

BACKPACK SOCIALISM

BY JIM MCINTOSH

In March 1989, Bernard Sanders of Burlington, Vermont, the nation's only admitted socialist mayor, having declined to run for a fifth term, ended his eight-year tenure. He was replaced by one of his appointees, not an admitted socialist, who has vowed to continue Sanders's agenda.

Upon leaving office, Sanders announced that he would be "writing and lecturing," which means talk shows and campus forums. He has cut an album of folk songs. He has a dream of establishing a third political party, a leftist coalition outside the Democratic and Republican parties. He says his Burlington experience proves that it is possible. He will be seeking publicity and getting it.

For nearly a decade, Sanders, 47, has enjoyed generous attention from an indulgent media. *U.S. News and World Report* cited him as one of the nation's 20 best mayors. *Newsweek* termed him "the popular mayor of [a] prosperous New England city." The *New York Times* ran his opinion pieces. He is photogenic and always good for an eye-grabbing quote like, "I am not now, nor have I ever been, a liberal Democrat."

Neither is he a native Vermonter. Sanders grew up in Brooklyn and attended the University of Chicago. He spent time on an Israeli kibbutz, then in 1968 moved to the Vermont countryside to get "back to nature." Before winter was over, Bernie was in the city of Burlington, where he began producing educational filmstrips and videotapes.

In 1970 he was a congressional candidate for the now-all-but-defunct Liberty Union Party—a leftist group that espouses guaranteed incomes, nationalized industry, and disarmament. He discovered that he had a talent for paranoid oratory and a knack for getting attention. He ran twice for governor of Vermont and twice for U.S. Senate but never earned



Bernie Sanders: radical talk, New Deal policies

more than 6 percent of the vote. He left the Liberty Union Party in 1976, accused of building a "cult of personality." He began nurturing a martyr complex.

During the Carter era, when many leftists found a home in the Democratic Party, Sanders disdained the Democrats—a disdain he still nurses. He joined the Socialist Workers Party, serving as a presidential elector on the SWP ballot in 1980. He styled himself as a 1930s Socialist and cultivated a folksy image. He kept his name before the public by making documentaries (including a biography of Eugene Debs) and showing them on Vermont Educational Television.

In 1981, Sanders and 23 other left-wing activists met and nominated Sanders to run for mayor of Burlington. Significantly, he did not run as a Socialist. He ran as an "independent" against a weak Democrat and a weaker Republican. His timing was good. Burlington's conservative Democratic administration was vulnerable, while a new constituency—personified by Sanders and his "marpies" (middle-aged rural professionals)—was ready to flex its muscles.

Sanders won by 10 votes. Immediately, he announced that he was a socialist, and the news media loved it: in the wake of the Reagan landslide, Vermont elects a socialist! Sanders and the

People's Republic of Burlington became perennial subjects of off-beat feature stories. Explains University of Vermont political science professor Garrison Nelson: "We get a lot of attention because we are within [the vicinity of] two of the most media-sensitive cities in America—New York and Boston—who send reporters up here for yucks."

Besides being good for yucks, it's hard to imagine a city easier to manage. Burlington is tiny—500 U.S. cities are bigger. Its population of 38,000 is 95 percent white,

mostly middle class, with several thousand college students. Located on Lake Champlain, it is a very pretty college town, with even prettier outskirts. The living is easy in Burlington. Unemployment is less than 2 percent.

In addition to the University of Vermont and the affiliated Medical Center, Burlington boasts an IBM facility and a General Electric munitions factory nearby. The city's homeless shelters—a Sanders initiative—can sleep 80 people and always have vacancies. Since 1984, Vermont has been administered by a liberal Democratic governor who is generous with handouts. If any town could afford a few years of backpack socialism, Burlington could.

In fact, Sanders inherited a vital downtown and a stock of affordable housing. The major shopping districts and malls were in place. The city was poised to take off. When Sanders says he made Burlington thrive, businesspeople say that the city prospered in spite of him and that Burlington's economic success was due more to Reaganomics and increased defense spending than to local leadership.

The business community learned to accommodate Sanders and his bureaucrats, the self-described "Sand-eristas." Truthfully, Sanders's record as mayor was basically, er, liberal. He talked

like a flaming radical, but his everyday administrative policies were warmed-over New Deal stuff. He visited Nicaragua (loved it) but refused to allow peace protesters to block the entrance of the GE munitions plant. He increased taxes on businesses, but he also introduced reforms that saved taxpayers money. His folksy style—frizzy hair, no tie, rumpled clothes—was deceptively laid-back, because Sanders never relaxed, especially his mouth.

He campaigned for Jesse Jackson in 1988. He made friends with leftist big shots like I.F. Stone, Barbara Ehrenreich, and former Berkeley mayor Gus Newport. He ran for governor in 1986 and for Congress in 1988. In the latter race, fueled by a national fundraising effort and a relative absence of Marxist rhetoric, he finished ahead of a blundering Democratic candidate 38 percent to 19 percent. The Republican won. Sanders blamed the Democrats and within a month announced his retirement from city hall.

That's Sanders in a nutshell—the martyr complex, the showy style, and the substantive failures. After eight years and two statewide Sanders campaigns, there is still no third party in Vermont. Sanders's progressives do not even hold a majority on the Burlington City Council. His "rainbow coalition" has fewer than 300 paying members. His paranoid refusal to play along with the Democrats has made bitter enemies in the powerful New England faction of the party. He cannot dependably deliver any sizable bloc of voters. He has no conspicuous protégés. Except for achieving celebrity status, what has he accomplished?

Bernard Sanders will try to persuade a national audience that leftists can make American cities livable. To prove that "progressives" or "rainbows"—he is phasing out his use of the "S-word"—can run a government, he will invite people to examine his record in Burlington. He risks the chance that they will examine it more closely than Bernie himself has yet been willing to.

Jim McIntosh watches Vermont from the safety of New Hampshire.

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BY JO KWONG

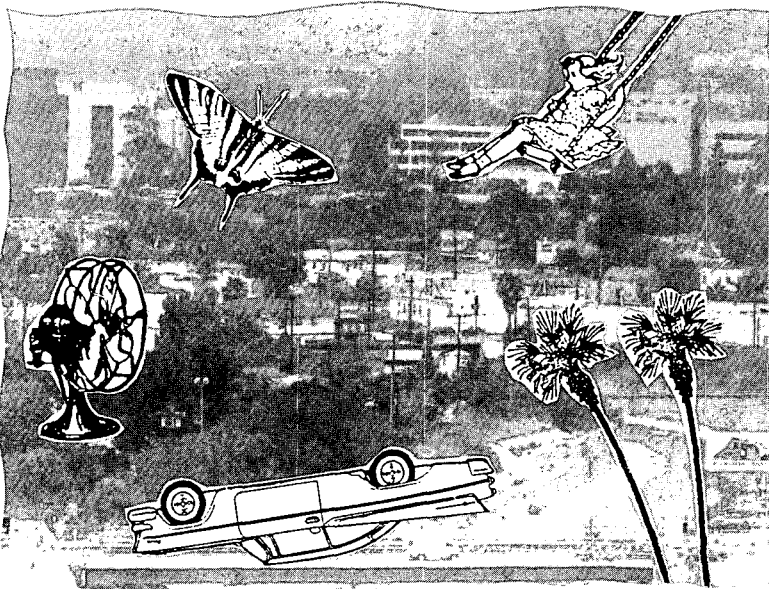
The EPA sits perched like a giant atop the San Gabriel Mountains overlooking Los Angeles, sniffing the air disapprovingly and tapping the billy club of Clean Air Act sanctions in the palm of its hand. For two decades, the South Coast Air Quality Management District has faced the task of meeting federal and state air quality standards for an area covering 13,350 square miles. Angelenos have mostly ignored AQMD officials. But now, those officials are saying smugly, if you don't start listening to us, you'll have to deal with Mr. EPA.

With Washington threatening to impose its own measures if Los Angeles doesn't, the AQMD in March approved a master plan for cleaning up the air. It is being watched closely in cities and states across the nation.

The first stage of the plan alone proposes 120 measures to control emissions. Using lighter fluid on your backyard barbecue during "summer smog episode days" will be an air crime. Only radial tires will be allowed. No more gas-engine lawn mowers or chain saws. Underarm deodorant: banned.

The plan itself, of course, speaks in no such straightforward terms. It proposes "requiring reformulation of [underarm] products with less reactive components" or that "all non-utility internal combustion engines not used for emergency standby be phased out and replaced with electric motors."

The main focus of the plan, though, is vehicle pollutants. It calls for \$44 billion or so in new transit and highway facilities, converting most vehicles to solar power or methanol fuel, forcing businesses to locate in residential areas, lim-



iting the number of family cars, and putting 60 percent of the workers in the four-county area on alternative schedules: nine-day, 80-hour or four-day, 40-hour work weeks. The AQMD has made no small Plan.

Some of the technologies required to effect it, admits the AQMD, "may not exist yet." And critics say that many of the measures will not improve the air nearly as much as the AQMD hopes and might even cause more damage. No one really knows, for example, the environmental effects of substituting methanol, which yields the byproduct formaldehyde, for petroleum.

The good news is that the plan will never become law in its present form. Many of the measures await approval from all sorts of governmental entities, from local zoning boards to regulatory agencies such as the FAA. The usual lobbyists will turn out in force to oppose them.

The bad news is that while not all of it will become law, parts of the plan surely will. And the AQMD's approach to cleaning up the air is fundamentally and systemically flawed. The underlying assumption is that regulators can assess

overall air quality in the Los Angeles basin; can understand the interactions and operations of everyone and everything that pollutes; can design alternatives to virtually everything in society from gardening to manufacturing, from cosmetics to transportation, taking into consideration the aggregate air pollution effects of these alternatives; and can impose, monitor, and enforce each of their dictates. Even without consideration of cost-effectiveness or least-cost solutions, this is

a Herculean task.

Fortunately, there is an alternative to such command-and-control approaches. Most people share the goal of improving air quality and are willing to pay to achieve it—despite the hue and cry from critics about how much the plan will cost (pro and con estimates range from \$3.9 billion to \$12.8 billion annually). The problem with the plan is not that it will cost but that it gives area residents little choice about how to go about achieving cleaner air.

Admittedly, in the absence of regulation, people do not freely incorporate pollution control measures into their lifestyles. Any move to stop treating the air basin as a "free good" is going to cost. But instead of requiring specific technologies or prohibiting particular processes, the AQMD would do far better to establish practical, enforceable air-quality levels and let people search for the least-cost means to achieve them. Under a variety of emission pricing schemes, all types of emissions—residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural—could be reduced by encouraging "markets" in air quality.