

Vox

This trucker makes the best argument for Bernie or Bust

Jeff Stein

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I've heard a lot of terrible arguments for Bernie or Bust over the course my three days here.

Some say the Green Party really can win in November. Others say that Bernie Sanders was somehow forced against his will to endorse Hillary Clinton. Still some maintain that Donald Trump and Clinton are equally bad.

And then I met Kirk Voorhees.

"I just feel like the Clintons have betrayed me over and over," Voorhees told me. "I find it hard to believe she'll do anything for me after taking all this money from these special interest groups. Why will she turn on those people when it's always so easy to turn on us?"

Voorhees, 56, is a truck driver from northern New Jersey. He made the trip to Philadelphia on Sunday, and when we met on a park bench outside of City Hall on Monday he was glistening with sweat from the Philadelphia heat.

To be clear, Bernie or Bust seems to be a small minority of Sanders supporters, and Sanders himself **dismantled** their case Monday night. But Voorhees tells a more compelling story than most.

He says he has personally felt the way big corporations have used politicians to hurt working-class people, and he believes that Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton are simply too close to those special interests to ever effectively challenge them. You don't have to agree with that argument to try to understand it.

A transcript of our conversation, lightly edited for length and clarity, is below.

Jeff Stein: So you're obviously [part of the] Bernie or Bust [movement], and you've told me you can't see yourself coming to vote for Clinton. How did you come to that position?

Kirk Voorhees: Let me just start out by saying I was a full supporter of Bill Clinton in the '90s and voted for him twice. Back then, I was the local secretary treasurer for my local union of the American Federation of Government Employees.

I was a carpenter on a military base. We made ammo boxes and we built crates for different types of weapons systems. We also went around maintaining the buildings, and I did that for 11 years. It was the same plant my father worked for.

Then Clinton and Al Gore, they had this thing called "**Reinventing the Government.**" They said it was an opportunity for employees to work with people in government and get rid of waste. One day, they told us that they were getting rid of the masons and the mail-carriers and the carpenters and all the lower-level staff people — and we were out.

So in 1998, I was suddenly out of a job. I got divorced. And I had two small children to take care of by myself — both little girls. It was better for me to have a nighttime job, and I started waiting tables at Ruth Chris Steakhouse.

It was horrible. I remember going down to the nice part of town while waiting tables. Everything looked great for the yuppie crowd. But there was nothing going on for us.

JS: You've told me that the Clintons have advanced policies that have hurt the working class. But the Democrats say the problem is that things were going well until the Republicans took back control in 2000, and that the problem is just that they lost power. Why don't you believe that?

KV: Bill Clinton, the only reason he was successful in getting stuff pushed through Congress is that he made so many concessions to the right he basically was a Republican. I've read some articles that Bill Clinton was ready to push privatization of Social Security through in '99 and the only thing that stopped him was a blow job from an intern. [The Cato Institute basically **agrees.**]

I just feel like the Clintons have betrayed me over and over. I read a book about the Clinton years and how the liberal class just sold out the middle class, and Clinton was a big part of that. Living through these things, I remember when they said, "**We'll reform welfare**" and they did that by taking millions of single women off of food stamps with no way to feed their children. Then they started the "**three strikes and you're out**" policy, and it put a generation of black men in jail.

Clinton got **rid** of Glass-Steagall and after that we fell apart. We lost our jobs in the recession. We lost our homes, and after that they bailed out the bankers and gave them trillions of dollars so they could keep their bonuses while the working man **hasn't gotten a raise in 25 years.** And the elite give themselves money and pat themselves on the back.

I don't know how we stop this with having another one of them as president. I saw Bernie as offering another way.

JS: What I think a lot of Clinton supporters would argue is that she has proposed a lot of policies — particularly on health care and education — that really are similar to Sanders, and certainly much more progressive than what Trump would do. Why don't you believe she really means to stick to those?

KV: If she wins, she'll be back in the bubble again. She's out there saying whatever she needs to say right now, sure. But we've seen the reality of a Clinton presidency; it wasn't as rosy as it was portrayed to be.

I see her taking money from Goldman Sachs and the banks and the pharmaceutical companies. And Clinton was on the board of Walmart. The Clinton Foundation — my god.

I find it hard to believe she'll do anything for me after taking all this money from these special interest groups. Why will she turn on those people when it's so easy to turn on us?

I know Donald Trump will appoint worse judges. I would never vote for him. I'm just trying to imagine either of them being president, and all I see is them as puppets for the bankers and the elites pulling the strings behind the scenes.

People in Washington live in a little political bubble and make their own little decisions calculated on their own little narrow benefit. That's all I see happening.

JS: We've talked about why you don't trust Clinton. But what made Sanders such a powerful candidate for you? Is there something there she can try to replicate?

KV: Bernie said things I never heard in my whole lifetime — universal health care and college free tuition and expanding Social Security. All I've heard before that is letting Wall Street handle Social Security.

Right now, I'm now hearing that they're talking about increasing what we have to pay for our health care [in Voorhees's work as a trucker]. That [New Jersey Gov.] Chris Christie is doing this and all the firemen and police unions and teachers will have to pay more for it, so you will, too.

I have two kids who just got out of college with substantial student loan debt. Every other industrialized country can provide education and provide health care to their people. Bernie was the only one I saw fighting for that.

IT REALLY FEELS LIKE WE HAD A DEATH IN THE FAMILY

JS: What have you been thinking since Clinton became the nominee? Given that Sanders now is so clearly saying that he wants Clinton to beat Trump, shouldn't that be good enough for you?

KV: I'm really lost right now. I have three months to decide, and I'm trying to take it all in, but I'm kind of numb from what transpired over the last couple of days. And I have a while to think about how I'm going to go.

It really feels like we had a death in the family. Yesterday, we were still excited about what was going to happen in Philadelphia — that there may be a roll call vote and maybe we could get into the convention and make a difference.

Watching Bernie come up were some of the greatest moments of my life. I was part of an electric feeling — I went to New York City to hear him speak, and it was a love-fest I'll never forget. But I'm trying to process what happened.

JS: Was there a moment in the primary you felt like you could never support Clinton again?

KV: When Bernie went on the attack — I was seeing Bernie speak, and it was at that rally in the Bronx. And he said that it came out that Clinton gave a speech to Goldman for \$250,000. And Bernie said, "That must have been the greatest speech you ever heard in your life! That must have been Shakespearian tomes." [Laughs.] And of course I don't make \$250,000 even over years.

And I said: "Damn, that guy's for real." I'm choking up to you right now talking about it. It was such a special moment. Bernie was in the south Bronx, and they had him standing up on this little old school soap box doing his thing. He gave a speech to thousands of people, and all on a tiny soap box. That blew me away. There's no other politician who would do that.

JS: Why did the Goldman moment strike you as so important?

KV: She won't release the transcripts, and that just leaves to my imagination what has been said there. You get these little dribs and drabs, and I'm saying to myself: "This is probably a rah-rah speech to the investment bankers and stockbrokers," and "I'll be there; just write that check, and I'll help you."

Even elite Republicans are for her. They all know that if they get Hillary, their investments are safe. When Bernie put her feet to the fire and she didn't even respond, it makes me believe she's bought by these people.