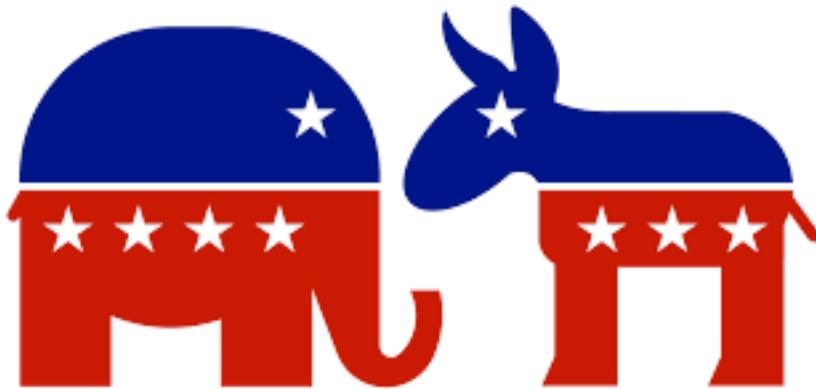


Thoughts on the Democratic Party –A Personal Statement



By Ron Tabor
December 11, 2018

At our meeting in August (*a meeting of supporters of The Utopian—Ed.*), Jack and I were asked to prepare a draft of a document outlining and motivating our group's position of opposition to voting for and otherwise supporting the Democratic Party. However, before attending to that task, I thought (with Jack's OK) that it might be appropriate for me to write up something of a more personal nature to indicate my current thinking on the issue. (It should go without saying that while I primarily discuss my opposition to the Democratic Party, this does not mean that I in any way support the Republicans.)

While the fundamentals of my position on the Democratic Party have remained the same, how I think about it and describe it have evolved over the years. I used to conceive it in terms of social class and the other categories of Marxism. Thus, I described our long-term strategic goal to be a proletarian socialist revolution through which the working class would lead all oppressed people in the

overthrow of our current social system, capitalism, and replace it with a cooperative and democratic socialist society. To achieve this, we wanted both to unite the working class (or as much of it as possible) and simultaneously to inculcate in the workers revolutionary socialist consciousness, aka class-consciousness. This meant getting the workers to recognize that they constitute a distinct social class that stands in opposition to the capitalist class, the class that owns the means of production, the factories, mines, mills, and other workplaces of our society, which they use to exploit and oppress the working class and the other oppressed layers of society. Crucial to this was to explain to the workers the class nature of the capitalist state, particularly to rid them of the illusion that the state is a socially neutral institution which workers and other oppressed people might use to better their conditions or even to bring about socialism. Instead, we sought to demonstrate that the state is controlled by the capitalist class, that it is by nature a capitalist institution through which the capitalists maintain the workers and other oppressed people in conditions of subservience and as material for exploitation.



In bourgeois democracies, the capitalist nature of the state is in part obscured by the fact that the political arena is occupied by distinct political parties that are often in considerable conflict with each other. A particularly effective variant of this setup exists in the United States, where the political system is dominated by two such organizations. One of these, the Democratic Party, has, for much of its history, pretended to represent and fight for the working class and other oppressed people, while the other, the Republican, has openly promoted the interests of the capitalists, the owners of small

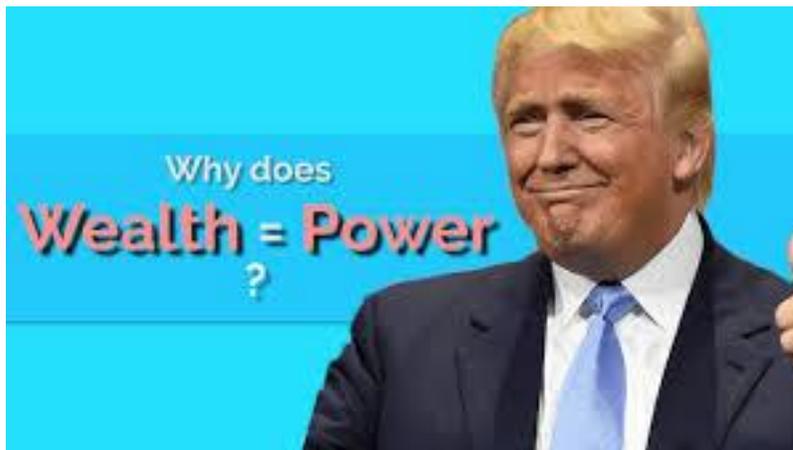
businesses, and the better-off layers of the middle class, while contending that this would ultimately help all members of society, including those at the bottom. So, to get the workers to understand the class nature of the state, we thought it was necessary to expose the Democratic Party (as well as, of course, the Republicans) for what it is. We saw it as essential, in other words, to explain that the Democratic Party, despite the fact that it utilizes progressive-sounding rhetoric, that it is (generally) supported by the labor unions, and that, when pushed, it promotes progressive legislation, is, in fact, a capitalist party. The party is financed by powerful



sectors of the capitalist class and works to defend the interests of the entire capitalist class and the system as a whole. As part of this project, we advocated that the workers, the unions, and other working-class organizations not vote for, donate to, or otherwise support the Democratic Party. Instead, we insisted that they break with the Democrats and build their own independent party (which we variously called a labor party or a workers' party). To urge the workers and other oppressed people to vote for and continue to support the Democratic Party means to tie them to the liberal wing of the capitalist class (or in Leninist terms, to turn them into a "tail" of the liberal capitalists) and thus to prevent them from establishing themselves as a class independent of, and opposed to, the capitalist class as a whole. It also means preventing the workers from going beyond the limits of the capitalist system and attempting to overthrow it and replace it with their own class rule. (This was what we meant when we insisted that we were for the "united front" of working-class organizations and opposed to the "Popular Front", a bloc of all supposedly "progressive" forces, including the capitalist liberals.)

When I decided I was an anarchist (sometime in the mid-1980s), I began to think about the issue of the Democratic Party somewhat

differently, although without changing my underlying attitude. I then saw capitalism more broadly as a specific form of hierarchical society, a social system built on domination and subordination, in which some people have power over others. Modern society can be seen as an interlocking web of hierarchies, including those based on economics (class), ethnicity, gender and gender-identity, and differing physical and intellectual abilities. I believe that in our current, commercialized, system, the fundamental determinant of power, that is, the ability to dominate and exploit others, is money or wealth. (One's position in the other hierarchies greatly influences



one's position in the economic hierarchy, in that it helps or hinders one's ability to accrue wealth and hence gain power.) Moreover, wealth and political power are interchangeable; if one has wealth, one has, or can readily acquire, power, while if one gains power by, for example, getting elected to a political office, one can readily acquire wealth. (Barack Obama became a millionaire through the sale of his books, which, I think it is reasonable to say, few people would have read had he not been president of the United States. Michelle Obama may well accomplish the same thing with her recently published memoir.)

Whereas Marxism tends to view the state as distinct from the economic system and to conceive of it as an instrument of the capitalist class, as an anarchist, I see the state as a, if not the, central component of the interlocking hierarchical structures that make up the system. In effect, it's the lynchpin that holds the structure together. The state serves the interests of and defends the system because it is integral to the entire hierarchical set-up. As a result, it does not need to be directly controlled by the

Although all components of the elite are militant defenders of the social system (as the source of their wealth and power), they have different, often competing, interests, along with differing views about how the system should evolve, about which economic, political, and social issues need to be addressed, and about how this ought to be done. The result is a struggle among these elements that is fought out in various spheres, such as the market/the economy, the political arena, and the intellectual/ideological realm. As the recent developments in the United States reveal, these conflicts can become quite intense and may result in serious crises.



Looked at this way, both of the main political parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, are integral parts of the system. It is their very nature to serve the interests of the elite and to defend the system as a whole. They are central components of the political arena and key props of the state. Historically evolved, the parties represent competing and shifting coalitions of different social layers, from the top strata down through the middle classes and including sectors of the working class. (It is worth remembering that over 40% of the potential electorate does not vote, even in presidential elections.)

Beyond defending the system and propping up the state, the two parties and the political system as a whole offer the elite a number of advantages. Among them are:

1. They provide a flexible but relatively contained arena in which the various sectors of the elite can fight for their specific interests, policies, and ideologies without threatening the existence of the system as a whole.
2. They provide a means for economic and social groups below the elite, such as the owners of medium-sized and small businesses and other middle-class people, to fight for their interests.
3. They appeal to and mobilize broader social layers, thus creating mass bases for the specific policies that are ultimately chosen through the political process.
4. They provide a vehicle for individuals from various social layers who demonstrate political talent to rise through system, and through that, into the elite.
5. They provide an effective feedback mechanism through which the elite can ascertain the thoughts, feelings, and complaints of broader groups and layers in society.
6. They promote the illusion that the political system, and indeed the entire hierarchical structure, is "open", that is, that it provides a means, even for people from the lowest ranks of society, to increase their wealth and position in the hierarchy of power.
7. By mobilizing the middle and lower layers of society around two competing parties, their ideologies, and specific policies, the political system divides these strata into two contesting sectors and prevents them from uniting their forces and organizing a joint struggle against the entire elite and the system as a whole.
8. It provides an effective way for the elite to co-opt, contain, and eventually destroy radical movements of both the left and the right that might seriously threaten the system.

It is worth spending some time on these last two points.

The Romans had an adage – "divide and conquer" or "divide and rule" – a technique they consciously deployed to establish and maintain their vast and long-lived empire. Unlike the US constitution, which was explicitly devised to sustain the rule of an

elite, the two-party system was not consciously developed to achieve this end. Despite this, it has certainly functioned this way over the course of its more than two centuries of existence. In fact, it is hard to conceive how an arrangement of political parties that was consciously designed to “divide and rule” could have achieved that result any better than the current, spontaneously evolved, one. In the United States today, a large percentage of the population is divided into two extremely antagonistic camps, each of which is led by one of the two competing sections of the political elite. On one side are those mobilized behind Donald Trump and the Republican Party, which he essentially hijacked by winning the Republican primaries and then getting elected president. On the other are those mobilized behind the Democratic Party, whose candidate, Hillary Clinton, won the popular vote by a considerable margin but failed to win a majority in the Electoral College. While this extreme polarization is not without risks to the ruling elite as a whole, the resultant division of the population has effectively prevented the emergence of a united popular movement that might direct its ire against the rule of the elite as a whole and thus against the entire hierarchical system. This is rather striking.



Also striking has been the ability of the two-party system to co-opt, contain, and eventually destroy radical mass movements. From the late 19th century, through the 1930s and the 1960s, and to the present, the two-party system, usually working in cooperation with the state’s repressive apparatus, has carried out this task extremely effectively. The Occupy Movement is a prime example. It was first co-opted by the trade union bureaucrats and then repressed by the police, after which remnants of the movement got swallowed up in Barack Obama’s 2012 re-election campaign. It should be obvious

that the task of dividing the populace into competing political camps requires a party like that of the Democrats, that is, one which, while being financed and controlled by sectors of the elite, can make a credible case that it represents and fights on behalf of ordinary people. Meanwhile, the Republican Party has played a comparable role on the other side of the political spectrum, which is one of the reasons why, unlike in the parliamentary systems of continental Europe, a distinct, explicitly right-wing, authoritarian party has never emerged in this country.

Despite the changes in how I analyze our social order, I still conceive of our strategic political goals much as I did before. If there is any chance to overthrow our current (hierarchical, bureaucratic, competitive, unjust, and brutal) society and replace it with an entirely different one (one based on equality, cooperation, and justice), it is essential that the overwhelming majority of people (including middle-class individuals and owners of small and medium-sized businesses) unite into one mass movement that is consciously directed against the entire elite, the state, and the political and economic system as a whole. And this will be possible, if it is possible at all, only if the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and the entire state apparatus are exposed for what they are and then destroyed. How can we (and other groups and individuals who agree with us) facilitate this process if we vote for and otherwise support the Democrats? We can claim that we are really for overthrowing the entire system, but we would, in fact, be preventing the emergence of a movement against the Democratic Party and hence of the entire elite. How can we help to unite the broad mass of the population around our vision if we write off all who do not now vote for, or whom we cannot hope to convince to vote for, the Democrats? More concretely, how can we think of building a mass popular movement, one that involves the overwhelming majority of the people, if we simply give up on the Trump/Republican supporters and write them all off as irredeemable racists, misogynists, and xenophobic reactionaries, a "basket of deplorables", as Hillary Clinton so snootily described them? How can we even begin to talk to them, let alone convince them of our views, if we fail to clearly distinguish ourselves from the Democrats? And how can we do that if we vote for or in any other way support the Democratic Party? Many of the people who voted for Donald Trump saw him, and still see him, as an outsider, a rebel, who opposes the entire political "establishment" (both

Democratic and Republican) and the government bureaucracy (the so-called "deep state"). How can we (and the libertarian left as a whole) make any inroads into Trump's base if we put ourselves in a bloc with part of that very "establishment"?

In fact, large numbers of people have good reasons to despise the Democrats. This is the party of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, dishonest and corrupt politicians who made a boatload of promises to millions of working-class and lower middle-class people and then abandoned them to the march of capitalism without even offering them a scintilla of hope. As the industrial heartland of the country got destroyed as the business elite shifted production overseas in search of cheaper labor and access to foreign markets while automating those facilities that remained, thousands of the rural and semi-rural communities that depended on the jobs those factories used to provide got destroyed. What was the response of the Democrats? Stooges of Wall Street, they threw billions of dollars at the banks, the insurance companies, the hedge fund managers, and the auto companies, and refused to punish anyone for their



malfeasance, while doing nothing to help struggling homeowners keep up on their mortgages and save their homes or to assist any of the other people who got clobbered by the Great Recession. These so-called "friends of labor", who for years relied on the union bureaucrats to mobilize their members to vote for their candidates and work on their campaigns, didn't lift a finger to protect those organizations from the combined onslaught of an eroding industrial base and a coordinated political attack by the Republicans. These are the people who make so much noise about their support for ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity, but omit any consideration of

the millions of lower middle-class and working-class white people who are edited out of the "identity politics" narrative, while doing precious little for the millions of lower-class Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, women, people with disabilities, LGBTQ people, and members of the other oppressed groups the party claims to champion. (Barack Obama deported more people than any other president, before or since.) The Democratic Party is financed, supported, and ultimately controlled by some of the wealthiest and most powerful people in the country: Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg and Sheryl Sandberg, Bill and Melinda Gates, Warren Buffett, Tim Cook, Larry Page, George Soros, Eli Broad, Haim Saban, Richard Blum (Dianne Feinstein's husband), the Pritzkers, Michael Bloomberg, and scores of other billionaires and multi-millionaires. All these people make much of their oh-so-liberal values and their oh-so-deeply-felt humanitarian virtues as long as these don't affect their wealth and their power. Their strategy is to appear to want to



reform the system in the interests of the common people, while never supporting any measure that would seriously threaten the elite and the hierarchical structure of which they are part and to which they are loyal. They make nice-sounding promises, in the form of rhetoric, policies, and programs, to the majority of people suffering from the ravages of our system which, even if they were entirely implemented, would do very little to improve their lives. Yet these elite liberals know that, in fact, these policies and programs will never be fully implemented, because: (1) they are too expensive; and (2) they will never get passed by Congress (and they can always blame the Republicans for this). In short, the Democrats play the role of the "good cop" against the "bad cop", the Republicans. And you need both partners if this ruse is to work.

To the uninitiated (and, unfortunately, to many who ought to know better), the Democrats always look better when they are out of power. Then, the rhetoric becomes particularly flowery and the promises flow forth most abundantly. It is easy to forget the details of what they did when they were in office. During his first election campaign, Barack Obama promised to get the country out of Iraq. (The war in Afghanistan was the one worth fighting, he insisted.) But did he pull US troops out of Iraq and end the war? No. People also forget that the first thing Obama did after his first election was to select a cabinet and a set of advisers made up of bankers and Wall Street executives. (I remember how stunned and utterly devastated many liberals and progressives, those who were inspired by the soaring rhetoric he uttered during the election campaign, were.) Bill Clinton launched the War on Drugs, which has resulted in the incarceration of millions of people, mostly Black and Latino, the explosion of the size and strength of the criminal gangs, and the virtual destruction of many countries in Central and South America. It was his administration that promoted "mandatory minimum sentencing" and "three strikes you're out" (under pressure from



sections of the Black communities, which were being destroyed by the drug trade), but which today many people believe to have been the policies of the Republicans. He was also instrumental in convincing the bankers, individual investors, and hedge-fund managers of Wall Street that he could govern in their interests even better than the Republicans. And then there was Hillary Clinton, who made it clear, in both word and deed, that she and the Democratic Party as a whole neither needed nor wanted the support

of white working-class people in the middle-sized and small towns throughout the country who had traditionally supported the Democrats and who now, because they got nothing in return for their loyalty, were responding to Donald Trump's phony promises to rebuild their devastated communities. She didn't even bother to visit Wisconsin, only went to Michigan once, and on a trip to Appalachia essentially told the laid-off coal miners and their families that she had no intention of doing anything for them and that, instead, they should "get with the program" of phasing out coal. When she received \$300,000 for speaking to a gathering of Wall Street big-shots, do you really believe she was being paid that much because she's a good speaker? The fee was a bribe, a payment to guarantee access and consideration of their concerns, if/when she was elected, which they all expected would occur. And what do you imagine she said in this speech (which she refused to make public) except that she would do all in her power to protect Wall Street's interests? Thus, in thinking about our attitude toward the Democratic Party, it is crucial to remember its role in, and responsibility for, making Donald Trump's victory possible.



Despite this, I understand why people who see themselves as liberals, "progressives", and even radicals want to vote for and perhaps otherwise support the Democrats. I also get why people who are so petrified of Donald Trump that they would do anything to get him out of office would do so. But I don't see how people who seriously consider themselves to be revolutionaries can think this way. Aside from the fact that when one votes for the Democrats one is in fact voting for the system, voting for the Democratic Party is a very slippery slope. Because if one thinks it's important to vote

for the Democrats, why isn't it important to try to convince other people to vote for the Democrats? And if one thinks it's important for other people to vote for the Democrats, why not donate to the party, why not volunteer to work on its campaigns, why not actually join the party? In short, if one thinks it's important enough to vote for the Democrats, why stop there? Isn't it inconsistent (and at least a bit hypocritical) merely to vote for the Democrats and leave it at that? This political logic is not merely a rhetorical trick. It's been played out an infinite number of times over the decades and is being played out once again, as the vast majority of the left, in their panic over Donald Trump and the Trump-led Republican Party, has collapsed into the Democratic Party and has effectively given up the fight for whatever revolutionary goals those organizations and individuals ever claimed to believe in.



This is where the so-called "insurgent" Democrats, some of whom, such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, call themselves "democratic socialists", come in. Bernie Sanders claims to be an opponent of capitalism and an advocate of "socialism", but the "socialism" he promotes today is little more than a watered-down version of the liberal welfare state, which was only viable, to the degree it was, when the United States was the overwhelmingly dominant global hegemon, which is no longer the case. Sanders calls for a revolution, but he is very careful to insist that this revolution is to be a "political" one (whatever that means), not a social one. This is rhetoric designed to mislead the ignorant and the naïve, among them, the thousands of young people who have become politically active in the last few years. Like the other "insurgent" Democrats, Sanders claims to be a militant opponent of the Democratic "establishment", but throughout his career in Congress, he has consistently caucused with them, allied with them,

and supported their program. Do we need to be reminded of the sorry role he played at the end of the 2016 Democratic primary campaign? After having denounced Hillary Clinton as a tool of the "billionaire class", Wall Street, and the Democratic Party "establishment", he completely capitulated to her well before the Democratic Convention and then had his operatives (aka goons) work in collaboration with hers to prevent those of his supporters who had not enthusiastically climbed on the Clinton bandwagon from making their discontent known at the convention itself. Whatever Sanders and the other "insurgents", "progressives", and "democratic socialists" think they are doing, they are just putting lipstick on a pig. At best, they will get the Democratic Party to adopt a somewhat more "progressive" program. But this will add up



to little more than a marketing device to convince people that "this time, things will be different", that this time, as opposed to the last time (Barack Obama) and the time before that (Bill Clinton), the Democratic Party really will fight for the interests of the people, instead of for those of the Wall Street bankers and hedge fund managers, the CEO's of Silicon Valley, the big shots of Hollywood, the real estate developers, the liberal media moguls, and the other members of the elite who finance and ultimately control the party. In sum, the role of the "insurgent" Democrats, "progressives", and "democratic socialists" will be to help the Democratic Party perform its historic role once again, that is, to head off militant mass movements on the left and herd them into the morass of the bourgeois political arena, where they are denatured and ultimately killed. It is understandable why inexperienced and idealistic young people might fall for this. It is astounding that older radicals, let alone revolutionaries, with decades of experience behind them,

cannot recognize the scam for what it is. "This time is different"? Don't bet the farm on it!



Of course, people can say that since the libertarian socialist revolution seems to be nowhere on the horizon, since there exists no serious revolutionary movement, and since there is not even a hint of sympathy for our program among the broader layers of the US population, we should stop being revolutionaries and, as part of this, cease our efforts (as feeble as they are) to propagate our (absurd, even ridiculous) vision of a truly free and liberated - a democratic, cooperative, and egalitarian - society. But then, they should come out openly and say this. And they should honestly admit that they are really liberals and "progressives" and should support the Democratic Party with a clear conscience.

Perhaps some people believe we can do both, that is, propagate our program while supporting the Democratic Party. But, as I've said before, you are what you do. The history of the left since the 1930s shows this. When you vote for, organize for, or donate money to the Democratic Party, you become, in fact, a Democrat, even if you think you are a progressive, a radical, a socialist, or even an anarchist.

Beyond these political concerns, I believe there is a moral issue involved. This is something that those of us who once considered ourselves to be Marxists rarely talked about. This is because Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in their polemics with the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and elsewhere, insisted that they never based their arguments on moral considerations but instead on their view, which they believed to be scientifically demonstrated, that

socialism would be the inevitable outcome of the internal logic, the "laws of motion", of capitalism. We can now see, or should be able to see, that Marx' and Engels' claim to have put socialism on a scientific basis is false, and that, in reality, the real grounds of our advocacy of a liberated society are moral. We believe the existing social system is evil: unjust, undemocratic, wasteful, hypocritical, cynical, dishonest, and brutal - in a word, obscene. And we claim to want to convince the vast majority of the people to replace it with one that is better, specifically, one that is the opposite of the current system in all these respects. This involves a lot more than proposing simply a change of the structure of society (the "property forms"). In fact, we are trying to convince people to relate to other people in a completely different way than they do now. As our Who

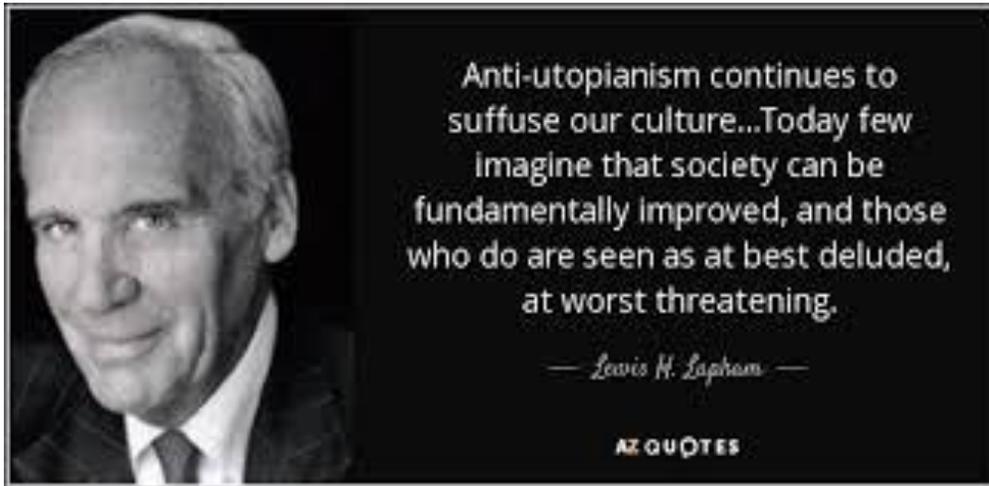


We Are statement says: while (some, perhaps most) people know how to cooperate (and to treat each other in a sensitive, kind, and caring manner) in small ways, we have not figured out how to do so on a society-wide, let alone international, basis. But how can we fight for a truly free, humane, and moral society if we utilize bureaucratic, corrupt, and dishonest methods to do so? (This was something the Bolsheviks, assuming they were, in fact, interested in building a humane society, never figured out.) How can we build a non-hierarchical society, if we utilize hierarchical methods and support hierarchical organizations in our efforts to do so? Specifically, how can we convince people of our program if we vote for and otherwise support something as vile and disgusting - as dishonest, bureaucratic, corrupt, cynical, and hypocritical - in short, as immoral - as the Democratic Party?

This brings me to another, more personal, consideration, one that might be termed "aesthetic." For me to vote for and in any other way support the Democratic Party would be to offend my self-image, my self-respect. It would represent a devastating blow to my conception of who I am and what I have done with my life. It would be an attack on everything I have stood for. I have spent my entire politically conscious life fighting to overthrow this rotten system. This has meant, along with many others, hours of organizing and speaking, hours in uncountable meetings, and hours of reading and thinking about how to do this, what to replace this society with, and whether it's even possible. I refuse to accept that everything we've done has been a wasted effort and that we should now change our course, alter our program, and after all these years (decades!), cave in to the Democrats, to the arrogant, cynical, and hypocritical "titans of industry" who finance and control it, and to the dishonest liberal, "progressive", "socialist", and (even) Stalinist politicians who manage its machinery. This is why I hold to the historic position of the anarchist movement: to refuse to participate in any way in traditional - bourgeois, bureaucratic, hierarchical - politics.

In sum, I am a political maximalist, one who focuses on the ultimate goal, even if this may seem ridiculous (utopian?) to some. Others might choose to be more "realistic", to make compromises in the interests of being more "effective." This is, in fact, a personal choice, one that every politically active person has to make, and one that, ultimately, is not subject to argument or debate. In this light (militant atheists, please forgive me), I occasionally think of what Yoshua (Jesus the man, the historical figure, who I believe was an anarchist, a Jewish anarchist) would say if he returned to our contemporary world. Would he urge his followers to vote for or otherwise support the Democratic Party as the supposed "lesser evil"? Or would he say, "FUCK ALL THIS SHIT!"? (That's my translation of, "My kingdom is not of this world") I think the answer is obvious. In this sense, I am a follower of Jesus.

I don't wish to tell anyone, let alone order anyone, to do or not do anything. The Utopian milieu is not a Leninist party, there is no discipline; people can, and should, do what they wish, vote if and for whom they please. But I will not hide the fact that I am looking to find, and if possible unite with, those who think, and above all feel, as I do.



At this point, I think of what we are currently doing as elaborating and defending our maximal program, our vision, at a time when the overwhelming majority of the people of the world have either abandoned it, forgotten it, or never shared it. This means keeping the dream of a truly liberated - a truly humane - society alive, while refusing to sully it in any way.

Today, there are very few of us, and at least for the foreseeable future, it seems very unlikely that what we do will have much of an impact beyond ourselves and our immediate friends and acquaintances. But, one thing we can do, and I think should do, is: to keep the flag of the libertarian revolution flying. Or, to paraphrase another tradition, keep the "light shining in the darkness."
