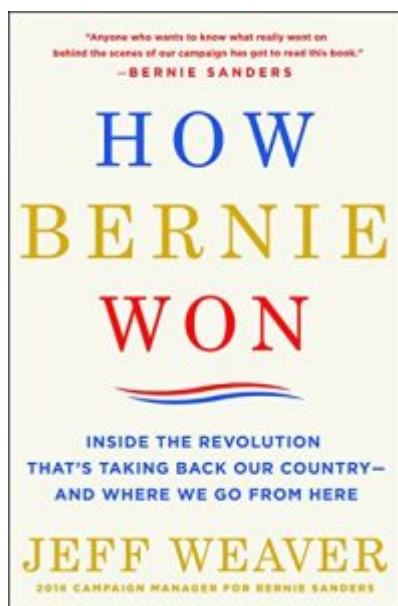


Time to Bring FDR Back into the Democratic Party

Review: **How Bernie Won: Inside the Revolution That's Taking Back Our Country**, by Jeff Weaver, St. Martin's Press, 2018, 363 pps.

By Angela Vullo

Sept. 6, 2018—From the title on, author Jeff Weaver, Bernie Sander's 2016 campaign manager, challenges the common perception of the outcome of the U.S. Presidential election. Although Bernie lost the Democratic nomination, resulting in the presidential win of Donald Trump, Weaver argues, he has succeeded in setting off an economic and political revolution in the country. This book is a "must read" for anyone who wants a political insider's account of what actually happened in the election cycle of 2016—particularly in the Democratic Party—and continues to happen to this very day. The Democratic Party, and U.S. politics in general, is being shaken to its very core.



Weaver's book is not just about Bernie's presidential run, but reflects on the Senator's whole political and personal

history. Although Jeff weaves many anecdotes and examples of personal stories and party infighting into his exposé, he addresses the subject matter from a much larger polemical and analytical standpoint. He heavily refers to FDR's 1944 State of the Union [address](#), especially the part on the Second Bill of Rights, as the way forward, and even includes the speech in his book. "I have been warned you won't read it," he challenges the reader.

On a recent book tour, speaking before Our Revolution in Northern Virginia, the grassroots organization Sanders founded after the Democratic Convention, Weaver began his presentation by reading the passage from his book on the FDR speech, and declared that its message was the missing link in the campaign. "[F]ar more so than all of my musings this speech is critical to understanding our campaign, the unfinished business of the modern Democratic Party, how far the party has strayed from its modern roots, and Bernie's place in the continuity of the party and American political thought."

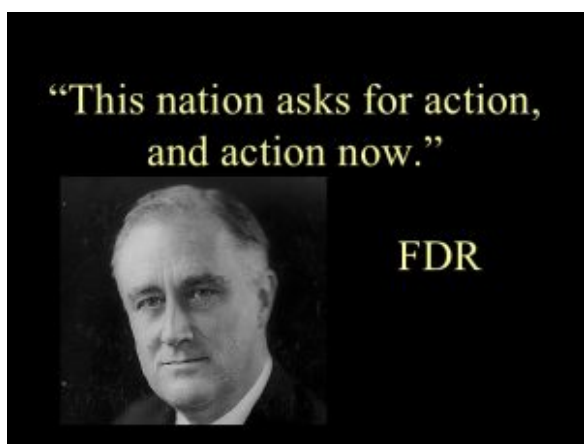
Weaver's book is rich not just in insight, but also in proposing solutions, particularly on how the Democratic Party must correct its mistakes. He goes through the minutiae of party rules and electoral outcomes in detail, but he insists that the broad analysis is more important than anecdotes. History is changed by bold ideas, not "incrementalism," he argues. The big idea in this book is that the Democratic Party must return to the tradition of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The Party Shift

In taking on the Democratic party structure, Weaver focuses on the shift in early 1990s, when, he asserts, the party was taken over by a right-wing elite who called themselves the New Democrats or Neo-Liberals, i.e. Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council (New Democrats). Bill Clinton's victory meant that "a new corporate-friendly wing of the Democratic Party had come into power," Weaver writes. "Bill

Clinton's administration represented an aberration in the historical trajectory of the Democratic Party toward more inclusion, more economic equality and broader and broader opportunity."

The New Democrats abandoned the working class, and adopted free trade policies, Welfare Reform, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), Capital Punishment, the tech bubble, etc.



In his inaugural address, FDR demanded action for working people.

Ironically, it was at this same time that Bernie Sanders was elected to Congress in Vermont in 1990, which put him in a position to eventually run for president. Proving how the long arm of history actually works, "All these chickens would come home to roost in 2016 for Hillary Clinton," Weaver says.

Bernie as Outsider

Bernie Sanders has always been a political outsider, and since 2015 he has succeeded in forcing the Democratic Party to bend to his policy direction. Despite losing the Democratic Party's nomination, he chose to work within the party, and to try and reform it. Some fruits of his efforts were visible at the just-concluded August Democratic National Committee (DNC) meeting in Chicago.

At that meeting, the party was forced to overhaul its

structure to limit the power of the super-delegates, and move toward returning party control to the grassroots. This was a direct result of the DNC initiating the Unity Reform Commission during the Democratic Convention. This shift will significantly change the party nominating process for president. The Democrats also hope that by initiating other policy decisions, they will win a "Blue Wave" in 2018.

Weaver's book holds lessons for that effort. He captures the excitement of the Bernie campaign, but more importantly, stresses where it fell short, and what has to be done differently, not to just win elections, but move the country forward. Weaver makes clear that building the party, and reaching out to those who have been left out, particularly Independents, is the way to save the country. That's why Bernie, believing that "People are hurting everywhere," campaigned throughout the country, and raised millions for down-ballot candidates.

Weaver's use of an FDR quote on the General Welfare is quite apropos at this point.

"I like to think of our country as one home in which the interests of each member are bound up with the happiness of all. We ought to know, by now, that the welfare of your family or mine cannot be bought at the sacrifice of our neighbor's family."



FDR giving his 1944 State of the Union Address

For over three decades, going back to 1986, Senator Sanders has been consistent in his views; so consistent, that Weaver admits that he can recite some of Bernie's speeches by heart.

As most people know, Bernie is most identified with promoting single payer health care, tuition-free college, raising the minimum wage, Wall Street reform, and overall, shifting the system to one of income equality. He is a co-sponsor of the Warren-McCain Bill, calling for a 21st Century [Glass Steagall](#).

Throughout Weaver's account of the election, he unabashedly declares that, "To the extent our campaign bears any responsibility for Trump's victory, it is that we did not defeat Hillary Clinton." He takes on DNC chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz for her role in trying to shut down Bernie's campaign to assure Hillary the nomination. When Weaver joined the campaign in 2016, Bernie was still an unknown, but, nevertheless, they were both in it to win. And to this day, Weaver believes that Bernie could've beaten Trump.

The Sanders' Presidential Campaign Begins

Bernie Sanders announced his presidential run on May 26, 2015, and declared his main focus to be defeating "the rigged economy."

"[A]n economy held in place by a corrupt finance system, which could only be defeated by everyday people standing up and electing a president who would fight against the economic and political elites and for a more people-oriented government and economy."

Throughout the campaign Bernie worked to bridge the racial and economic divide, and raised more small contributions than any other presidential candidate in history. In the speech following the New Hampshire primary, in 24 hours he raised \$6.5 million. Overall, his campaign totaled \$228 million from over 8.2 million contributions. This was quite a leap from its original budget of \$30 million.

On October 13, 2015, 40% of voters did not know who Sanders was compared to Hillary. In retrospect, that was maybe not such a good thing for her.

Bernie focused on the positive, and did not engage in negative attacks, especially on the Hillary emails. He wanted a real debate on the substantive policy issues.



Bernie Sanders on the 2016 campaign trail

From the first debate Senator Sanders concentrated on several issues: combating wealth and income inequality; reforming the campaign finance system; breaking up the big banks; and advocating for criminal justice reform. The campaign's internal polling showed that "Wealth and income inequality and corrupt campaign finance system—were the top issues for Democratic primary voters."

"One issue that weighed on voter's minds was Bernie's electability. It is a sad irony, given the outcome in November 2016, that a year earlier we were spending time and resources trying to figure out how to convey to voters that Bernie Sanders was more electable than Hillary Clinton. As early as the summer of 2015, public polling consistently showed that Bernie Sanders was a stronger candidate against Trump (and most of the other Republicans) than Hillary Clinton would be. The media minimized and dismissed these polls as soon as they reported them."

While it was clear the American people craved a strong

positive message, Weaver contends that the Sanders campaign fell short in delivering that message. "But what was not sufficiently articulated by us was that in many ways Bernie was running for FDR's fifth term."

In an ironic twist, after Bernie lost the Democratic nomination, Trump cunningly grabbed onto the FDR idea, invoking the "forgotten man" into his speeches, and went on to victory. As we all now know, Trump quickly turned his support to Wall Street and reneged on his promises, although he would be quick to tweet the opposite. Bernie is the real deal; Trump is not.

The Iowa Primary: The DNC versus FDR

According to Weaver's recollection, the Bernie campaign escalated in November 2015 based on four things: paid media ads; the CBS debate; the exposure of Wasserman Schultz's efforts to shut down the campaign; and Bernie campaigning full time.

On November 14, during the CBS debate, there was a critical exchange between Bernie and Hillary on her taking Wall Street money. In response to Bernie's accusations, Clinton responded by basically confirming his charges:

"So, I represented New York, and I represented New York on 9/11 when we were attacked. Where were we attacked? We were attacked in downtown Manhattan where Wall Street is. I did spend a whole lot of time and effort helping them rebuild. That was good for New York. It was good for the economy and it was a way to rebuke the terrorists who attacked our country."

Beginning on December 16, 2015 the DNC took a series of actions which resulted in Senator Sander's campaign contract being violated. Debbie Wasserman Schultz "shut off access to the voter file we had purchased and all the data that our campaign had put into it." That action, Weaver writes, fit

right into our message that “the political elites controlled a rigged system.”



DNC Chair Wasserman Schultz pulled numerous shenanigans for Hillary to win.

Weaver extensively details how this shutdown was designed to cripple the campaign’s outreach into Iowa, where the caucus was to be held in one month and a half. No calls or emails could be sent out. He contends that this was a deliberate attempt to torpedo Bernie’s efforts in the Iowa Caucus. It came on top of other preferential treatment given to the Clinton campaign by the DNC, and outright political and financial warfare against Bernie.

Most likely the Clinton campaign had access to Sanders’ voter IDs. Sanders’ campaign paid \$250,000 for DNC access, while the Clinton campaign paid nothing. The DNC never set up joint fundraising events as promised.

This was war.

Weaver cites lots of details on caucus rules, and how the whole process was not transparent. He refers to the Iowa showdown as like the decisive battle for Stalingrad in World War II. The morning after the Iowa caucuses, where Hillary allegedly edged out Bernie by a handful of votes in a highly contested result, the *Des Moines Register’s* headline read: “What happened Monday night at the Democratic Caucus was a debacle, period.”

Weaver appropriately asked, “What could we do? Call the DNC?”

Sanders heavily invoked the ideas of Franklin Roosevelt during the Iowa campaign. Weaver recalls: “One of the themes that we used in Iowa Mail, which never really became as big a part of the broader messaging in the campaign as it should have, was the connection of Bernie’s transformative agenda to Franklin Delano Roosevelt.”

“In truth, what Bernie was advocating was merely the logical progression of what FDR had accomplished and what FDR acknowledged had been left unaccomplished during his tenure.”

What is detailed in FDR’s Second Bill of Rights includes—economic security, children to have a brighter future, freedom from illness and unemployment, retirement without poverty, and a life of dignity and social inclusion, or simply, “an agenda of common aspirations,” “an economy that works for all of us.”

Weaver insightfully argues: “Is there much difference between FDR’s call for creating a new set of rights that would allow all Americans ‘pursuit of happiness’ and the presidential platform of Bernie Sanders? A legacy abandoned during the Democratic reaction of the 1990s. FDR warned, that returning to the gross income and wealth inequality of the 1920s would put us in danger of yielding to ‘the spirit of Fascism here at home.’ |”



FDR visits with farmers in North Dakota in the 1936 campaign.

Recalling FDR's famous declaration about Wall Street—"They are unanimous in their hate for me, and I relish their hatred—, Bernie declared: "And let me echo that today: If the Koch brothers and the billionaire class hate my guts, I welcome their hatred, because I am going to stand with working families."

Although Bernie continued with the FDR theme during the New York Primary, Weaver concludes: "[I]t was a connection that we might have stressed more thematically throughout the campaign. Bernie represented a rediscovery of the values of the Democratic Party's modern roots and an articulation of the unfinished business of the New Deal."

Clinton trips on her Achilles heel

Around the time of the March 9, Miami debate, stories were breaking on Hillary's connection to Wall Street. She had made ninety-two speeches during the period of 2013-2015 at approximately \$225,000/speech, collecting \$21.6 million. There were eight speeches to big banks, totaling \$1.8 million, which included three speeches to Goldman Sachs.

Hillary refused to release the transcripts of the speeches. The only cryptic message that saw the light of day was from the infamous hacked email account of Clinton campaign chairman, John Podesta reporting that in one speech in 2016, she said, "You need both a public and private position."

Her support of Wall Street and her continued support of the job-destructive free trade agreements, and the "honorable men" at Goldman Sachs (as she was reported to have called them), showed that she had lost touch with the middle class

She cheated at least three times during the debates, either by

false accusations about Bernie's record, and in the case of Ohio, by being given the question regarding the death penalty in advance by DNC official Donna Brazile.

But, despite the exposure of all this, Bernie lost big.

The evil role of the media

The media line being pushed by *Washington Post* syndicated columnist, Dana Milbank, and others, along with Connecticut Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, was "Bernie is adorable, but unelectable;" hold your nose and vote for Hillary. Weaver cites how "One Clinton advisor was asked, after the general election, how it was that the least popular presidential candidate in history had won In November. The advisor replied, 'Well, we ran the second least popular candidate in history'."

Trump received more free media time than Hillary, while Bernie came in last on that count. It's estimated that Trump got \$5 million in free media, twice as much as Hillary.



Trump campaigning in Michigan in 2016.

Why? The media went for high ratings. Weaver sums it up: "That gift took a reality TV star to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue." Trump's outrageous or offensive remarks were "good for media." "Trump's empty podium" before his appearance would even be featured, while the media could have been interviewing other candidates.

But the best backup for this theory comes from the now-notorious CBS owner, Les Moonves. "It [non-stop Trump coverage-ed.] may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS." "I've never seen anything like this, and this is going to be a very good year for us. Sorry it's a terrible thing to say. But, bring it on, Donald, Keep going."

All in all, through the DNC and media corruption, the election was rigged against Sanders from the very beginning, without any help from the Russians. It would appear that we are totally capable of stealing our own elections.

California seals the defeat

The Sanders' message resonated deeply in the once-industrial states, the Rust Belt, much to the consternation, and increasingly discredited Hillary Clinton. Weaver describes Bernie's progress with labor in Michigan in the run-up to the March 8 primary. "Bernie's rigged economy message was extremely well received by working-class votes in the state."

"But the single most powerful issue with voters in Michigan overall was Bernie's opposition to the unfair free-trade agreements that had devastated America's industrial heartland." "It was an issue that cut across racial lines." "The impact of American trade policy and NAFTA in particular—and its role in exporting American auto production—was an issue that we knew we had to focus on, especially as it was an issue where Bernie and Secretary Clinton had very different positions and records."

For Hillary Clinton, the handwriting was already on the wall in the nation's heartland.

Despite this, during the last stretch, leading up to the June 7 primaries, Hillary was pulling ahead in the polls. The California Primary was fast approaching. Bernie was set to debate Trump, but Trump chickened out and cancelled. Bernie needed a big win in California to have leverage with the super

delegates, who represented a crucial margin.

Enter the corrupt media. The night before the primary, AP ran a wire that Hillary Clinton had enough super delegates to win the nomination, regardless of how the primary turned out. AP was caught harassing and influencing super delegates. Weaver claims that they were most likely given contact information by the Hillary campaign. As it turned out, AP made the whole thing up.

With the loss of California, the discussion with super delegates to support Bernie had ended.



Bernie drew an estimated 27,000 people to his final rally in Los Angeles.

Bernie said he would support the Democratic nominee, while still being committed to advancing his progressive change. Thirteen million American voted for Bernie, giving him tremendous clout.

The question was when and how he would support Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The really big show

Although Bernie eventually endorsed Hillary Rodman Clinton, he did not immediately jump to her side or drop out. He turned to the fight on the party platform, where the results proved that Sanders was right to stay in the race as long as possible, as

it “advanced his ‘political revolution’.”

His main policy demands included the removal of Wasserman Schultz, free college tuition, a modified single payer plan, adding a public option to the ACA, and offering Medicare to people in their 50s.

In the midst of all this, a political explosion hit, when the hacked DNC emails were released by Wikileaks. “However, none of us could have anticipated the Wikileaks grenade that was lobbed into the process on July, just three days before the convention opened. The release of the hacked DNC emails set our supporters ablaze. For anyone who had doubted that the DNC and Debbie Wasserman Schultz were actively trying to torpedo Bernie’s campaign, the emails said it all.”

Despite Bernie throwing his support behind Hillary, many of his supporters did not follow suit. The DNC was warned, “If Wasserman Schultz walks on the stage – half the convention will boo.”

“The most emotional moment of the night came when Larry Sanders, Bernie’s brother, cast the final vote for Democrats Abroad. He spoke about his parents, their hard lives, their young deaths, and their love for Bernie. And he spoke of their love for FDR’s New Deal and the pride they would have felt knowing that Bernie was renewing that tradition.”

Time is running out to return to FDR

Weaver calls upon the Democrats to learn their lesson, and send forth a new message.

“People want change. We cannot continue what we have been doing. The Democratic party has lost the trust of tens of millions of voters in large swaths of the country.” People are desperate for an “authentic candidate.” Weaver challenges the Party “to pick a side – the 99% or the 1%? We must gain the trust of youth and Independents.”

Weaver lists how Donald Trump has been disloyal to his supporters, “On issue after issue, he betrayed the people he asked to support him. He promised to drain the swamp, but has filled his Administration with Wall Street insiders. He promised better health care and tried to add millions to the roles of the uninsured. He promised to favor the middle class over the elites but pushed a tax agenda that would benefit the super-rich and endanger funding for schools, health care, and transportation. As of this writing he couldn’t even keep his promise to release the government’s JFK assassination files. ”



A demonstration at the DNC meeting August 2018

But Weaver makes it clear that the Democrats must not define themselves by the Republicans. “In an interview with NBC’s Chuck Todd, I once said that Bernie was trying to reconstitute the FDR coalition. Chuck’s response was that he was not sure that coalition even existed anymore. He had a point. And that’s exactly the problem.”

Weaver explicitly calls for a return to the party of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and admits that the failure of the campaign to embrace such a direction with as much gusto as it should have might have cost them the election. “Being ‘Not Trump’ is not going to do it. Democrats must demonstrate what they are for.”

“Frankly, it’s time to turn away from the aberrational rightward shift that has been tearing the party apart since the 1990s – time to return the modern Democratic Party to its

historical trajectory of greater equality and inclusiveness.”

Weaver professes that “campaigns are fought in an historical moment.” “Too many at the top of our own party are scared to death of the regular people in every corner of the country that Bernie Sanders gave voice to in 2016 and continues to give voice to.” With the recent “unity” vote by the DNC in Chicago, and the #1 objective to defeat Trump in 2020, is that historical moment for Bernie Sanders and the Democratic Party yet to come?