



A Letter From the Editor

By ERIC FISCHER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Editing a publication which cuts against the grain of public opinion on campus is challenging, enlightening, and incredibly rewarding. Our publication is either heavily scrutinized so it can be criticized or it is dismissed completely. It is sometimes picked up and discussed vigorously and sometimes thrown into the garbage soon after distribution. Sometimes we get strong agreement from our readers, and occasionally we engage in a friendly sparring session with our counterparts at *The Monitor* (though I believe we have a perfect record against them). Coming to

our publication and are willing to engage in discussion as well. For this I am grateful.

Perhaps my most rewarding experience as an editor was when a close friend said to me: "Thank you for taking the positions you do. Someone had to say it." This is emblematic of a larger problem at colleges, the fact that students find it difficult to dissent. This comes about for a variety of reasons, but chiefly, I believe, because it is difficult to be a lone voice. We aim to rectify that. A student might find it difficult to be the lone voice challenging his or her friends, but when we publish articles, we

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the end of my tenure as editor-in-chief, I want to share some of my most rewarding experiences while publishing *Enquiry*.

On one occasion, an acquaintance mentioned to me that what he liked most about *Enquiry* is that it often examines conclusions that must be so obviously true that they don't merit a deeper look. Of course the firebrand candidate for president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, shouldn't be elected, until we ran an article examining the base of his support and why it supported him despite the controversies. Of course the college's endowment should divest from fossil fuels, until one of our pieces pointed out that investment returns may suffer and the lack of evidence that divestment would meaningfully combat climate change. This acquaintance did not agree with these views, but he recognized that we have tried to examine the roots of supposedly unassailable positions and found them sometimes to be wanting.

Faculty members have reached out to me on multiple occasions as well. They have either commented positively or challenged some of the arguments in our pieces. In both cases, I am grateful for their comments. They have sharpened my own writing, editing, and argumentative skills and reinforced the importance of minimizing chinks in the armor that could be validly criticized. Faculty members have shown that they read

hope they will spark such conversations. We hope that students can point to something we published, say "this is a good point," and continue the discussion. While I am sometimes disheartened that there are so few voices for the kinds of views we often publish in *Enquiry*, I have faith that there are conversations we helped spark to which we are not privy.

Tangentially, I have often wondered what percentage of the student body at Hamilton finds itself right-of-center, and I have wavered between "a very small percentage" and "a healthy minority." To this day, I am not certain which it is. But I do believe a large number of Hamilton students are critical thinkers, and also that many agree with our staff writers on many occasions. They are willing to hear different opinions and evaluate each on its own merits. My message to those students is simple: Stand up for what you believe in. Don't believe that you must always agree or disagree with someone. Find common ground and go from there.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who makes *Enquiry* possible. Thanks to all of our staff, who write, edit, lay out, and distribute our publication every week. In particular, I want to thank Helen Sternberg, *Enquiry's* layout editor for four years. She has been pivotal in ensuring

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Sanders at Hamilton

By CASIMIR ZABLOTSKI
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

With Bernie Sanders's recent endorsement of Joe Biden, ending his second run for the presidency, an assessment of his long career's significance seems warranted. There is no better place to start than Hamilton College, where Sanders taught for a semester in the spring of 1990. Many students are unaware of the popular politician's connection to our school, and except for a few digitized articles from the *Spectator*, the college's newspaper, it appears that his time at Hamilton is little more than a distant memory to most.

Sanders was brought to Hamilton by Dennis Gilbert, then head of the Sociology Department. They developed a strong relationship that led to Gilbert leaving Hamilton later in 1990 to assist Sanders's first congressional campaign. Both are clearly men of the left: Sanders's policies easily show it, while Gilbert's scholarship more subtly supports this assessment. Gilbert published a book in 1991 that was arguably favorable to the Sandinistas, a Marxist-Leninist party with a violent approach to taking power in Nicaragua, and commented on the Nicaraguan situation often in the *Spectator*. The issue was a popular topic on the Hamilton campus, but Gilbert seems to have been even more interested in it. Sanders backed the Sandinistas and even attended one of their rallies during a personal trip to Latin America.

A trip to the college's archives allowed me to retrieve a course catalogue for the Spring 1990 semester, where I found that Sanders taught two courses, focusing on democratic socialism and urban sociology. The descriptions of them are as follows:

235S Democracy and Socialism:

An examination of the current state of American democracy and a look at democratic socialism as an alternative to capitalism. Why are the richest people in America getting richer, while the poor are getting poorer? Why are our citizens increasingly not voting? The role of Big Money and the media in perpetuating capitalist ideology. Democratic socialism and its relevance to democratic values as the United States enters the 21st century.

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visual consistency and high standards for every one of our editions across the years. Thank you to the Alexander Hamilton

Institute, which supports us, and Dr. David Frisk, whose editing and stylistic guidance are invaluable. Thank you to my friends and family, who have supported me throughout my time at Hamilton, including the stresses

of *Enquiry* deadlines. And finally, the biggest “thank you” goes to our readers. We aim to stir minds and make you think critically. Seeing the fruits of our labors, on campus and by e-mail, keeps us going every week.

SANDERS AT HAMILTON *cont.*

335S The Problems and Potential of Urban Life: An examination of such urban problems as weak and corrupt political leadership, low citizen participation, crime, failing educational systems, deteriorating infrastructure, unhealthy environment, low-wage jobs, and homelessness. The importance of cities for the cultural and intellectual life of the nation. The quality of urban life and the role of recent federal policy. Field trips to various governmental agencies in Utica integral to the course.

When he is mentioned in the *Spectator*, Sanders is sometimes described as a social democrat, which may be loosely defined as an egalitarian who wishes to soften or humanize capitalism through governmental policies that stop short of actual socialism. Interestingly, however, the first course focused on “democratic socialism as an alternative to capitalism,” and there are many references in the *Spectator* to Sanders as a plain socialist who wishes to “redistribute wealth and power.” This begs the question of exactly where he lies on the political spectrum. Many have debated whether he is a social democrat, a democratic socialist, or something more radical, despite his insistence that he is a democratic socialist and not something else. Sanders appears to be deeply indebted to Karl Marx, and at Hamilton he mediated an open discussion titled “Marxism: A Rescue Attempt?” along with Gilbert. Sanders opened the discussion by pitting capitalism and socialism against each other and asserting that the former had not defeated the latter, even with the imminent demise of the Soviet Union. He argued that there were many serious problems in capitalist societies which needed to be addressed, ranging from poverty and wealth inequality to the lack of universal health care — issues which Sanders continues to focus on today.

The rest of the discussion seems to have dwelled on theoretical applications of Marxism, with Gilbert assessing Vladimir Lenin’s idea of the vanguard (leading and only useful) party as a “powerful but problematic idea.” Professor Robert Kurfirst, a visiting instructor in the Government Department at the time, argued that Marx’s ideas are still relevant if they are detached from the idea of revolution. While Sanders is not recorded as having joined the discussion after his opening remarks, it is safe to assume that he agreed with his colleagues that changes in or replacement of capitalism, whether it be the abolition of private property that Marx desired or a simpler drive for equality, must

be brought about democratically.

Yet Sanders has not been immune to distasteful impulses. It is plain that he wishes to greatly increase the scope and active role of federal power to achieve his goals, even refusing to deny that he would bring back the “era of big government” in 2016. And Professor Bob Paquette, former professor of history at Hamilton and my mentor at the Alexander Hamilton Institute, has been known to occasionally describe Sanders as a communist in disguise. “Communism” is a label he was allegedly ambivalent about disavowing in the 1970s, once stating that “I don’t mind people coming up and calling me a communist ... at least, they’re still alive.” And his relationship, in terms of attitude, with authoritarian regimes is troubling. From happily singing in his underwear with Russians while honeymooning in Soviet-era Moscow in 1988 to praising Cuba’s literacy programs despite flagrant human rights violations in the county, he has not been a stranger to making what can fairly be considered enabling comments about America’s enemies.

Regarding Cuba, Sanders has even said Fidel Castro’s literacy program was well-intended despite being imposed by a dictator, seeming to ignore the nation’s historically high literacy rates and the nature of the program as statist indoctrination. This parallels his and Gilbert’s sympathy for the Sandinistas in 1990. Sanders clearly seems blinded by his ideology, unwilling to change his opinions despite overwhelming evidence against them. A particularly potent example is his long-standing position that America should operate under a system of Scandinavian socialism like Sweden’s, a claim that many students at Hamilton and on other campuses also boldly make without understanding the benefits of the capitalism they oppose. A major difficulty with this opinion is that Sweden is not a socialist state, but rather a social democracy with a homogeneous population whose wealth is largely historic and which enjoyed healthy growth after a free-market rebound following disastrous policies of economic redistribution, according to a comprehensive policy report by the Cato Institute. Taxation is certainly high there, although somewhat low for corporations, but the country arguably still has a capitalist ethos and system. As Swedish historian Johan Norberg writes, a Swedish model for America would actually mean a more open economy.

With these points in mind, how do professors at Hamilton remember Sanders? Professor Dan Chambliss, who was on leave that semester and whose position he filled, says he has almost “zero recollection” of Sanders beyond his being an interesting man to have teach here. Suggesting that capitalism and socialism are not a simple dichotomy but a

spectrum (contrary to how Sanders framed the tension between them in the “Rescue Attempt for Marxism?” discussion), Chambliss says Sanders merely wants to open more room for discussion on the issues he cares about. But he believes it’s an understatement to call him a social democrat, and that Sanders has consistently wished to shift the political vocabulary to show that socialism “isn’t actually that bad.” When asked about his comments on Cuba, Chambliss deemed it a “bogus issue” that was taken out of context, although he conceded that he does not know what Sanders’s actual views on the country are.

Others remember him differently. Most notably, Paquette has rejected the predominant narrative of Sanders as a sweet old man who wishes for peace and equality, instead describing him as an ideologue who became cantankerous when he discovered that Paquette, despite being educated in Marxist theory by his mentor Eugene Genovese, was not a man of the left himself. When I asked Paquette for a comment on Sanders, he responded:

Bernie Sanders occupied an office above mine in the Kirner-Johnson Building during the spring semester 1990. We had few conversations after the first unpleasant one, when he learned I was not a fellow Marxist, nor a fan of Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas, a hot-button issue at the time. A strident class warrior, hardly an avuncular type, he tended to pronounce rather than converse and became animated when his left-wing clichés were challenged.

Regardless of how people at Hamilton remember him, Sanders has one defining quality: his consistency. While Chambliss was quick to note that he has not stubbornly remained the same in all of his viewpoints over the past 30 years, the progressive face of the Democratic Party has nonetheless remained a strident class warrior and champion of what he calls social justice throughout his career — a fact that both his supporters and his detractors can respect. Some of his more reasonable goals have come to fruition, such as greater acceptance of gays in the military, while his radical ideas remain a cause for concern for proponents of the free market and others who fear a greater expansion of government. There have been occasional changes in his platform and his voting record, although they may be indicative of an incremental move to the left, paralleling a shift in his self-representation. By and large, however, from his time at Hamilton to the present, Sanders’s song has remained the same.

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