A Deep State Grudge against Bernie Sanders?

After the Democratic Primary Debate on February 7th, 2020, MSNBC host, Chris Matthews, did what he normally does, which is give his opinion. However, instead of being clear or coherent and basing his opinion on facts, he let loose a very paranoid sounding, and somewhat confused diatribe against US Senator Bernie Sanders, the Presidential candidate currently leading in the polls.

He said: “I have my own views of the word ‘socialist’ and I’d be glad to share them with you in private. They go back to the early 1950s. I have an attitude about them. I remember the Cold War, I have an attitude towards Castro. I believe if Castro and the Reds had won the Cold War there would have been executions in Central Park and I might have been one of the ones getting executed. And certain other people would be there cheering, okay? So, I have a problem with people who take the other side. I don’t know what Bernie supports over these years. I don’t know what he means by socialist.”

This is not the only odd primetime TV moment related to Bernie Sanders and his presidential campaign. Appearing on Tucker Carlson’s program in January of 2019, former Assistant FBI Director, Terry Tuchie, proclaimed:

“The electorate in some places is putting more and progressives and self-described socialists in positions and, ironically, years ago – when I first got into the FBI – one of the missions of the FBI in its counterintelligence efforts was to try to keep these people out of office.”

Why did they call it “COINTELPRO”?

Many Americans would roll their eyes if they were told that the FBI had interfered in elections and systemically worked to destroy the lives of activists, resulting in multiple deaths. The term “conspiracy theory” would be thrown out and people would exclaim: “Everyone knows America has freedom!” “This country isn’t a dictatorship! That could never happen here!”

The knowledge, or lack thereof, relating to the FBI’s Counter Intelligence Program is a deeply tragic example of how easily the American public is influenced. The program was first revealed when FBI files were stolen from offices and leaked to the press in 1971. When the Congressional Church Committee investigated the FBI and CIA in 1975, their misdeeds became a matter of public record. However, afterward it disappeared from public consciousness.

The Congressional testimony and files released under the Freedom of Information Act revealed that the FBI had a massive program with the sole purpose of meddling in US politics. The FBI worked to destroy the US Communist Party, despite the fact that the Supreme Court had specifically ruled that it was a legal organization in its 1957 Yates v. United States ruling.

The FBI went after the Civil Rights Movement, planting stories in the media, and slandering Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a homosexual and a Soviet agent. The anti-Vietnam War protest movement was also targeted, as were many left-wing and Black Nationalist groups. FBI actions resulted in the death of many activists from the Black Panther Party.

The Socialist Workers Party sued the FBI, documenting 18 years of harassment which had destroyed lives, prevented victories at the ballot box, and otherwise violated US law. The organization was awarded a settlement of $264,000 in
Among those who campaigned for the Socialist Workers Party in the 1980 and 1984 elections, as the court proceedings against the most powerful law enforcement agency in the United States went on, was an up and coming Vermont politician named Bernie Sanders.

So, why was this FBI program called COINTELPRO or Counter Intelligence Program? The reason was that the FBI did not consider left-wing political parties and activism to be a legitimate part of American discourse. The Communist Party USA, and eventually the Civil Rights Movement, Black Nationalism, and the larger left-wing milieu, were labelled as “intelligence” because they were considered to be penetration of the United States by the Soviet Union and China.

During the 1930s, The Soviet Union became a global superpower with its 5 year economic plans. The Soviet-led Communist International had pre-empted the Second World War by building massive anti-fascist coalitions starting in 1935. While the Communist Party USA openly used the slogan “Communism is 20th Century Americanism” and insisted it was a domestic political movement rooted in progressive and democratic struggles, the FBI considered the Communist Party USA to be nothing more than a wing of the KGB. The fact that the party had longtime labor giants like William Z. Foster, salt of the earth, Midwestern American steelworkers like Gus Hall, or beloved African American academics like Angela Davis as its leaders, made no difference.

**Different Strategies to Oppose Marxism**

The reality is, however, that not all of the American deep state agreed with the FBI. The US Central Intelligence Agency, following the strategies of Zbiegnew Brzezniski, had the opposite approach. With the Congress for Cultural Freedom Program, the CIA funneled money to Marxist and Communist writers and thinkers in the USA and Western Europe. The Frankfurt School, a German institution that pushed an anti-Soviet version of Marxism that focused on cultural criticism, was covertly built up and supported. The CIA bankrolled the publication of Partisan Review, a Trotskyite magazine that pushed a critique of western capitalism alongside a condemnation of the USSR and China. All of these efforts resulted in the historic breaks, in which the Italian Communist Party, the Spanish Communist Party, and other massive Communist organizations denounced the Soviet Union. Zbiegnew Brzezniski spoke very enthusiastically about the “Eurocommunists” as useful to the United States in its geopolitical efforts.

Left-wing voices were essential in the CIA’s effort to fight the Soviet Union with soft power. Joint “days of action” against Nuclear energy in which Soviet citizens and US citizens took to the streets simultaneously, along with a constant inflow of western cultural figures in the Soviet Union, all set the stage for the fall of the USSR in the 1980s.

But this did not stop the Republican Party, voices linked to the military industrial complex, and the FBI itself from denouncing anything but full on anti-communism as treason. A clear difference of strategy existed, and the fall of Jimmy Carter and the rise of Ronald Reagan represented a clear polarization within the US intelligence and military apparatus.

**Can Bernie Sanders be forgiven?**

In the 1970s, Bernie Sanders sounded like a Marxist. He called for the workers to control the means of production. He was associated with Trotskyists, Social-Democrats and peace activists. He praised Fidel Castro and the Sandinistas of Nicaragua. Sanders always had strong criticism of the USSR, and his admiration of international leftist forces never seemed to go beyond Latin America.

In the 1990s, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Bernie Sanders foreign policy views shifted even closer to the Pentagon. Despite being a longtime peace activist, Sander’s supported Clinton and NATO’s bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. This shift prompted peace activists to protest in front of his office, and ended his friendship with Marxist writer, Michael Parenti. Sanders supported the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, though he strongly opposed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Though Sander’s praised Hugo Chavez in his early years, in 2016 he denounced him as a “dead Communist dictator.” Sanders has spoken of Maduro, Chavez’ successor, in harsh terms such as “tyrant.”

Furthermore, Sanders no longer advocates the Marxist understanding of socialism. He has made this clear on numerous occasions, saying: “I don’t believe the government should own the means of production, but I do believe that the middle class and the working families who produce the wealth of America deserve a fair deal.”
At one 2015 Presidential debate, Sanders went as far as saying that he does not oppose capitalism, and that Democratic Socialism exists merely to facilitate a profit centered economy, saying:

“Everybody is in agreement. We are a great entrepreneurial nation. We have to encourage that. Of course, we have to support small and medium-size businesses. But you can have all of the growth that you want, and it doesn't mean anything if all of the new income and wealth is going to the top 1 percent... We should look to countries like Denmark, like Sweden and Norway and learn from what they have accomplished for their working people.”

But the tone of the Chris Matthew rant about public executions seems to indicate that many within the US deep state do not believe in Sanders change of heart. Despite the Soviet Union having collapsed and Sanders’ views drastically shifting, it appears that many in the US government view him as a Soviet agent.

The beliefs underlying the COINTELPRO program, that all left-wing views are merely an expression of foreign influence appears to be very well alive.

As Sanders polls well, and wins democratic primaries, the question must be asked: Will this long standing deep-state grudge be strong enough to keep him from being the Democratic Nominee?

Caleb Maupin is a political analyst and activist based in New York. He studied political science at Baldwin-Wallace College and was inspired and involved in the Occupy Wall Street movement, especially for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”.