

I grew up under oppressive communist regime. Why I voted for Bernie Sanders?

March/17/2020, Los Angeles, Daniel Strehlau

My name is Daniel Strehlau, and I am a proud naturalized US citizen, since 2017. I was born and grew up under the ugly, authoritarian, tyrannical, opportunistic, nomenclatural, cruel, socialistic and communistic regime of Poland. I was raised by my Mother with an affinity and emotional connection to the USA. My grandfather was a US citizen, but I never met him. He died before I was born, but his friends sent me sweets, toys, peanut butter and clothes from the USA. Some part of my family arrived in NYC in 1904, but I never met them either.

My grandmother survived two concentration camps, one slave factory and one death march and after 1945 she returned to Poland. I am a non-religious Polish Jew. I used to live and work in Switzerland, Germany, France and Norway.

In just post-communist Poland, I studied at one Academy (Master of Arts), University and a Film School and I didn't pay a penny. How it is even possible? I didn't even know what student debt is, until I arrived in USA.

I am a freelance filmmaker (www.danielstrehlau.com; 16 narrative shorts and documentaries in total), but to pay my bills I've worked as a Lyft driver for the last five years in LA and surrounding counties – I drove 130 K miles, I gave 13,237 rides, which means I met in my car between 15 K and 52 K people. With about 70% of them I spoke about Senator Bernie Sanders.

First of all, Bernie Sanders has nothing to do with communism and socialism. Those labels are used to increase fear and post-cold war signs of phobia. Communism is "a totalitarian system of government in which a single authoritarian party controls state-owned means of production and advocating elimination of private property." I am sorry, but didn't find anything like that in Bernie's agenda, which is even not leftist agenda, because there is no ideology behind this, like communists had. It is just a pro-human agenda, which is the basic social structure of civilized democratic societies in developed Western European countries or in Canada or Australia - following semantics, it is called democratic socialism.

In Western European countries Bernie wouldn't even be considered as a leftist, but a centrist. Medicare for all helped those countries to fight successfully, not only with corona virus (Italy would be more devastated if they didn't have this medical system), but all the health issues of their citizens. Western European citizens don't pay deductibles, copayments, out of pocket, etc. No, they are provided with a full service health system without those payments. So let's not forget, if you are rich enough and you travel to your beloved Italy, France, Holland or Germany and you see a person,

who opens your door in your hotel or the man who sells you cheese around the corner, those people has a better health care insurance than most Americans in USA... And still there are rich and millionaires and corporations in Europe, but somehow they are regulated in ways that help to favor all people... So, let me ask enough rich people, what bothers you about not to being so self-centered and supporting Medical for all people in USA? Why are you so afraid to give a chance to other people to live in dignity, live healthy or live at all? Is it your privilege you are afraid to lose? Well, your privilege will not suffer, if you give up selfishness.

Based on my observations of the last few years, I think that in the USA we have corporate communism or corporate socialism: corporations, oil companies (whose products destroy our planet) and others get subsidies from our tax money (Shell - \$2.04 Billion; Intel - \$3.87 Billion; Boeing - \$ 13.18 Billion annually, just to name a few). \$1.5 trillion was paid to the banks in 2009 and again quite recently, so what should we call this, when government pays individuals and corporations using our public money? Communism / corporate socialism.

In our taxes we pay right now for medical for all the political establishment in Washington DC, so they can have medical for all their lifetime, and they decided they can have it from our taxes, but we cannot, although we pay for it. So who is a communist / socialist here? Based on the rules of capitalism and free market, the companies which can't make it should be out of market giving place for those which are stronger. Instead, they are paid by our tax money to survive. If we promote capitalism, we shouldn't because it simply doesn't work - so many poor people around, jobs are taken to China, wages are stolen, and the environment is devastated.

I understand that we have the corona virus pandemic, which started on a recognizable scale in January 2020, and that companies should be helped, but why can't the people of the USA, the tax payers, get a bail out from their own money? People, including me, who can't work in their jobs as a result of the crisis, should be helped. This implies that we should change the constitution immediately: instead of "We the People" we should change it to "We Corporate Business". Paraphrasing the words of Senator Sanders from his speech on Corona Virus Pandemic (<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/03/13/sanders-says-coronavirus-red-flag-current-dysfunctional-and-wasteful-healthcare>), Are the people, especially the working class people, less important in this pie?

Having experienced education without debt, I still think about children in poor communities in our cities where I was driving Lyft and meeting teenagers and young adults. Most of them don't have dreams to become teachers, doctors, mechanics, engineers and so on; the goal of many of them is just to become gang members. Would public universities being tuition free, as proposed by Senator Sanders, change this situation? Would it give them a chance to be educated and change their goals or just finally achieve them? Of course it would. A better educated society creates a better nation. It fosters a system with less criminality and more opportunities for people to find different jobs or retrain themselves and get new jobs. Would some still fall victim to the

cycle and be unemployed and stay at home, escaping into addiction? Perhaps, but their children would have at least the chance to change this hopeless pattern.

Growing up under communism wasn't a pleasant experience but I, too, must admit that the world is not purely black and white, there is a lot of gray area. As atrocious as many of the elements of the communist system I experienced were, there were also some worthy aspects. For example, during communism women were treated equally with men. They were directors, prime ministers, presidents etc. They received equal pay as men. It was in the US where I discovered constant discussion on this subject and realized that we are far behind even communists, paying less to women for the same work that men did. To me, this resembled a mentality on the level of 18th-century white men.

I think that Bernie Sanders wants us to think in broader terms, which doesn't hurt - unlike populists and demagogues who don't want us to think at all. And again, the world is not black and white; there is a lot of gray area. If we award Olympic gold medals to athletes from communist countries, this does not mean that we value Leonid Brezhnev or Fidel Castro and their communist systems and regimes. The same is true with Oscar-winning films or great music or literature from communist countries, which earn Noble prizes and are enjoyed by millions around the world. Or let's look at China, which is a totalitarian regime. Did they not make progress over 50 years or progress fighting coronavirus? Bernie doesn't support communist China. People who think that such assessments glorify communism or tyranny are stuck in the phobia and mentality of the Cold War. I think Senator Sanders is above that. If half of the island was illiterate until 1962 and a program was created that taught all islanders to read and write, then that's positive. Was the Castro regime totalitarian and oppressive? Of course, nobody questions that, including Bernie Sanders. Bernie never praised any communist regime, on the contrary, he condemned all totalitarian regimes and this is very well documented. I think that acknowledging those "gray areas" on the level of education, culture, etc. could only open the doors for good diplomacy and negotiation opportunities for normalization and reforms with regime rulers. It will give positive signals, not only to their scared neighboring countries but to all world. I think Senator Sanders is, again, a step ahead of all of us.

Additionally, we should stay objective and also keep in mind the criminal activity of the CIA in South and Central America, by which democratically elected leaders were removed just to promote corporate interests.

Bernie Sanders' intellect is very consistent and well formed. I noticed this especially during his last one-on-one debate with Vice President Biden. Not only did he make evident his integrity and demonstrate that he is a solid political artisan (craftsman) with immense professional experience, but he also pointed out in a subtle way that VP Biden wasn't honest about his own record, like about his fight to cut social security several times, which was stopped by Senator Sanders on the senate floor. He exposed his inconsistencies and lack of foresight.

Additionally, Senator Sanders didn't resort to going low. He didn't even mention Biden's complicated and questionable history with the segregationism and school buses or his efforts to gain support from Robert Byrd, a former organizer and member of the KKK, who partook in Congress in a lengthy filibuster effort against the 1964 Civil Rights Act. He didn't mention creepy touching and sighing by VP Biden, which so visually disturbing.

Senator Sanders was very well prepared with his proposals, which are ready to go through legislative cycles. His Green New Deal got the highest score from dozens of top climate scientists as the best and essential program to save our planet. Let's forget about how our lifestyles just changed right under our feet. That's nothing compared to the consequences of more dramatic events, which will happen. Changing to green energy will save our children and next generations. There are a lot of opportunities to storage green energy – kinetic devices, kinetic power plants, or Newcomer Energy Vault created in the stealthy Swiss/Southern Californian startup Energy. Let's not forget that people were always innovative. The first industrial electric motor was invented in 1834...! The first cars were electric, introduced in 1902 and 1904, and there were charging stations across New York City. What would have happened if humanity had continued moving in this direction? We definitely would not have wars in the Middle East, like Iraq and Kuwait. Maybe there would be other wars, perhaps not on such scale, or maybe there would be no wars at all. Certainly, we could have today car batteries in the size of a hand watch with a charging time of 60 seconds... (just as a reminder, today's car batteries have a range of 350 - 400 miles, such as Tesla's, and a charging time of only 24 minutes – . Bypassing my divagations we have already implemented innovations in green energy: wind and wave turbines, solar glass, solar panels, voltage storages, energy sufficient houses and more, which are successfully used in the UK, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, and France and with continuing development towards 100% renewables as the exclusive source of energy in the next few years. VP Biden's idea to build speed railroads would possibly contribute to the fight against climate crisis, but on such a micro scale that could make its effects almost negligible, making it simply unfair to compare with Senator Sanders' Green New Deal. His Deal takes us much further into reforms and necessary drastic changes in this warlike reality of crisis.

Sanders' record of fighting for African American civil rights starts very early. In 1962, at the age of 19, he organized a protest against the segregation of student houses in Chicago. He was leading the human barricade and chained himself to two female African American protesters. He was arrested. In 1965 Bernie Sanders was marching behind MLK on the bridge in Selma. In 1988 Bernie Sanders endorsed Jessy Jackson in his presidential race, helping him to win Vermont. The 1988 Jackson campaign won 13 primaries and caucuses, 7 million votes, and 1,218.5 national convention delegates. The 1984 and 1988 Jackson campaigns helped register millions of young African Americans to vote!

In 1986, risking his political position, Bernie Sanders organized the first ever Lesbian Gay Pride in Vermont, later he fought in congress for the dignity and rights of LGBT US soldiers.

In his very first year in the House, he co-founded the Congressional Progressive Caucus. He led this group for its first eight years. Its primary devotion is to advance liberal causes and is currently the largest organization within the Democratic congressional caucus.

He sided with the minority in voting against the use of force against Iraq in 1991 and 2002. He also opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Voted against the Patriot Act despite the majority of Congress voting for it (357 to 66). He also sponsored several amendments trying to limit its effects, even getting a proposal passed through the House preventing the government from obtaining a record of the books people buy.

Was an open critic of Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan and took him head on insisting he only represented “large and wealthy corporations.” Greenspan later admitted to Congress that his economic ideology regarding risky mortgage loans was flawed.

He passed more amendments than any other member during his time in the House. It earned him the nickname “The Amendment King.” He did this despite being a “socialist” and Congress being controlled by Republicans from 1994 to 2006, in one of the most partisan right-wing Houses ever.

Passed an amendment to “require offenders who are convicted of fraud and other white collar crime to give appropriate notice to victims and other persons in cases where there are multiple victims eligible to receive restitution.”

In US Senate he received the distinction of being named the third-most popular senator in the country, according to Public Policy Polling in August 2011.

Given a score of 100 percent by the NAACP and NHLA (National Hispanic Leadership Agenda) based on his record during his time in the Senate.

Named one of the top 5 American Jews of the Forward 50 in 2015.

Chairman of the United States Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs in 2013-2014.

Became ranking minority member of the Senate Budget Committee in January 2015.

Became ranking minority member of the Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging.

Passed an amendment making sure that solar water heaters provide at least 30 percent of hot water for new federal buildings. This is forcing us to use green energy.

Made sure to it that bailout funds weren't used to replace laid-off U.S. workers with exploited and poorly-paid foreign workers.

Helped ensure that child care was being offered to parents in the Armed Forces by requiring the Comptroller General to provide accurate reporting on what was being done.

He required a public database be made available showing the names of senior Department officials seeking employment with defense contractors. This helped crack down on corruption.

As a son of an emigrant (his father came to USA in age of 17, with no money, no English language and no education) Bernie Sanders fights for emigrants as well as for Latino and Native American communities..... Why did so many American Palestinians, American Muslims, and American Arabs vote for a Jew, who spent his youth in Israel? They even call him "Amo Bernie" - Uncle Bernie. How phenomenal is it that a Jew, whose family was wiped out in the Holocaust in Poland, who supports the rights of the state of Israel and the rights of the state of Palestine, is the main political figure for a majority of Muslims in our country? We don't need to create any impressions here, Senator Sanders unites all of us, his multi-ethnical, multigenerational rallies with 5+ k 10+ K or 30+ K of participants across the country are further proof of it. These are just a few of the humanistic issues Senator Sanders has boldly advocated through his entire life. This is a really historical record worth making a biopic feature movie about Senator Sanders, because it would just be breathe taking...

After watching the last debate I didn't get the impression that Senator Sanders is this politician, who sounds to me more like a politician from the 70s, 80s, 90's or even the 2000's era. Although he is older, he represents a wider, more bold approach to the future for all of us. His unique experience consisting of 30 years in congress fighting for the people and not for corporations or wealthy campaign contributors, his intellectualism, his toughness resulting from growing up in the poor neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY, losing his parents at such an early age, all this makes him a person, whom we should recognize as being sensitive and dedicated, a professional politician, a good human being, a true Mensch, not greedy, not a career maker, not corporate owned, but owned by people (his presidential primary campaign doesn't take money from corporations, billionaires or super PACS, but is based only on donations of regular people), inspired by FDR and his New Deal, under which he grew up, a deal which encouraged him to adopt the axiom and have certainty that "the government could do good things". This is the only chance in our lifetime to elect for US President such a unique and symbolic person.

PS. At the end...One more thing: if Bernie is such a communist or socialist, why didn't he build or fight for a Socialistic Soviet Republic of Vermont? Somehow he didn't want to do this, did he betray himself or what?

All sources available on request.