These are weasel words used to promote violence and to hide inconvenient truths about America’s role in creating its own tyrannies.

The opportunists and even some sincere people will advise supporting the Democratic Party in the November 2016 election. The Republicans’ barely concealed racism and blatant misogyny will be held up as boogie men to frighten anyone who begins to think independently. Yet the Democrats can’t even provide the low hanging fruit of their past.

In 2009 and 2010 the Democrats controlled the White House and both Houses of Congress. If they were interested in raising the [minimum wage](#) they had a golden opportunity to do so. That type of treachery must be kept in mind when the “I’m disappointed in the Democrats but still support them” arguments are made.

Self-determination should be the question upper most in every mind. Who will stand independently when mealy mouthed liberals advise standing pat with failure? Who will speak up for Americans who want to free themselves from police violence, gentrification, job loss and surveillance? Who will speak up for people around the world who are subjected to drone strikes, occupations and interventions?

The people who are complicit or even just silent will have exposed themselves. When they counsel accommodation and still claim to be on the left they must be called out as liars. There should be little confusion about what it means to be a leftist.

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elsewhere. She maintains a frequently updated blog as well as at <http://freedomrider.blogspot.com>. Ms. Kimberley lives in New York City, and can be reached via e-Mail at [Margaret.Kimberley\(at\)BlackAgendaReport.com](mailto:Margaret.Kimberley(at)BlackAgendaReport.com).

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