

The political bankruptcy of filmmaker Michael Moore and his “5 Reasons Why Trump Will Win”

By David Walsh
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American filmmaker Michael Moore has written a letter to supporters headlined, “5 Reasons Why Trump Will Win.” It is a tired, cynical, internally incoherent piece that emerges almost inevitably from the left-liberal milieu to which Moore, the director of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Bowling for Columbine* and *Roger & Me*, has belonged since the mid-1970s.

Moore begins the recent piece by informing readers of his website that he has “awful, depressing news” for them, to wit, “[Republican] Donald J. Trump is going to win in November. This wretched, ignorant, dangerous part-time clown and full time sociopath is going to be our next president.” He makes this prediction in the context of expressing support for Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton.

That a semi-fascistic, billionaire conman has been chosen by the Republican Party as its presidential candidate and could be the next resident of the White House ought to prompt painstaking analysis. A serious effort to explain the extraordinary character of the 2016 elections would need to take into account the crisis of American capitalism and the rottenness of its two-party system—and would also need to draw sharp conclusions, including the urgency of creating a socialist alternative to the present political set-up.

This is not Moore’s approach. Instead his explanations and arguments, as we shall see, are of the most banal, pragmatic, even puerile character.

Unhappily, the filmmaker is not someone who ever feels the need to explain his own history or past political positions. Previous mistakes and miscalculations are never corrected or even acknowledged, they are merely compounded by new, even more egregious ones. This is a hallmark of American “radical” petty bourgeois thinking, renowned for its inconsistency, lack of principle and disdain for history, at its worst.

In reality, Moore’s opposition to America’s war drive—like that of many others in his upper-middle-class milieu—and his ability to make any sort of genuine popular appeal ended with the inauguration of Barack Obama. Under the Bush administration, a relatively easy target, the filmmaker functioned as the mouthpiece for a mood of protest that never went beyond the precincts of bourgeois politics. As both *Sicko*—his film about the health care system—and *Where to Invade Next*—his most recent work—indicate, Moore’s political vision extends as far as some version of the European or Canadian welfare state.

The documentary filmmaker’s adoption of a faux working class personality has always been one of his least attractive traits. He has chosen, in public at least, to impersonate a worker without knowledge, without culture, a simple naïf, something of a buffoon. In fact, Moore understands nothing about the important social and political battles of the American or global working class, which have always involved not merely a physical, but a heightened ideological and intellectual dimension.

In any event, let us recall that Moore officially endorsed Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont in a statement issued February 1, 2016. In that statement, the documentarian argued that Sanders had a far better chance of defeating Trump and accused the Clinton camp of “red-baiting” the Vermont senator. He took note of the fact that Hillary Clinton “voted for the Iraq War,” opposes reform of the financial system, “doesn’t want to break up the banks,” “doesn’t want to raise the minimum wage” and opposes a free health care system.

He went on, “Clinton does find ways to pay for war and tax breaks for the rich.” She was “FOR the Patriot Act, FOR NAFTA, and wants to put Ed Snowden in prison. THAT’S a lot to wrap one’s head around, especially when you have Bernie Sanders as an alternative.”

Over the course of the next few months Moore vigorously campaigned for Sanders.

Various tweets provide the general line of his arguments. On January 23, Moore wrote, referring to Clinton, “If u vote 2 invade Iraq but later say u r sorry (after thousands have died & trillions spent) do u really think your reward is the White House?”

Moore was asked March 27 to explain his preference for Sanders over Clinton in ten words or less. He replied: “Iraq War, Wall Street, mass incarceration, college debt, Israel/Palestine.” On April 12, he taunted Clinton that she ought to “bring Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman [Sachs], onto the stage to introduce u at your next rally! Be proud of those who support u!”

Two days later, Moore asked rhetorically, “Can anyone with a conscience vote for someone who led us on to war in Iraq?,” and added, “A question to my good friends who support Clinton: Can you, as best as possible, assure me you’re convinced Hillary will not take us 2 war?”

On May 9, Moore was asked by a correspondent, “What would you ask or say to Hillary if given the chance?” His answer: “How many families of Iraqi dead have you said ‘I’m sorry’ to?” He noted as recently as May 20, “One Dem candidate is 4 peace & against violence. The other candidate supports war & the violence against the poor perpetrated by Goldman Sachs ... Clinton is a hawk, she sanctioned a war.”

How in the world then could Moore justify his statement on May 8 that he would “support” Clinton in a general election?

“She’s better than the alternative and she will do some good,” Moore told *Politico*. “Unfortunately I can’t support her during the primaries because she voted for the Iraq war and she’s not really going to fix corporate America and Wall Street. They’ll still be calling the shots in her White House so that makes it difficult for people who care about those issues.”

What can one say in the face of this unprincipled jumble? Moore could not back Clinton “in the primaries” because she was a warmonger in the service of a financial elite who would “still be calling the shots in her

White House,” but he could support this corrupt “hawk” in a general election! The American people are fortunate indeed to have someone like Moore looking out for their best interests.

Apparently counting on the amnesia or intellectual laziness of many of his readers, Moore, in his latest pronouncement, praises Clinton, “our very first female president, someone the world respects, someone who is whip-smart and cares about kids, who will continue the Obama legacy.” He enthuses about the latter prospect, “Yes! Four more years of this!”

As noted above, there is no internal logic to Moore’s “5 Reasons” argument concerning the inevitable triumph of what he absurdly describes as the Trump “juggernaut.”

(Even his current certainty that Trump will win the presidency is a reversal of previous positions. In the same May 8 interview, Moore stated firmly, “Trump can’t win, that’s the math.”)

The filmmaker is obliged to admit that wide layers of the population are refusing to vote for Clinton and the Democrats because they are suffering economically. He refers to conditions in the former industrial states as “broken, depressed, struggling, the smokestacks strewn across the countryside with the carcass of what we use to call the Middle Class. Angry, embittered working (and nonworking) people who were lied to by the trickle-down of Reagan and abandoned by Democrats who still try to talk a good line but are really just looking forward to rub one out with a lobbyist from Goldman Sachs who’ll write them [a] nice big check before leaving the room.”

Trump, Moore comments with some legitimacy, is seen by millions of angry Americans as their “personal Molotov cocktail to throw right into the center of the bastards” who ruined their lives. Voting for the Republican candidate is a means of paying back “all of them, all who wrecked their American Dream.”

He points once again to Clinton’s right-wing record: “Her vote for the Iraq War made me promise her that I would never vote for her again. To date, I haven’t broken that promise. For the sake of preventing a proto-fascist from becoming our commander-in-chief, I’m breaking that promise. ... She’s a hawk, to the right of Obama. ... She is hugely unpopular—nearly 70% of all voters think she is untrustworthy and dishonest.” Many Sanders voters, he adds, are “not going to vote for Trump; some will vote third party, but many will just stay home.”

If Moore were to follow the logic of his own arguments, he would be obliged to conclude: the reactionary, anti-working class policies of the Democratic Party, one of America’s two imperialist parties, are entirely responsible for the prominence of Donald Trump, in large measure the embodiment of mass anger and confusion that has not yet found a progressive, socialist expression.

To draw such a conclusion, however, would involve self-criticism, in fact, an internal ideological revolution. If the American population today faces the non-choice of Clinton and Trump, “left” forces in the orbit of the Democratic Party, like Moore, with their endless celebration of “practical” politics that leads into one blind alley after another and always works to the favor of the big-business Democrats, are centrally culpable. Their specific mission is to lull the working class to sleep and to dull its consciousness with empty phrases about the supposed “progressive,” “liberal” or even “left” qualification of one miserable representative of corporate American after another.

In 2004 Moore disgracefully endorsed former US Army general Wesley Clark for the Democratic Party presidential nomination, claiming that this war criminal, who presided over the savage 1999 bombing of Serbia as NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander in Europe and enthusiastically supported the invasion of Iraq in 2003, was “an honest, decent, honorable man who would be a breath of fresh air in the White House.”

And when these various strategies, shortcuts and clever tricks come undone, as they always do, with the working class in America or elsewhere paying the price, the Moores of this world invariably chastise

the population for its backwardness and lack of political fortitude. Today, because identity politics is the first and last refuge of a scoundrel, Moore, out of the blue, suggests that support for Trump represents “The Last Stand of the Angry White Man.”

With his trademark ham-fisted irony, Moore goes on, purporting to speak for this “Angry White Man”: “Our male-dominated, 240-year run of the USA is coming to an end. A woman is about to take over! How did this happen?! *On our watch!* ... [A]fter having had to endure eight years of a black man telling us what to do, we’re supposed to just sit back and take eight years of a woman bossing us around?”

This is slanderous and repugnant. Millions of white and black workers voted twice for Barack Obama, the candidate of “change,” sold to them by Moore and the pseudo-left as a transformative and historic figure who would repudiate the hated Bush administration’s militarism and corporate criminality. In November 2008, Moore had this response to Obama’s victory: “Who among us is not at a loss for words? Tears pour out. Tears of joy. Tears of relief. A stunning, whopping landslide of hope in a time of deep despair.” What have been the results of this “landslide of hope”? Eight years of war, of attacks on democratic rights, of declining living standards and of the ever-increasing enrichment of the top fraction of the richest one percent.

Sadly, Moore never learns anything. He repeats the same type of blather at every important juncture. It is not our fault if we can cite in July 2016 what we wrote in January 2004, at the time of his endorsement of Clark, without having to change a word:

“Insofar as his [Moore’s] impressions coincide with or include a sympathy for the working class or genuine feeling for its suffering, he can produce valuable work. Both *Roger & Me* and *Bowling for Columbine* [and later, *Fahrenheit 9/11*], despite their limitations, contain some genuinely worthwhile moments and insights.”

But why, we asked, “has the left failed to construct a mass movement in the US? The strength of American capitalism no doubt played a significant role. But this failure has persisted despite the obvious and growing crisis of the system. The absence of a coherent, consciously considered and worked out ideology, indeed the contempt for theory that Moore and others exhibit, has played a huge role. The right wing in America has no intrinsic power or popular appeal, its relative dominance is a function in part of the intellectual bankruptcy of this sort of ‘left’ pragmatism, thoroughly incapable of orienting itself to the historic needs of the working class and the construction of a principled mass movement.”

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