

**FLETCHER, from page 4**

There are different interpretations about what the Second Amendment says, but regardless, it definitely advances the idea of a militia and an armed population.

Why do you need an armed population? Well you need it when you have slavery and you have to enlist people in slave patrols and to put down slave insurrections. You need it to keep your Indians at bay.

What's happened over time, because of gun ownership being identified with being free and white, there is a visceral connection to it that goes beyond the issue of basic rights. You could not look at the hysteria that emerges around gun ownership and conclude that that has to do with some provision of the Constitution. It's much deeper.

If it were about the Second Amendment, then the NRA would have come out adamantly in support of the family of (Philando) Castile, the guy that was killed in Minnesota who was a legitimate gun owner, who was killed by the cops. If this was about the Second Amendment, then the NRA should have been outspoken in condemning that, right? Because Castile told (the police) he had a gun, but no, it's not about that.

**E.G.:** *Do you think the labor movement would be the best place to bridge the current political divide?*

**B.F.J.:** This is a very hard question. (Long pause.) You may not like what I have to say. I've concluded over time that roughly a quarter of the population is lost and can never be regained. They're gone. There are these science fiction movies where people get bitten by zombies, and at a certain point it's like they're not coming back to humanity. Roughly a quarter of the population is lost, and they are the core of the Trump phenomenon. They are the core of the very strands within right-wing populism.

On top of that segment there are those who are probably redeemable, who voted for Trump. It's complicated because they voted for someone who they knew – because I don't think most people are stupid – they knew this guy was a racist, they knew he was a misogynist, they knew that he had been through several bankruptcies so all the stuff about him being a great businessman was bullshit. They knew he was an adulterer, they suspected he had ties with the mob, but they voted for him.

What does that mean, when people do that? For me, what it means is they're not a priority to try to work with. I'm interested in working with the two-thirds of this country that are sane.

I think that we need to consolidate the sane in order to win over that segment of the Trump vote that have not been lost to the dark side of the force. And that will happen – and it relates to this issue of social justice unionism – that will happen to the extent that we start building progressive alliances that are fighting for power that have an alternative vision of where this country needs to go.

As such, the status quo is unacceptable as a response to right-wing populism. There is no future in that. That doesn't mean that some people who advocate the status quo can't be won over, but progressives and people on the left need to be advocating for



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*Above, Bill Fletcher Jr. at the SeaTac Hilton in Seattle, where he was attending the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association's 50th Anniversary Conference in April. At left, Samuel Gompers, pictured here in 1920, became the leader of the American Federation of Labor and pushed a patriotic agenda working within existing party structures.*

president. Therefore, despite the fact that this guy is a racist, misogynist, egomaniac, he's not black, and he's reversing, and trying to reverse, everything that this black president – who by the way was certainly not a leftist, I wouldn't even call him a progressive, he's a liberal – but reversing everything that that black president did because they want to wipe the slate clean.

**E.G.:** *We're seeing teacher strikes in states where they have "right-to-work" laws. By eroding unions, are we actually galvanizing a labor movement?*

**B.F.J.:** I want to answer that in two different ways. I'm not one of those who believe the worse things get, the better they are. I don't believe that that happens. The worse things get – the worse things get, and they can keep getting bad.

The slogan of the communist party of Germany in 1932 was "after Hitler, us" because they believed that Hitler was going to expose himself to be a charlatan. And that people would then say, "OK, got it!" Didn't quite work out that way. So, it's important that we understand that when things get worse, people can respond in a number of different ways, and some very bad ways are to turn inward, basically to just fight for survival.

The second part is that I think that this eruption among teachers' unions needs to be seen on a continuum that starts with the Arab Spring and then goes to the Madison (Wis.) uprising and then goes to Occupy, and then we start to see the uprisings after Trump was elected. There's a certain continuum of these insurgencies where resistance is growing, and it could translate into a new movement. But I don't think it

**When you have all of these revelations, the corruption in his administration. ... And people are sticking with him. Why? For one fundamental reason: because they look at Trump as addressing what they believe to have been the greatest mistake in U.S. history, and that was the election of a black president.**

will happen on its own.

That's what I was trying to get to on the issue of leadership (during his speech earlier that day), because that example I gave about Italy – I think a lot about that: It's like, damn! They seemed like they were on the verge of a socialist revolution in 1919, and three years later, you've got Benito (Mussolini). It's like, what happened? How is that possible? And there are plenty of other examples of things like that having happened.

History is very unforgiving about lost opportunities. At certain moments there are windows that are opened, and if you don't jump through that window, at that time, the window shuts, and it's very hard to open that window up.

I'll give you an example. The defeat of the populist movement in the 1890s, the window was open, there was a moment there where there could have been an incredible transformation of the United States. We blew it. Part of it was racial, part of it was that William Jennings Bryan led the populist into the Democratic Party, and there she goes. And then we had Plessy v. Ferguson (the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision that upheld racial segregation laws), and we were stuck with that for 50 years. That's why urgency is critical.

This is the thing I love about history, is it's unpredictable. Even though you can say that it's a continuum, you can only say that in hindsight. You can't say that prospectively. But when you see these things emerge, then you can put things together and realize their connections.

So, what is the implication? We need new leadership. We need left leadership. We need a broad united front. What these teachers' unions are doing is phenomenal, in particular in reaching out to parents and everything else, but what we need to hear from the steelworkers' union, or the painters, or the carpenters, saying, "yeah – we're with the teachers – we're ready to throw down."

We need them to be thinking about, for example, in Oklahoma, in West Virginia, how do we go forward? What's our platform in the next election? What do we do? It's not

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