

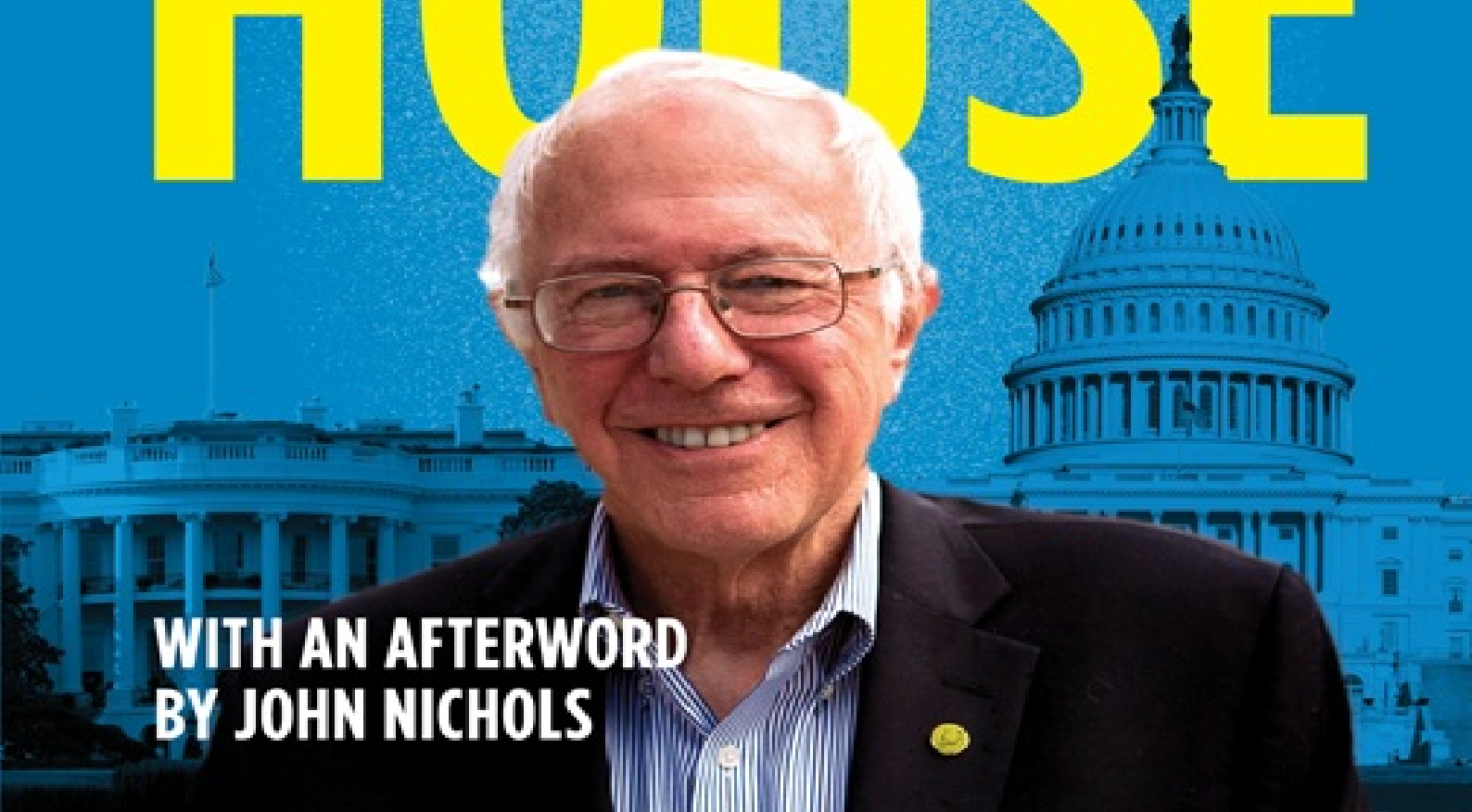
BERNIE SANDERS

WITH HUCK GUTMAN

OUTSIDER

IN THE WHITE

HOUSE



**WITH AN AFTERWORD
BY JOHN NICHOLS**

Outsider in the White House

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Bernie Sanders
with Huck Gutman

Afterword by John Nichols



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Acknowledgments

I want to thank the people of Burlington, Vermont, and the people of the state of Vermont for their support over the years. In going outside of the two-party system and making me the longest-serving independent member of Congress in American history, you have done what no other community or state has done.

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Thank you, Jane. Without your love and support as my wife, much of what is described in this book would not have occurred.

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No member of Congress achieves much without the support of a strong and dedicated staff. In that respect, I have been extremely fortunate in having so many wonderful and hardworking coworkers. The following people have served on my congressional staff since 1991, and I thank all of them for their efforts: Paul Anderson, Mark Anderson, Lisa Barrett, Dan Barry, Stacey Blue, Debbie Bookchin, Doug Boucher, Steve Bressler, Mike Brown, Katie Clarke, Greg Coburn, Mike Cohen, Steve Crowler, Clarence Davis, Jim DeFilippis, Don Edwards, Christine Eldred, Molly Farrell, Phil Fiermonte, John Franco, Mark Galligan, Liz Gibbs-West, Dennis Gilbert, Bill Goold, Huck Gutman, Theresa Hamilton, Katharine Hanley, Adlai Hardin, Millie Hollis, Lisa Jacobson, Carolyn Kazdin, Nichole LaBrecque, Megan Lambert, Rachel Levin, Sascha Mayer, Florence McCloud-Thomas, Ginny McGrath, Chris Miller, Elizabeth Mundinger, Laura O'Brien, Eric Olson, Kirsia Phillips, Anthony Pollina, Jim Rader, Tyler Resch, Mary Richards, Jane Sanders, Jim Schumacher, Brendan Smith, Tom Smith, Sara Swider, Doug Taylor, Eleanor Thompson, Jeff Weaver, Cynthia Weglarz, David Weinstein, Ruthan Wirman, Whitney Wirman, Tina Wisell.

Huck Gutman wishes to thank his wife, Buff Lindau, for her unstinting love and her endless generous support. He also wishes to thank Bernie Sanders for showing Vermont, and the nation, what progressive politics looks like when it works, successfully, in the real world.

When people say I am too serious, I take it as a compliment. I have always understood politics as a serious endeavor, involving the fates of nations, ideals and human beings who cannot afford to be pawns in a game. I suppose this understanding makes me an outsider in contemporary American politics. But if I am more serious about politics than those candidates who jet from one high-dollar fundraiser to the next, or from a Koch Brothers–sponsored summit to the Sheldon Adelson “primary,” I do not think I am more serious than the American people.

The American people want political campaigns to be about candidates’ stands on the issues, not about fundraising, polls, or the negative ads that overwhelm honest debate. Elections should be influenced by grassroots movements and unexpected coalitions, not by the cult of personality or a billionaire’s checkbook.

From the time I began to get involved in politics, as a student organizing for civil rights on the University of Chicago campus, as a peace activist in the Vietnam War era, as a supporter of labor unions and peoples’ struggles, what offended me most about electoral politics was the pettiness. It seemed that the media and political parties were encouraging voters to make decisions of enormous consequence on the basis of whether a candidate had a bright smile or delivered a zinger belittling another candidate—not on the basis of ideas or philosophy, let alone idealism. I never wanted to be part of such a soulless politics. And across my years of campaigning for causes and for elective office, I think I have done a pretty good job of avoiding it.

The first edition of this book, originally titled *Outsider in the House*, was written two decades ago after I had been elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Vermont but long before I even imagined I would campaign for the presidency. It tells the story of how we built an independent progressive politics in one city and then in one state. It is the story of an insurgency that won first the mayoralty of Burlington, Vermont’s largest city, and then a statewide congressional seat. More importantly, it is the story of how we used the authority that extended from those victories to make changes for the better in the lives of people who don’t have many allies in positions of power.

The working people of Vermont are the real heroes of this book because they stuck with the fight for economic and social justice long after the media and the political elites expected them to give up. They did not merely keep at it; they drew their friends and neighbors into the process—increasing election turnout at a point when it was declining in much of the rest of the country. I always say that our greatest accomplishment in Burlington was not our initial victory in the mayoral race of 1981—although that was a sweet victory. Our greatest accomplishments were the victories that came in the elections that followed, when increased voter turnout, especially from low-income people and young people, allowed us to beat back the combined efforts of economic and political elites to stop us. We did not overwhelm our opponents with money, we overwhelmed them with votes—like it’s supposed to work in a democracy.

When I reread *Outsider in the House* recently, I was reminded of the extent to which this is a story of struggle. It is not the story of easy or steady success. It is the story of hard work, a little progress in the right direction and then a setback, of election defeats and election wins, and of breakthroughs that few of us had imagined possible—until they happened.

A politics of struggle is rooted in values and vision, and above all trust. It involves a compact a candidate makes with the people who share the values, who embrace the vision. It doesn’t say, “Vote

for me and I'll fix everything." It says, "If I get elected, I will not just work for you, I will work with you." The work may mean implementing a program at the local level or sponsoring legislation at the federal level, but what matters most is the connection that is made between people and their elected representatives—the connection that says there is someone on the inside who is going to fight for the citizens outside the halls of power. When citizens recognize that this fight is being waged, they are energized. They make bigger demands. They build stronger movements. They forge a politics that is about more than winning an election; they forge a politics that is about transforming a city, a state, a nation, and maybe the world.

I embraced this politics of struggle as a young activist on behalf of racial justice. I got involved in electoral politics because I believed that movement activism on behalf of civil rights and women's rights and labor rights and environmental protection and peace needed to be reflected on our ballots and in the corridors of power. I started slow, losing and learning. Eventually, with the help of friends and allies whose loyalty and commitment meant everything to me and everything to our shared success, we started winning. We did not just win elections, we won the transformational progress that only comes when political activism is focused on more than the next election. My decision to run for the presidency in 2016 was inspired by the events outlined in the original text of *Outsider in the House* and by experiences that came after its publication in 1997—in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate, and more importantly on picket lines, in marches, and at town hall meetings and rallies against economic inequality, or protesting the impoverishment of workers and communities by failed trade policies, or denouncing the neglect of the basic dignity and humanity of immigrants, or against unnecessary wars, racial injustice and environmental catastrophe.

The two decades since this book was published have not been easy for Americans. The gap between rich and poor has extended beyond the breaking point of civil society and sound economics. Instead of addressing poverty, politicians of both parties have criminalized it and accepted incarceration rates that are obscene and racist; the devastating effects of climate change have been ignored; we have accepted a warped sense of priorities that says America can always find enough money for war but that there is never enough for infrastructure or education or nutrition programs. Our democracy has been rendered very nearly dysfunctional by Supreme Court rulings that make it easier for billionaires and corporations to buy elections and harder for people of color and students to vote in them. The United States is degenerating into a plutocracy as democracy is overwhelmed by money and negative ads and the collapse of serious journalism.

When I announced I was going to run for president, I said it would take a political revolution for a democratic socialist from Vermont to win the presidency. A lot of pundits thought that was an acknowledgment of impossibility. It wasn't. It was a statement of what would be necessary to undo the damage that has been done and to reclaim our country from the oligarchs. The pundits and the political consultants still have a hard time understanding this. But the people get it. They are turning out by the thousands, by the tens of thousands, for our rallies. They are sending contributions of \$5 or \$10 because they understand that if we all give what we can then we might yet be able to beat the billionaire class.

I am as serious as they say I am. I have no taste for symbolic campaigns. I decided to run for president because I believed it was necessary to do so, because I believed this campaign could bring about a political revolution, and I believed we could win. We did it in Burlington. We did it in Vermont. And we are doing it in America. Change comes, even in the face of overwhelming odds. And the recognition of the changes we have already made, of what we have won, inspires us to fight even harder.

When I began to write the story of my political journey, I accepted the designation "outsider."

have stood outside the mainstream of American politics. I have rejected the status quo. I have ca some lonely votes, fought some lonely fights, mounted some lonely campaigns. But I do not fe lonely now. There are a lot of us outsiders, and we are organizing for a \$15 minimum wage, for jo programs that address structural unemployment, for single-payer health care, for free colle education, for the renewal of our cities, for the reconstruction of our infrastructure and the creatio millions of jobs, for just and humane reform of a broken and racist criminal justice system, f comprehensive immigration reform and a path to citizenship.

The majority of Americans today are outsiders, especially in the halls of power where decisio about our economy are being made. And we will remain outsiders for as long as the political balan is tipped against the great mass of Americans, for as long as the status quo is characterized b inequality and injustice. It will take all the energy of the new movements of this new time to make th change that is needed. These movements began on the outside, but even now they are beginning to b heard on the inside—changing our politics, changing our laws, changing America. Cities and states a raising wages. They are beginning to address racial disparities in policing practices and the polici that lead to mass incarceration. They are demanding a constitutional amendment that will overtu Citizens United and restore free and fair elections. Something is happening in America, somethin that feels like a political revolution. I have been an outsider in the House. I have been an outsider the Senate. Now I am a candidate for the presidency. I believe that this political revolution might ju put an outsider in the White House and that, together, we can remake our politics and our governanc so that none of us are outsiders anymore.

I believe we can be serious and optimistic. I believe we can recognize the overwhelming od against us and forge coalitions that overcome the odds.

The point of beginning is not a political strategy. It is a shared sense of necessity, an understandin that we must act. I believe that Americans, battered by job losses and wage stagnation, angered b inequality and injustice, have come to this understanding. I hear Americans saying loudly and clearl enough is enough. This great nation and its government belong to all of the people, and not solely to handful of billionaires, their super PACs, and their lobbyists.

We live in the wealthiest nation in the history of the world, but that reality means little becaus almost all of that wealth is controlled by a tiny handful of individuals. There is something profound wrong when the top one-tenth of 1 percent owns almost as much as the bottom 90 percent, and wher 99 percent of all new income goes to the top 1 percent. There is something profoundly wrong wher one family owns more wealth than the bottom 130 million Americans. This type of immoral and unsustainable economy is not what America is supposed to be about. This has got to change, an together we will change it.

The change begins when we say to the billionaire class: “You can’t have it all. You can’t get hug tax breaks while children in this country go hungry. You can’t continue sending our jobs to Chin while millions are looking for work. You can’t hide your profits in the Cayman Islands and other ta havens, while there are massive unmet needs in every corner of this nation. Your greed has got to en You cannot take advantage of all the benefits of America if you refuse to accept your responsibilitie as Americans.”

When we declare, “Enough is enough,” we are demanding a country and a future that meets th needs of the vast majority of Americans: a country and a future where it is hard to buy elections an easy to vote in them; a country and a future where tax dollars are invested in jobs and infrastru instead of jails and incarceration; a country and a future where we have the best-educated workfor and the widest range of opportunities for every child and every adult; a country and a future where w take the steps necessary to ending systemic racism; a country and a future where we assure once an

for all that no one who works forty hours a week will live in poverty.

Now is not the time to think small. We cannot settle for the same old establishment politics and stale inside-the-beltway ideas. We cannot let the billionaire class use its money and its media spin to divide us. Now is the time for millions of working families—black and white, Latino and Native American, gay and straight—to come together, to revitalize American democracy, to end the collapse of the American middle class, and to make certain that our children and grandchildren are able to enjoy a quality of life that brings them health, prosperity, security and joy—and that once again make the United States the leader in the world in the fight for economic and social justice, for environmental sanity and for a world of peace.

Now is the time for us to make America the country that the vast majority of our people want it to be. It will take a political revolution to make the change. But I have learned from the experiences recounted in this book that political revolutions are possible. They are not made by billionaires and political insiders. They are made by workers whose jobs are threatened, by students who are overwhelmed by debt, by retirees on fixed incomes, by outsiders who recognize that enough is enough—and who recognize that they must organize and campaign and vote for something better. When we stand together there is nothing, nothing, nothing we cannot accomplish.

*Bernie Sanders
September 2011*

November 5, 1996. We won. Blowout. By 7:30 p.m., only half an hour after the polls close, the Associated Press, based on exit polls, says that we will win, and win big.

The town-by-town election results are coming in by phone and over the radio. In Burlington, my hometown, where we always do well, we are running much stronger than usual. We even win the conservative ward in the new north end. We win Shelburne, a wealthy town usually not supportive of Winooski. Landslide. We win Essex, my opponent's hometown. We're now getting calls in from the southern part of the state. Brattleboro. We're winning there almost three to one. Incredible. We're even winning in Rutland County, traditionally the most Republican county in the state. We're also winning in Bennington County, where I often lose.

By ten o'clock, Jane and I and the kids are down at Mona's restaurant, where we're holding our election night gathering. The crowd is large and boisterous. When our victory celebration appears on the TV monitor, the crowd becomes very loud. I can hardly hear myself speak into the microphone. The noise is deafening. The next day the *Rutland Herald* describes my remarks as "vintage Sanders." "We know that there is something wrong in this country when you have one percent of the population owning more wealth than the bottom ninety percent." I said a few other things as well. I was very happy.

My Republican opponent, Susan Sweetser, calls to concede and we chat for a few minutes. She then goes on television to thank her supporters and wish me well. Jack Long, the Democratic candidate, drops by to offer congratulations.

The extent of our victory becomes clear the next morning when the newspapers publish the town-by-town, county-by-county breakdown of election results: 55 percent of the vote to Sanders, 33 percent to Sweetser, 9 percent to Long. We won in every county in the state and nearly every town. Who could have imagined it? An Independent victory—much less a sweep—is rare. So rare that when *USA Today* published the nationwide tallies for congressional races, the copy under Vermont read: "A Large—56%, Democrat Jack Long—9%, Republican Susan Sweetser—33%." Apparently "Independent" is not a category in the paper's database.

The newspaper in front of me says that "Sanders is the longest-serving Independent ever elected to Congress, according to Garrison Nelson, a political science professor and an expert on Congressional history." Gary, who teaches at the University of Vermont, knows about these things. That's what he studies. Who would have believed it? Thank you, Vermont.

But this had been a tough race, far more difficult than the final election results indicate. Newt Gingrich and the House Republican leadership had "targeted" this election, and spent a huge sum of money trying to defeat me. Some of the most powerful Republicans in the country came to Vermont to campaign for Sweetser, including Majority Leader Dick Armey, Republican national chairman Haley Barbour, presidential candidate Steve Forbes, House Budget chairman John Kasich, and Republican convention keynote speaker Susan Molinari. As chairman of the House Progressive Caucus, a democratic socialist, and a leading opponent of their "Contract with America," I've been a thorn in their side for some time. They wanted me out—badly.

My campaign was also targeted by corporate America. A group of major corporations organized by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the National Federation of Independent Businesses put me at the top of their "hit list" and poured tens of thousands

of dollars into the state to sponsor negative and dishonest TV ads, as well as a statewide mailing. By the end of the campaign Vermonters were watching four different TV ads attacking me.

The wealthiest people in Vermont went deep into their pockets for my Republican opponent. They wrote out dozens of \$1,000 checks (the legal maximum) and attended \$500-a-plate functions. We also took on the National Rifle Association (NRA), the National Right to Work Organization, and other right-wing and big money organizations. Never before had the ruling class of Vermont and the nation paid quite so much attention to a congressional race in the small state of Vermont—a state with just one representative.

By contrast, as an Independent, my campaign ran without the support or infrastructure of a major political party. There were no campaign contributions from our “central office” in Washington, no “coordinated campaigns” with other candidates, no photo-ops with a presidential candidate at the local headquarters, no votes from families with a long and proud record of commitment to our party ideals. We had to fight for every vote that we got. And that’s what we did.

We rose to the occasion and ran the best campaign that we had for many years—perhaps ever. Our coalition—of unions, women’s organizations, environmental groups, senior citizens, and low-income people—had done a terrific job. We raised close to a million dollars, received over 20,000 individual contributions, distributed by hand over 100,000 pieces of literature, made tens of thousands of phone calls, and sent out over 130,000 pieces of mail. The campaign staff was fantastic, our volunteers dedicated—and it all came together on Election Day.

Obviously, this book is more than a manual on running a successful congressional campaign. It is a political biography. It talks about some of the victories that I and my co-workers in Vermont have had, but also about a lot of *unsuccessful* campaigns and derailed ventures. (Given the state of the league in America, how could it be otherwise?)

This is a book about hopes and dreams that will not be realized in our lifetimes. It is about the fragility of democracy in America, a nation in which the majority of people do not know the name of their congressional representative and over half the people no longer vote. It is about a political system in which a tiny elite dominates both parties—and much of what goes on in Washington—through financial largesse.

Here is a story of corporate greed and contempt for working people, of private agendas masquerading as the public good and corporate America’s betrayal of workers in its drive for galactic profits. It describes a national media, owned by large corporations, which increasingly regards news as entertainment, insults the intelligence of American citizens daily, and is even further removed from the reality of everyday life than the average politician.

And Vermont. This is a book about the great state of Vermont—my favorite place in the world—and about our “big city,” Burlington, with 40,000 people. It visits our small towns, where most Vermonters live, and drops by our county fairs and our parades to look at the kind of special relationship that exists between people in this small state.

It is about my eight years as mayor of Burlington, and how the progressive movement there helped make that city one of the most exciting, democratic, and politically conscious cities in America. Yes, Democracy can work. It is about the United States Congress, the good members and the not so good. It examines the two major political parties—neither of which comes close to representing the needs of working people—and the frustrations and successes of helping to create an independent progressive political movement. It reviews some of the battles in which I’ve participated—for sane priorities in our federal budget, for a national health care system guaranteeing health care for all, for a trade policy that represents the needs of working people rather than multinational corporations, for an end

corporate welfare, and for the protection of programs that sustain the weakest and most vulnerable among us.

Most of all, this book is about the struggle to maintain a vision of economic and social justice, and the optimism necessary to keep that vision alive.

It goes without saying that I never would have become mayor of Burlington, Vermont, or a U.S. congressman without the help of dozens of close friends and co-workers who have worked at my side for many, many years. They have energized me and sustained me. Thanks to all of them.

You Have to Begin Somewhere

May 20, 1996. I'm tired. It was too hot last night and I didn't sleep well. All night a raccoon chattered in the attic of the house, finally waking me up for good at 6:30 a.m., after only four hours' sleep. A night I worried about the impact of Dick Armey's visit to the state of Vermont.

Armey, Newt Gingrich's number-two man and the type of reactionary who makes even Gingrich look like a liberal, came to Vermont to endorse Susan Sweetser, my opponent in the upcoming congressional election. More importantly, he came to raise money for her. Sweetser probably made a big mistake by inviting him, since Armey, the majority leader in the House, epitomizes the congressional right wing that is every day sinking lower in the public's estimation. About thirty Vermonters demonstrated at the hotel where Armey was speaking at a \$500-a-plate dinner. They are not great fans of the Gingrich-Army "Contract with America."

The article in the *Burlington Free Press*, the largest paper in the state, gave decent coverage to the demonstrators' protest against the savagery of the Republican cuts in Congress. The press coverage raised important issues about the Republican agenda, with its attacks on the poor, the elderly, and women, and in doing so tied Sweetser to that unpopular agenda. It even quoted someone from the local chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW), a definite plus. Still, Sweetser ended up raising \$30,000 in one night, which is a helluva lot of money, especially in a small state like Vermont.

Sweetser had advertised the Armey event as a "private briefing by the Majority Leader." I wonder if Armey was going to share his wisdom with rich Vermont Republicans about how we should eliminate Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the concept of the minimum wage, ideas he has voiced in the past. Or maybe he was just going to talk about the "Republican Revolution." In any case, in Vermont \$500 is a lot of money for dinner. I hope these rich folks enjoyed themselves.

I feel in my gut that this is going to be a very, very tough campaign. I won the last election by only three points, and Sweetser is much better organized than my previous opponent. She has started her campaign much earlier and is going to raise a lot more money than he did. I also fear that it will be a nasty campaign, with personal attacks that will become increasingly ugly. It's going to be a brutal six months, and frankly I'm not looking forward to it.

What is really distressing is not only the negative campaigning—the lies and distortions that have already begun—but the enormous amount of time I am going to have to spend raising money and dealing with campaign operations, rather than doing the work I was elected to do in Congress. Sweetser began her campaign in *November*—less than halfway into my two-year term. That's crazy. That means that I have to keep my mind on an election for twelve months, rather than focusing on my real work.

The last couple of weeks I played a leading role in opposing the Republican Defense Authorization Bill, which supplied \$13 billion *more* for defense than Clinton's budget had allocated. And Clinton's budget was already way too high. But now, instead of concentrating on the important issues facing Vermont and America, I will have to devote more and more energy to the campaign. I am going to have to start getting on the phone and raising money. I'm going to have to think about polling, and TV ads, and a campaign staff. I'm going to have to make sure that we don't repeat the many mistakes that we made in the last campaign. Basically, I'm going to have to be more *political*. It's too early for that.

and I don't like it.

Most people don't realize how far Newt Gingrich, Rush Limbaugh, and their friends have shifted the debate about where the country should be moving. In terms of the defense budget, 75 House Democrats—out of 197— supported the outrageous boost in military expenditures. Of course, almost all of the Republicans (including those fierce “deficit hawks”) backed the increase. The Cold War over, we spend many times more than all of our “enemies” combined and, with very little fanfare, the defense budget is significantly raised.

In the Armed Forces Committee, the vote for increased military spending was almost unanimous. Only two members, Ron Dellums and Lane Evans, out of the fifty-five members of the committee voted against it. That's pathetic. A little pork for my district, a little pork for yours—and taxpayers end up spending tens of billions more than is needed.

Ditto for the intelligence budget. Major Owens of New York, Barney Frank of Massachusetts, and I have been trying to cut the CIA and other intelligence agency budgets for the last five years. This year while introducing an amendment to trim their budget by 10 percent, I read into the record a *New York Times* article that described how the National Reconnaissance Office, one of the larger intelligence agencies, had *lost* \$4 billion. That's right. They lost the money. They simply could not account for \$4 billion, and their financial records were a complete shambles. No problem. The intelligence agencies got their increase anyhow.

Meanwhile, the Republican Congress, with many Democrats in agreement, are cutting back on every social program that people need—for the elderly, for children, for the sick and disabled, for the homeless, for the poor. That's called “getting our priorities straight.”

I always feel anxious at the beginning of a campaign, but I feel more so this time. It's bad enough to be on the hit list of Gingrich and Armev, and to have the chairman of the Republican National Committee come to Vermont to announce he will give Sweetser the maximum allowable under the law, \$153,000. What is most worrying, however, is that we progressives are not generating the excitement and support we need. That's the situation even in Vermont, where independent progressive politics is as advanced as any place in the country.

I have no illusions. This is my fifth race for Congress. I lost in 1988, won in 1990, '92, '94. People are not as excited as they were when I first ran. “Reelect Bernie—Again” is not an especially stirring slogan. And there simply aren't enough progressives committed to *making* the electoral struggle. The activities of most progressives revolve around specific issues and action groups. Many are not really in touch with their communities, nor do they appreciate the hard work involved in winning a congressional seat, a governorship, or even a mayoralty. Theory and ideas are exciting, but the practical work of capturing and holding public office—that's another story. So I'm concerned about running into the same problem we saw two years ago: lack of motivation among our core supporters.

One difficulty we're up against is that, to a large degree, modern American politics is about image and technique. In case you haven't noticed, elections do not have much to do with the burning issues facing our society. Ideas. Vision. Analysis. Give me a break! Most campaigns are about thirty-second TV ads, getting out the vote, polling, and reaching undecided voters.

It is six months before the election, and the Republicans have already done their focus groups. How do I know? I can hear it in their “message,” which they repeat over and over again like a mantra: “Bernie Sanders is ineffective. Bernie Sanders is out of touch. Bernie Sanders is a left-wing extremist. Bernie Sanders rants and raves on the House floor and still no one listens to him. Susan Sweetser, on the other hand, is a sensible moderate who can work with everyone.” They think that's how they can beat me. Maybe.

It is very frustrating that, because modern electoral politics is driven by technique, one needs more and more sophisticated “experts” in order to compete in the big league of congressional campaigns. But how far does one go in this direction? Was I elected to Congress as the first Independent in forty years so that I could hire a slick Washington insider consultant who will tell me what to say and do? Not very likely. Am I going to be shaped and molded by a Washington insider? Not while I have breath in my body.

On the other hand, is it against some law of nature for a progressive and democratic socialist to present effective television ads, or is that just something that Republicans and Democrats are allowed to do? No. In my view we should do our TV well. Shouldn't we be prepared to respond immediately to TV ads from my opponent which distort my record? Yes. Are we betraying the cause of socialism because we don't communicate with mimeographed leaflets and pictures of Depression-era workers in overalls and caps? No. The world has changed, and it's appropriate to use the tools that are available.

Still, I have reservations. From my first day in Vermont politics, I prided myself on never once having gone to an outside consultant. We did everything within the state of Vermont, everything “in house,” usually in *my* house. You should have seen how we wrote the radio ads—around my kitchen table. John Franco, a former Assistant City Attorney in Burlington, loud, brilliant, occasionally vulgar. George Thabault—my assistant when I was mayor, imaginative, funny. David Clavelle, a local printer who had also worked in my administration. Huck Gutman and Richard Sugarman—college professors. Jane and me. Quite a crew. A helluva way to write a radio ad.

As for our television ads, we always went with my close friends and wonderful Burlington filmmakers, Jimmy Taylor and Barbara Potter. They were always good, sometimes brilliant, and they knew Vermont. My wife, Jane, who is the most visual person that I know, was also in the middle of things. In 1990, when I won my first congressional race, Jimmy, Barbara, and Jane produced an ad that received rave reviews. It was taped in Jimmy and Barbara's living room in Burlington. For two hours with the camera pointed straight at my face, Barbara and I chatted informally about why I was involved in politics and what issues were of greatest concern to me. Jimmy and Barbara then edited the content down, and we aired a five-minute spot.

At a time when the vast majority of TV commercials were thirty seconds or less, this ad was not only well received for its straightforward focus on the issues, but for the novelty of its length. Later we cut the ad into one-minute and thirty-second sections, reinforcing what the voters had already learned from the original.

In 1990, local talent was enough. It helped us win an election that most people thought we would lose. And it was more than effective in 1992 and '94. But now, in 1996, we are taking on the Republican National Committee, probably the most sophisticated political organization in the world with money to burn. I know that we are not as prepared for the Republican assault as we should be, but that we are facing the fight of our lives and we need all the help we can get.

So, for the first time, I went out of state to a real, grown-up “consultant.” I figured that we really didn't have to do what they said, but that it wouldn't hurt to listen. But more on that later.

Plainfield, Vermont, fall 1971. I had just moved from Stannard, a tiny town in that remote section of Vermont we call the Northeast Kingdom, and was living in Burlington, which, with less than 40,000 inhabitants, is the state's largest city. I had originally come to Vermont in 1964 for the summer, and permanently settled there in 1968. Jim Rader, a friend from my student days at the University of Chicago, whose acquaintance I renewed in Vermont, mentioned to me that the Liberty Union Party was holding a meeting at Goddard College in Plainfield. I'd heard of the Liberty Union, a small peace-oriented third party that had run candidates in Vermont's previous election. Jim's information rattled

around in my brain for a few days, and I ended up going to the Plainfield meeting.

Why did I go? I really don't know. I had been active in radical politics at the University of Chicago where I was involved in the civil rights and peace movements, and had worked very briefly for a labor union. I grew up in a lower-middle-class home in Brooklyn, New York, and knew what it was like to be in a family where lack of money was a constant source of tension and unhappiness.

My father worked hard as a paint salesman—day after day, year after year. There was always enough money to put food on the table and to buy a few extras, but never enough to fulfill my mother's dream of moving out of our three-and-a-half-room apartment and into a home of our own. Almost every major household purchase—a bed, a couch, drapes—would be accompanied by a fight between my parents over whether or not we could afford it. On one occasion I made the mistake of buying the groceries that my mother wanted at a small, local store rather than at the supermarket where the prices were lower. I received, to say the least, a rather emotional lecture about wise shopping and not wasting money.

I was a good athlete, and there was always enough money for a baseball glove, sneakers, track shoes, and a football helmet—but usually not quite of the quality that some of the other kids had. While I had my share of hand-me-downs, there was enough money for decent clothes, but only after an enormous amount of shopping around to get the “best buy.” At a very young age I learned that lack of money and economic insecurity can play a pivotal role in determining how one lives life. That's a lesson I've never forgotten.

When I was graduating James Madison High School in Brooklyn, New York, I applied for admission into college. My father had his doubts. He had dropped out of high school in Poland and come to this country as a young man, worked hard all of his life and, with vivid memories of the Depression, wondered whether a solid job after high school wasn't a safer route than spending four more years as a student. My mother, who had graduated high school in the Bronx, disagreed and thought it important that I go to college.

My parents always voted Democratic, as did virtually every other family in our Jewish neighborhood, but they were basically nonpolitical. My family went to only one political meeting that I can recall, when Adlai Stevenson spoke at my elementary school, P.S. 197, during one of his presidential campaigns. It was my brother, Larry, who introduced me to political ideas. He became chairman of the Young Democrats at Brooklyn College and, fulfilling his sibling duties, dragged me to some of his meetings. More importantly, he was a voracious reader and brought all kinds of books and newspapers into the house, which he discussed with me.

I spent one year at Brooklyn College and four years at the University of Chicago, from which I graduated with a BA in 1964. I got through college with student loans and grants and through part-time work. I was not a good student. I took some time off from my studies when a dean suggested that perhaps I should “evaluate” my commitment to higher education. The truth is, though, that I learned a lot more from my out-of-class activities than I did through my formal studies. At the university I became a member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Peace Union (SPU), and the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL). I participated in civil rights activities related to ending segregation in Chicago's school system and in housing, and I marched against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. I also worked, very briefly, for a trade union, the United Packinghouse Workers. At the end of my junior year I worked in a mental hospital in California as part of a project for the American Friends Service Committee.

While coursework didn't interest me all that much, I read everything I could get my hands on—except what I was required to read for class. The University of Chicago has one of the great libraries in America, and I spent a lot of time burrowed deep in the “stacks”—the basement area where most

the books were stored. I read mostly about American and European history, philosophy, socialism, and psychology. Among many other writers, I read Jefferson, Lincoln, Fromm, Dewey, Debs, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Freud, and Reich. I also discovered the periodicals room.

In any case, there I was on a beautiful fall day in 1971 in a room full of strangers at a meeting of a group called the Liberty Union.

When I arrived, I soon discovered that the purpose of this meeting was to nominate candidates for the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives. Vermont's senior senator, Winston Prouty, had died on September 10, 1971, and the state's lone congressman, Robert Stafford, had decided to give up his House seat to run for the open Senate post in a special election to be held in January. That left two positions vacant, with no incumbents contesting either race.

The small Liberty Union Party was not exactly overflowing with individuals who were interested in running for the two seats. So, full of enthusiasm for what I believed was right and just, I raised my hand and offered my views on education, the economy, and the war in Vietnam. An hour later, I had won the nomination as the Liberty Union candidate for the open Senate seat. Talk about grassroots democracy! That meeting also allowed me to meet two lifelong progressives who have remained close friends ever since, Dick and Betty Clark of Chittenden.

When I say "won" I am being overly generous to myself. I was chosen as the candidate unanimously because there was no competition. By day's end, I had embarked on the first political campaign of my life. Together with Doris Lake, who was selected as the candidate for the House, I was to present Vermont voters with a political perspective from outside of the two-party system.

At the beginning of the campaign I participated in my first ever radio broadcast—a talk show on Burlington. And what a show it was. I was so nervous that my knees shook, literally bouncing uncontrollably against the table. The sound engineer frantically waved his arms at me through the glass partition between the studio and the control room. The sound of the shaking table was being picked up by the microphone. A strange thumping noise traversed the airwaves as the Liberty Union candidate for the U.S. Senate began his political career. And the few calls that came in expressed no doubt that this career was to be short-lived. "Who is this guy?" one of the listeners asked.

Despite such inauspicious beginnings, I enjoyed the experience of running for office very much. What excited me most was the opportunity to express to the people of Vermont views that many of them had not heard before. Although Vermont is a very small rural state, it has dozens of radio stations, eleven daily newspapers, and over thirty weekly newspapers. As it turned out, much of the local media was delighted to report the strange opinions of the Liberty Union's candidate. Again and again during that summer and fall I stressed my opposition to the war in Vietnam, and articulated my belief in economic democracy and social justice.

My political opponents in Vermont often accuse me of being boring, of hammering away at the same themes. They're probably right. It has never made sense to me, then or now, that a tiny clique of people should have incredible wealth and power while most people have none. Justice is not a complicated concept, nor a "new" idea. Tragically, most politicians do not talk about the most serious issues facing our country, or the real causes of our problems. So I do. Over and over again. This drove the media and my opponents a bit crazy, but most Vermonters seem to appreciate that I address the issues most relevant to their lives. And should we ever achieve economic and social justice in this country, I promise that I'll write some new speeches.

Just prior to the 1970 election, the Banking Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives published a report documenting the degree to which large banks in America controlled many major corporations, exerting enormous economic influence over our society. (Little would I, or anyone else,

in Vermont, have believed then that twenty years later I would be a member of that committee.) I lugged that report all over the state, quoting from it extensively.

I used the publication to talk about the phenomenon of “interlocking directorates,” showing how handful of very powerful people were making decisions affecting one major sector of the economy after another. I contrasted the reality of corporate domination with the lives of ordinary working people—laborers, farmers, shop owners—who had little or no say over what happened to them on the job.

Time after time, I pointed out that such disparity in the distribution of wealth and decision-making power was not just unfair economically, but that without economic democracy it was impossible to achieve genuine political democracy. The message could be reduced to a simple formula: wealth = power, lack of money = subservience. How could we change that? How could we create a truly democratic society?

For me, one of the highlights of that campaign was the public debates I had with Republican congressman Robert Stafford and the Democratic candidate, State Representative Randy Major. More often than not, the audience was sympathetic to the views I expressed—especially the call for economic justice. Although I was the candidate of a minor party, people were listening to what I had to say and they often supported my position.

The lesson I learned from those debates and the audience response—a lesson that remains with me today—is that the ideas I was espousing were not “far out” or “fringe.” Frankly, they were “mainstream.” They were concepts that a majority of people would support, if they had an opportunity to hear them. In short, social justice was neither “radical” nor “un-American.”

But another political fact became clear to me during this first campaign: the perpetual bane of American third parties. “I fully agree with what you’re saying, Bernie,” someone in the audience would invariably tell me after a debate. “But I don’t want to waste my vote on a third-party candidate.” How many times over the years have I heard that view?

That first campaign also provided a good introduction to the role of the media in politics. It was an unforgettable experience. The Democratic candidate, State Representative Randy Major, was not widely known and was considered a long shot in our (then) very Republican Vermont. So Major devised a plan to attract media attention by “skiing around the state to meet the voters.” It was a brilliant publicity gimmick, and it worked wonderfully. Throughout the campaign, people were talking about the skiing lawmaker.

In fact, far more press attention was paid to the condition of Major’s ailing feet than the “issues” facing Vermont and the nation. Here I was, giving long-winded statements to a bored media about the major problems facing humanity, and the TV cameras were literally focused on Randy’s blisters. This was “new,” fast-breaking news. Would he be able to continue his ski effort the next day? Tune in and find out. In any case, neither my “in-depth analyses” nor Randy’s skiing made much of a difference in the election outcome. In January 1972, Bob Stafford won the special election by thirty-one percentage points. Spending less than one thousand dollars, I came in a very distant third, with only 2 percent of the vote.

But if the truth be told, I was proud of the campaign that I had run. The low vote I got did not depress me. I understood that making political change was a long process, and that we had achieved an important kind of success. The Liberty Union, with a few campaign workers and limited financial resources, had exposed tens of thousands of people to new perspectives. Some Vermonters were seeing politics beyond the prism of the two-party system.

Six months later, in the general election of 1972, I ran for governor of Vermont. During the

campaign I naturally concentrated on the state and local issues that a governor deals with. The interest in my campaign increased but my percentage of the vote declined. This time, I ended up with only one percent. Now that's quite an experience—getting one percent of the vote. However, the issues that I and other Liberty Union candidates raised during that campaign helped play an important part in the election results and eventually resulted in changes in public policy.

Thomas Salmon, a Democrat, upset the Republican candidate, Fred Hackett, and was elected as one of the second Democratic governor in the state's history. During the campaign, Salmon very shrewdly and effectively picked up on two issues that the Liberty Union was fighting for: property tax reform and dental care for low-income children. Under the Salmon administration, a popular property tax rebate program was established, as well as a "tooth fairy" program that went a long way toward improving dental care for kids. Despite our paltry one percent, the Liberty Union made an impact on major legislation.

1972 was the year Richard Nixon won a landslide victory over George McGovern. During the campaign, the Liberty Union threw its support behind the presidential candidate of the People's Party, Dr. Benjamin Spock, the world-famous pediatrician. A delightful man, Spock campaigned in Vermont on several occasions. Because he was one of the "major" candidates for president, Spock was provided with Secret Service protection and was guarded in exactly the same way as Nixon and McGovern. Some twenty-five agents watched over him, in shifts, twenty-four hours a day.

As the Liberty Union candidate for governor, and the head of our ticket, I was given the responsibility of meeting Spock at the airport when he came to Vermont. I was broke at the time, and I needed to borrow a few bucks to put gas into my old VW bug just to get there. At the airport, after convincing the Secret Service that I really was a candidate for governor, I was able to welcome Spock to Vermont.

Later in the afternoon, Spock, I, and other Liberty Union candidates walked down Church Street in Burlington's main thoroughfare, and campaigned under the very watchful eyes of the Secret Service. I remember the incongruity of it all. Here I was, without a dime in my pocket, about to get one percent of the vote, being protected by a dozen well-armed agents of the federal government.

During that trip, Spock and I spoke at Johnson State College. In the midst of his speech, which was very well attended, a student ran into the auditorium and screamed out, "Is there a doctor in the house? There's been a car accident." Some drunken students had driven their car off the side of the road, and it overturned. Can you imagine their surprise when they found Dr. Spock and the U.S. Secret Service tending to their needs? Probably sobered them right up.

I ran for the U.S. Senate again in 1974. That election, in which I was vying for the seat left open when the venerable George Aiken retired, was a very close, hard-fought contest. While most of the state focused on the major party candidates—Patrick Leahy, a Democratic state's attorney from Chittenden County, and Richard Mallary, the incumbent Republican member of the House—I doubled my highest previous vote total, now reaching 4 percent. Leahy pulled off a major upset in that election and became the first Democrat ever elected to the U.S. Senate from Vermont.

1974 was a very exciting year for the Liberty Union, and the high point of its existence. Michael Parenti, who had been dismissed from his teaching post at the University of Vermont because of his antiwar activities, ran an excellent campaign for the U.S. House and received 7 percent of the vote against Republican Jim Jeffords (who won) and a Democrat—an extraordinary showing for a third party candidate. Michael, who remains a good friend, eventually left the state and has since become an outstanding progressive writer.

The Liberty Union also put up strong candidates that year for governor, lieutenant governor, and for

a number of seats in the state legislature—and many of them did well. Martha Abbott, our candidate for governor, and Art DeLoy, our candidate for lieutenant governor, each received about 5 percent of the vote. Nancy Kaufman, a young attorney who was the Liberty Union candidate for attorney general, received over 6 percent. (Twenty years later, Martha Abbott was elected to the Burlington City Council as a Progressive, where she continues to play a leadership role in the progressive movement.)

In 1976, as the now “perennial candidate” of the Liberty Union, I ran for governor again, this time against Republican Richard Snelling and Democrat Stella Hackel. With a solid performance in a prime-time television debate and greatly increased name recognition, I ended up with 6 percent of the vote. An increase to be sure, and an all-time high for me, but a long way from victory.

After that campaign I decided to leave the Liberty Union Party. It was a painful decision. I was proud of what a small number of people could accomplish in terms of running good campaigns, fighting utility rate increases, and supporting striking workers. We had done extremely well with limited resources, had brought a number of serious issues before the public that otherwise would not have been aired, and we affected public policy. With almost no money, our candidates received as much as 8 percent of the vote in three-party statewide elections. Further, since many of our candidates were women, we played a role in breaking down sexism in statewide politics. We also provided excellent political opportunities for working people and low-income citizens. One of our candidates for lieutenant governor, Art DeLoy, was the leader of one of Vermont’s largest unions—the first time in memory that an active trade unionist had run for office.

But as is often the case for small third parties, we were not attracting new members, new energy, or new leadership. Virtually all party responsibilities continued to rest with a handful of dedicated activists—including me. Enough was enough. My political career was over. With politics behind me, I set out to make a living and began building, reasonably successfully, a small business in education and filmstrips. I wrote, produced, and sold filmstrips on New England history for elementary schools and high schools. It was a lot of fun. In the process, I improved my writing skills and learned something about photography, marketing, and door-to-door salesmanship. I also met a lot of fine educators around Vermont.

In 1979, after discovering that the vast majority of college students I spoke to had never heard of Eugene Victor Debs, I produced a thirty-minute video on his life and ideas. Debs was the founder of the American Socialist Party and six-time candidate for president. During his lifetime, Debs had a profound impact on American politics and the lives of American workers. Many of his ideas about trade unionism laid the foundation for the growth of the CIO in the 1930s and ’40s. The Debs video was sold and rented to colleges throughout the country, and we also managed to get it on public television in Vermont. Folkways Records also produced the soundtrack of the video as a record.

Debs died in 1926, but his vision and the example of his life still resonate today. Unfortunately, his ideas remain sufficiently dangerous for them not to be widely taught in schools or discussed in the mass media. He fought to achieve a truly democratic society in which working people, not big money, would control the economic and political life of the nation. He founded the American Railway Union and led a bitter strike against some of the most powerful forces in the country. He believed in international worker solidarity and spent years in jail for his opposition to World War I. In 1920, while in jail for opposing that war, he ran for president—receiving close to one million votes. Eugene Victor Debs remains a hero of mine. A plaque commemorating him hangs on the wall in my Washington office.

Although I now had a business career, in an important sense my political work had not ceased. I was educating people, not from a podium or in a radio interview, but by resurrecting the heroes of our nation’s political past. The Debs video was a success, and I was now beginning to think about a video

series on other American radicals—Mother Jones, Emma Goldman, Paul Robeson, and other extraordinary Americans who most young people have never heard of. For better or worse, my media production career came to end in 1980.

But forward now to 1996, when aspects of the campaign are worrying me deeply, and getting me depressed. Too many questions are unanswered, and there are too many loose ends.

How do we relate to Vermont Democrats? In Congress, I chair the fifty-two-member House Progressive Caucus, which has fifty-one Democrats and me, people with whom I have an excellent relationship. But things are different in Vermont, where, among others, Governor Howard Dean is a moderate-to-conservative Democrat.

How do we relate to President Clinton, who is rapidly moving to the right? Should we establish links with his Vermont campaign? How should I respond to the Ralph Nader presidential campaign? Nader is a personal friend and an exemplary progressive, and his supporters have asked me to endorse his candidacy.

What should the progressive movement in Vermont do for this campaign? In addition to my own race for reelection, should we put up a full slate of candidates for office? Should we at least run a candidate for governor?

In Burlington, Progressives have won seven out of the last eight mayoral elections. I was mayor from 1981 to 1989; Peter Clavelle from 1989 to 1993. After losing to a Republican in '93, Clavelle was reelected in 1995. That same year, Progressives also took control of the City Council. But how do we strengthen the progressive movement throughout the state, beyond Burlington? We have had minimal electoral success in legislative races. Over the last six years, two or three Progressives have held seats in the legislature. Terry Bouricius, who served on the Burlington City Council for ten years and has worked with me over the last twenty, was elected in 1990, '92, and '94. Dean Corcoran was elected in '92 and '94, and Tom Smith, also a former Burlington city councilor, was elected in '90 and '92. But although we have strong pockets of support in communities around the state, never has a Progressive or Independent from outside Burlington captured a legislative post.

These are a few of the questions that I and other progressives are wrestling with as we begin organizing in earnest for the campaign.

In terms of who to support for president, the choice is really not difficult. I am certainly not a big fan of Bill Clinton's politics. As a strong advocate of a single-payer health care system, I opposed his convoluted health care reform package. I have helped lead the opposition to his trade policies, which represent the interests of corporate America and which are virtually indistinguishable from the views of George Bush and Newt Gingrich. I opposed his bloated military budget, the welfare reform bill that he signed, and the so-called Defense of Marriage Act, which he supported. He has been weak on campaign finance reform and has caved in far too often on the environment. Bill Clinton is a moderate Democrat. I'm a democratic socialist.

Yet, without enthusiasm, I've decided to support Bill Clinton for president. Perhaps "support" is too strong a word. I'm planning no press conferences to push his candidacy, and will do no campaigning for him. I *will* vote for him, and make that public.

Why? I think that many people do not perceive how truly dangerous the political situation in this country is today. If Bob Dole were to be elected president and Gingrich and the Republicans were to maintain control of Congress, we would see a legislative agenda unlike any in the modern history of this country. There would be an unparalleled war against working people and the poor, and political decisions would be made that could very well be irreversible.

Medicare and Medicaid would certainly be destroyed, and tens of millions more Americans would lose their health insurance. Steps would be taken to privatize Social Security, and the very existence of public education in America would be threatened. Serious efforts would be made to pass a constitutional amendment to ban abortion, affirmative action would be wiped out, and gay bashing would intensify. A flat tax would be passed, resulting in a massive shift in income from the working class to the rich, and all of our major environmental legislation would be eviscerated.

The Motor Voter bill would be repealed, and legislation making it *harder* for people to vote would be passed. Union-busting legislation would become law, the minimum wage would be abolished, and child labor would increase. Adults and kids in America would be competing for \$3-an-hour jobs.

You think I'm kidding. You think I'm exaggerating. Well, I'm not. I work in Congress. I *listen* to these guys every day. They are very serious people. And the folks behind them, the Christian Coalition, the NRA, the Heritage Foundation, and others, are even crazier than they are. My old friend Dick Arme is not some wacko member of Congress laughed at by his colleagues. He is the Majority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives. Check out his views. No. I do not want Bob Dole to be president. I'm voting for Bill Clinton.

Do I have confidence that Clinton will stand up for the working people of this country—for children, for the elderly, for the folks who are hurting? No, I do not. But a Clinton victory could give us some time to build a movement, to develop a political infrastructure to protect what needs protecting, and to change the direction of the country.

This is more than utopian fantasy. First of all, there are some promising developments in organizing labor. Several months ago the Progressive Caucus met with John Sweeney, the new president of the AFL-CIO, who told us that there will be a greater AFL-CIO commitment to union organizing, and more energy and resources spent in the political process. This has been long needed and is a very welcome development.

The great political crisis in American society is the quiescence of working people. If 5 percent of unionized workers became politically active, we could radically transform economic and social policies in this country. Today, most low-income workers do not vote, and many have very little understanding of the relationship of politics to their lives. The average American worker has come to accept that he or she has no power on the job. The company is moving the plant to Mexico. How can I stop it? The CEO earns 173 times more than the average worker. Who am I to contest management prerogatives? Corporations are asking for a give-back in health care, despite record profits. What authority do I have to challenge big capital? In our "democracy," the vast majority of working people feel helpless—*and* helpless given the current political structure—to protect their economic interests or chart their future.

If you have no influence over your own working conditions, what kind of power can you have over the economics and politics of the entire country? Why bother to vote? Why bother to pay attention to politics? And millions don't. In Vermont and throughout the country, the rich ante up \$500 or \$5,000 at a fundraising event to support the candidate who will represent their interests. Meanwhile, the vast majority of the poor and working people don't even vote. No wonder the rich get richer and everyone else gets poorer. Are we really living in a democracy?

Certainly, some of the more powerful unions, with entrenched bureaucracies and leaders disinclined to rock the boat, have contributed to this malaise. For many years, the AFL-CIO, under Lane Kirkland, was extremely conservative and inactive. A few years ago I was asked by some union leaders to speak with Kirkland at a dinner during the AFL-CIO convention in Florida. My mission was to radicalize him. I tried. I didn't succeed. "Lane, what about a national AFL-CIO cable TV station which could educate working people about what's going on in our society and give them information they never get on commercial TV?" I asked. "Can't be done," he replied. "What about more organizing efforts? Wh

about more political activity?” Not much of a response. Kirkland impressed me as an intelligent and thoughtful man with no energy or interest in making change. He was totally resigned to the status quo.

During the spring, 300 Vermont workers came out to hear Rich Trumka, former president of the United Mine Workers and new secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO. He gave a rousing speech, which was very well received. The new president of the Vermont AFL-CIO, Ron Pickering of the Paperworkers, is doing an excellent job in reactivating the union movement in Vermont. One of the main goals of the “Sanders for Congress” campaign is to involve more and more working people in the political process. I look forward to working with Ron as the campaign progresses. We’re going to receive substantial financial help from the unions, but we want rank-and-file grassroots support as well.

In June, there was a founding convention in Cleveland of the Labor Party, an organization which, from its inception, was supported by labor bodies representing over a million American workers. These union workers see no fundamental difference between the Democratic and Republican parties—and are starting a new party. It was an important political event, yet it received virtually no media coverage. Not one word in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or the *Wall Street Journal*. Here was only representatives of a million workers coming together to form a new political party. And now for another story about our favorite billionaire, Ross Perot, and *his* third party.

The Labor Party convention grew out of several years of organizing by people from the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, the United Electrical Workers, and other progressive unions. These union activists have long understood that negotiating a good contract for their workers is only part of their job, and that working people will continue to get the short end of the stick unless we have a government that represents *their* interests. The slogan of the Labor Party is, “The bosses have two parties. We need one of our own.” Hard to argue with that.

Politicians often claim that they are running for office because “the people urged me to do it.” This is rarely true. But in late 1980, it was true for me. Well, not exactly “the people.” It was my good friend Richard Sugarman.

Richard, talk-show aficionado, baseball statistician, brilliant philosopher, and professor of religion at the University of Vermont, suggested that I run for mayor of Burlington against the five-term incumbent Democrat, Gordon Paquette. In Richard, you could not have found a more unlikely political adviser. As a Hasidic Jew, professor, and writer, he is deeply involved in the interpretation of sacred texts; as a philosopher, he is immersed in the abstract thought of Plato, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Levinas. But he also has a very pragmatic side. Richard is one of the sharpest political observers I have ever known.

His idea, however, seemed more than a little farfetched. “Richard, why should I run for office when I’m happily retired from politics? How could I possibly win against an entrenched political machine? And what the hell would I do if, by some miracle, I actually won?” Those were only a few of my questions as he dragged me into the Burlington city clerk’s office in late fall 1980.

With the help of an employee in the office, Richard and I discovered the musty binder that contained the official Burlington election results from way back when. We went through and analyzed the 1976 gubernatorial election results. Patiently, he showed me a ward-by-ward breakdown of the election results, indicating how city residents had voted. Richard had a point to make: even though I received only 6 percent of the vote statewide, in Burlington I carried 12 percent, and in the two working-class wards of the city, over 16 percent.

On the basis of this showing, Richard reasoned that if all of our energy were concentrated on m

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