Steve Schwartzberg

at the College of Complexes

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Hi, I’m Steve Schwartzberg, and I am running for Congress in the 5th District as a Bernie Sanders supporter. I am a lifelong social democrat who thinks that it is time for a moral as well as a political revolution in this country.  My training is as an historian—Yale PhD 1996—a scholar of the history of American foreign relations who believes that we can draw from our common past to build a shared future.

My favorite revolutionary among the framers of our Constitution is the Pennsylvania lawyer James Wilson.  Years before Thomas Jefferson, Wilson had written that “all men are, by nature, equal and free.”[[1]](#endnote-1) According to Wilson we—the American people—are “sovereigns without subjects.”[[2]](#endnote-2) This was—and is—a succinct way of stating the most basic ideal of the American Revolution. It took the Civil War, and the civil rights movement, to even begin to make this true for African-Americans. It took the suffragists, and the women’s rights movement, to even begin to make this true for women. And it took the organization of trade unions, and the labor movement, to even begin to keep this true for working people: to prevent the power of the state being used on behalf of corporations to make subjects of workers. In our own day, it will take a moral and political revolution to keep the 1% from making subjects of all the rest of us and destroying the promise of the American Revolution.  And it will take repentance on the part of the American people to cease attempting to rule over the Indian nations as if they were in any way our subjects, or subject to our jurisdiction.

We must begin with a vision of the kind of society we want to be. I believe we want to be a social democratic society: just, prosperous, ecologically-sound, and self-governed by we the people.

We are a long way from that right now. 81 percent of American households experienced flat or falling incomes between 2005 and 2014.[[3]](#endnote-3) Nearly half of all Americans, according to a recent Federal Reserve study, couldn’t cover an emergency expenditure of $400 because they have so little in savings.[[4]](#endnote-4) Ninety percent of the children born in 1940 ended up higher in the ranks of the income distribution than their parents, barely forty percent of those born in 1980 have done so.[[5]](#endnote-5) In part this reflects the weakness of the American labor movement, which must be strengthened, but more fundamentally it reflects privileged treatment for the rich for more than a generation in the form of preferential tax cuts, preferential bailouts, and preferential access to credit generally. As a result, the take home income of the 1% has gone from about 10 percent of the total in 1980 to more than 21 percent of the total in 2015—more than doubled.[[6]](#endnote-6)

This represents a concentration of wealth and power in our society that is incompatible with our democracy. Beyond making the rich pay their fair share of the nation’s taxes by restoring Eisenhower era tax rates, we must invest massively in our nation’s infrastructure and in guaranteeing quality healthcare for all, programs of action that will benefit everyone—including the rich—but which will especially benefit the poor, the working class, and the middle class.

It is high time for a Marshall Plan for America. We helped rebuild Western Europe after WWII and we can help rebuild ourselves. Our roads, our bridges, our railways, our airports, our water systems, our mass transit systems, our electrical grid—all are in need of investment. And the world is in need of our decarbonizing our economy.

When A. Philip Randolph first proposed the idea of a Freedom Budget in the 1960s, the idea of a budget that would seek to finance progress toward social justice out of the resources of a growing economy, and contribute to its further growth, he was focused on ending poverty for all who were poor regardless of ethnicity.[[7]](#endnote-7) It is time for a Freedom Budget for the 21st century.

Although I support the principle of reparations for the descendants of American slaves—and I specifically support HR 40 with its call to begin to study the issue—my own emphasis is instead on advocating for a new Freedom Budget. The ongoing injustice of racial economic inequality requires us to recognize the great gulf in wealth between the median net worth of white and black households ($144,200 versus $11,200 in 2013)—a more than tenfold difference.[[8]](#endnote-8) Yet I believe it will be much easier to persuade the American people to help by supporting a Freedom Budget with new investments in public education, housing, and job training; to persuade them that it is time to water the tree of economic growth at its roots, instead of its top leaves.

I became politically active in high school with a national organization, the Social Democrats, USA, whose national chairman was the great civil rights organizer, Bayard Rustin—the principal organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. I learned a lot from Bayard about the moral authority of nonviolence and about the importance of strategy. The most important lesson I learned from him is that a community fighting for justice fights for all, or it is fighting for nobody, least of all itself. Because we seek to stand in the center of progress toward democracy, Bayard argued, we have what he called: “a terrifying responsibility to the whole society.” I thought about a career in politics at that time, but in college I became more interested in academics and for decades have published work on both the good and the harm that America has done in the world in hopes of helping us do better.

One of the most important contributions the United States ever made to the cause of social justice in another country was its support for the postwar land reform in Japan. Rather than seek revenge on those who had attacked us, we sought to make allies of the Japanese people as against the militarists who had betrayed them as well as the people of the United States. My article on the subject—“The ‘Soft Peace Boys’: Presurrender Planning and Japanese Land Reform”—is available online for free download.[[9]](#endnote-9) My book on the United States and the struggle for democracy in Latin America during the Truman Years is available for purchase from the University Press of Florida or online from Amazon.[[10]](#endnote-10) I have recently completed a book manuscript on the fight against Cherokee removal in the 1830s—the fight to try to prevent what became the Trail of Tears and Death.

We, the American people, are all in this together.  As James Wilson wrote of the spirit behind American progress in 1790: “All will receive from each, and each will receive from all, mutual support and assistance: mutually supported and assisted, all may be carried to a degree of perfection hitherto unknown; perhaps, hitherto not believed.”[[11]](#endnote-11) We must rebuild the hope-filled moral consensus on which our country’s progress rests—the consensus that James Wilson and Bayard Rustin and Bernie Sanders and countless others have championed—and transform our politics and our economics to serve the common good rather than the 1%.

If you support Medicare for All, if you support a Marshall Plan for the United States, if you support a Freedom Budget to abolish poverty, if you believe in respecting the sovereignty of the native peoples, if you want a foreign policy that is concerned with the global common good and respects the rights and interests of others, then please consider supporting my candidacy.

1. James Wilson, “Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament,” 1774, text in Kermit L. Hall and Mark David Hall, editors, *The Collected Works of James Wilson* in two volumes (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), Vol. 1, p. 4 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *Chisholm v. Georgia* 2 U.S. (2 Dall.) 419, 471 (1793). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Jeffrey D. Sachs, *Building the New American Economy* forward by Bernie Sanders (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.federalreserve.gov/2015-report-economic-well-being-us-households-201605.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Raj Chetty, et al., “The fading American Dream: Trends in absolute income mobility since 1940,” Science (28 April 2017), Vol. 356, Issue 6336, pp. 398-406 http://science.sciencemag.org/content/356/6336/398.full (11 October 2017) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Sachs, *Building the New American Economy*, p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.prrac.org/pdf/FreedomBudget.pdf (accessed 11 October 2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/22/6-facts-about-black-americans-for-black-history-month/ [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273601891\_The\_Soft\_Peace\_Boys\_Presurrender\_Planning\_and\_Japanese\_Land\_Reform [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. http://upf.com/book.asp?id=SCHWAF03 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. James Wilson, “Chapter III. Of the Law of Nature,” in Hall and Hall, editors, *The Collected Works of James Wilson*, Vol. 1, p. 542. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)