

THE COMMSTOCK REPORT

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By: David Kruse

This morning I heard an interview with NY Mayor Bill DeBlasio where, referring to wealth disparity in the US, he said that "there was plenty of money. . . it was just in the wrong hands." That is a pretty categorically strong statement that if you have wealth that somehow you hadn't earned it and that it was wrong that you had it while others did not. That is a profound statement of socialism.

While progressives lament the disparity of wealth, they have yet to challenge private property rights directly in their rhetoric but I expect that it is coming soon. It is a tenant of socialism that property rights should be communal or shared. Private property rights have been attacked by both left and right. There are cargo truck boxes parked along key highways in Iowa being used as billboards that say "stop eminent domain abuse" going back a couple years when the Rock Island Power line attempted to build a gargantuan power line west to east across the state. I feel that I contributed to that protest. When the Power Line Company could not reach a commercial agreement with private landowners for easements, it attempted to use the government to give them eminent domain power to take land rights from farmers. That effort failed due to organized landowner resistance.

From the left we see urban constituencies who appear to believe that land outside of city limits is public property and farmers are just annoyances living on it who must be managed and controlled. They would like to dictate to farmers what they plant, when they can plant it, what fertilizer can be applied and whether livestock can be produced and how, in a manner that reaches a commercial scale. The farms that they envision as politically correct are generally less productive and food is produced at a cost double or more of commercial prices which is passed on to rich consumers under Foodie labels. The poor consumers that socialists claim they champion cannot afford Foodie Food. I do not think that there is another sector of the US economy where private property rights are more cherished and defended than in Agriculture by farmers.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders is running for president in Iowa sounding like he would appoint Ben and Jerry's (ice cream founders) to be his Secretaries of Agriculture. The Register reported that Bernie "attacks factory farming, big agribusiness." What that unfortunately often means is he is describing anyone who is making any money from agriculture. To be politically acceptable to democratic socialists, everything is supposed to be small and low scale and the margins are just not there to make a living from that. If farmers adopt technology or pray tell GMOs, they would label that food with skull and crossbones on it if they could. The organic industry brand promotion is built on the degradation of commercial food quality and safety.

I have farmed since 1973 and in my career, I have seen farmers adopt conservation measures that in my opinion make them tremendous environmental stewards. They get no credit for that. I measure productivity in terms of inputs per bushel produced and farmers use markedly less fertilizer and chemicals per unit of production than any other system with the most affordable food anywhere in the world. US consumers enjoy the most affordable safe high-quality food in the world and instead the Bernie Sanders types impugn farmer's commercial reputations and even their personal character. Attacking 'factory farms' or 'big Ag' has become another instance of practicing identity politics.

"Factory farming" of livestock is simply the utilization of technology to produce quality meats at affordable costs while practicing suitable sustainable animal husbandry. CAFO is not four-letter word.

It is most often a family farm of a scale where the family can attain a sustainable living. That is why Dr. Temple Grandin was such a popular speaker at our annual Clay County Fair client appreciation event last fall. She has helped food supply chains sort out acceptable animal husbandry practices that can work for all.

The livestock industry has embraced sustainable livestock husbandry practices. My family has a cattle feedlot that is a CAFO that I am very proud of. They are excellent caretakers of the cattle where the lots in my opinion often resemble an FFA project where the cattle are kept comfortable. The cattle operation is integrated into the corn production limiting the use of commercial fertilizer to reduced levels of nitrogen and starter. To me I do not know how you would be more sustainable but they are working hard every day to figure that out. Bernie Sanders has never been there but I think he would be invited (have to talk to my brother-in-law). I think he would learn something. . . because as a general statement, Sanders is ignorant on commercial Ag.

Storm Lake Times Editor, Art Cullen, is a progressive who correctly says that the Dems lose because they do not interact with rural areas. They think Iowa City, where Sanders spoke, is rural America and they do not have a clue how people think in Storm Lake because they never visit.

USDA subsidies reflect equality relative to production. Progressives criticize big farmers getting more subsidies than small ones. Not on a production basis. Every bushel of corn and number of hogs are treated the same with overall subsidy limits per producer that are set by arbitrary political choice. There are subsidy limits and Iowa Senator Grassley has long fought to reduce them. Yes, larger producers get more subsidy because they have larger production. Smaller producers get just as much per bushel. Per bushel farm subsidies reflect capitalism while if subsidies were equalized per farmer, it would be socialism. Farmers are typically offered incentives to receive subsidies that they have to do something with conservation practices or the like to qualify for in order to receive many of them. Those programs require incentives to get participation. Farm subsidies have never defined success in Agriculture. They have not prevented farms from failing. The dairy industry is finding that out. There have been times they have averted general failure and even protected the equity of shareholders in rural banks. They indirectly subsidize consumers by sustaining our food production at reasonable cost.

As far as DeBlasio thinking the money is in the wrong hands and it is government's job to redistribute the wealth. . .that is socialist bunk. It is the government's job to referee so the rules are fair and equal. Sometimes the rules do favor the wealthy and that is just as wrong as rules that penalize them for working hard and earning a living. Bernie Sanders wants a \$15 minimum wage. If he was paying attention he would find that livestock packing and meat processing companies are all paying starting wages well above \$15 hour. Bernie obviously thinks that \$15 hour is a good fair starting wage. Then come to Iowa and get a job here as they are all hiring.