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Explaining Bernie's 'Socialism'

He perfects the strategy of denying the funding dilemma of the welfare state.



Bernie Sanders campaigning in Manchester, N.H., Feb. 8. PHOTO: CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY/ZUMA PRESS



By

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In the 1940s, many Western societies began adopting single-payer health systems as a way to expand access to the relatively few things medical care at the time could do for patients.

This was an agenda that, for obvious reason, could appeal to both consumers and providers of health care.

We live in a different time. If the U.S. were to embark on a single-payer system today, as Bernie Sanders proposes, it would not be doing so to expand access—though that slogan would still be used—but for a very different reason: to deny and limit care in order to control spending.

This agenda would be popular with neither patients nor providers, and therefore would be dead in the water—as liberal authorities, from the New York Times's Paul Krugman to Henry J. Aaron of the Brookings Institution, have suddenly discovered an urgency to point out to Democratic voters infatuated with Bernie Sanders.

Mr. Sanders knows it too. His socialism is farcical in a country that can't afford the entitlements it already has.

The one zinger that has found its mark during the current campaign has been Chelsea Clinton's claim that his plan endangers Medicare, which Mr. Sanders now brings up constantly in order to refute it. Mr. Sanders knows that seniors aren't stupid. They vote, and if they took his plan seriously, they would turn out in droves to protect Medicare from being raided by other age groups.

Take another farcical element of Mr. Sanders's farcical socialism. He tweaks Hillary over \$675,000 in speaking fees from Goldman Sachs. Unmentioned by the scourge of big money is Bill Clinton's far more egregious buckracking.

By the estimate of IBT Media, Mr. Clinton collected between \$54 million and \$141 million from governments and arms manufacturers who had arms-deal approvals pending before his wife's State Department. His own disclosures indicate at least \$20 million in speaking fees from banks and businesses since his wife began publicly eyeing the presidency.

A Washington Post investigation finds a "substantial overlap between the Clinton political machinery and the [charitable] foundation" and that "many of the foundation's biggest donors are foreigners who are legally barred from giving to U.S. political candidates."

Yet all this goes unremarked by Mr. Sanders, that ferocious denouncer of monied corruption. Why? For the same reason that Bill Clinton's reckless influence-peddling goes uniformly uncriticized inside the Democratic Party. Because that's the price of Mr. Clinton forgetting what a Clinton presidency was all about.

He enacted welfare reform. He spoke enthusiastically of fully funded personal Social Security accounts. He speculated about the possibility of converting Medicare into a means-tested program of private insurance vouchers.

This Bill Clinton you don't hear from anymore. One could easily forget he's not only the last, but the most prominent, of the once-numerous Blue Dog Democrats, who did not make a profession, as their party does now, of ignoring the long-term funding dilemma of the U.S. retirement programs.

Mr. Sanders, far from being a radical departure, is merely a perfection of what Democrats have offered since the Clinton era, namely denial.

Ignore the problem. If forced to acknowledge it, insist there's no problem because the rich will pay. In the meantime, savage every reform proposal as an attack on "unmet needs." Collect the political rents from serving as defender of every spending interest in our overcommitted republic.

When pressed, even Bernie admits that some additional, unspecified "political revolution" would be necessary before his socialist plans became actionable in America. Meanwhile, what would a President

Bernie do in office? You already have the answer.

With the latest report of the Social Security and Medicare Trustees, the programs' unfunded liabilities, in present value terms, are \$60 trillion. The worker-to-retiree ratio, which was 5.0 when Medicare was created in the mid-1960s, today is 2.5, and headed for less than 2.0 after 2030. Left out of this calculation, of course, is the growing rank of *non-retired* entitlement recipients whom taxpayers must also support.

You don't hear about any of this from Democrats. One reason is that Bill Clinton, the most active, ubiquitous of our ex-presidents, has utterly dropped the subject in return for his party's indulgence of his fundraising that knows no limits, and no concern about propriety or conflicts of interest.

You don't hear much about it from Republicans either. The Bill Clinton years may leave much to be criticized, but when both parties acknowledged a reality, there was at least a chance of doing something about it. That ended in 2000, when fully one-fifth of Al Gore's convention delegates were public-sector union representatives, placed there to quash any mention of entitlement reform in the Democratic platform.

And that suits a lot of Democrats just fine, including Bernie, who, for all his exotic pretenses, is just another machine Democrat.

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