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OPINION

So what does de Blasio believe now?

By [Bob McManus](#)

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Bill de Blasio and wife Chirlane McCray meet with the media in Harlem.

Photo: Stephan Yang

What little boy hasn't dreamt of running off to join the circus? Most get over it, but for those who take the leap the result can be life-altering.

Democratic mayoral nominee Bill de Blasio's flight of fancy appears to have been to the Nicaragua of Comandante Daniel Ortega, back when it mattered whether the Soviet Union won another foothold in the Western Hemisphere.

De Blasio seems slightly mystified — if not irritated — that some folks find current significance in his 10-day, 1988 jaunt to Nicaragua. The point, he says, was to deliver “medical supplies” to “needy people.” He adds: “I think it was the right thing to do.”

Plus, de Blasio adds: “It's 2013!”

Which should be the point of this debate: That Managua was then and that New York is now — and what does a former fellow traveller, a self-described “democratic socialist,” have to offer a citadel of capitalism today?

All that's getting lost in the cutesy-snark commentary that the controversy has generated.

The candidate says his mission was motivated by a belief “that United States policies toward Central America in the 1980s were wrong.” Yet this

misapprehends a critical fact.

Which is that prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, US policies on Central America had little to do with Central America per se, but everything to do with blocking Russian subversion in this hemisphere.

That is, before the implosion, Daniel Ortega represented a substantial security threat to the United States. Today, in his second iteration as Nicaraguan president, he's just a piss-ant plague on his own people.

That de Blasio seems not to understand any of this today suggests either a stunted worldview or a nostalgia for Soviet adventurism. Neither is a desirable quality in a mayor.

Or maybe he does get it, and understands how the issue could complicate his campaign.

The candidate now says he doesn't recall ever identifying himself as a "democratic socialist" — The New York Times says it has dug out evidence to the contrary — and it's not totally clear what that term even means these days.

But it certainly doesn't evoke an affinity for dynamic, market-oriented growth — and that absence is consistent with what is known about the de Blasio economic agenda. Or what isn't known, as the case may be.

Right now, all that really can be said is that de Blasio's plan for a more equitable city involves giving "the rich" a good hiding, and little else.

He's said nothing substantive about growth, about excessive across-the-board taxation, about corrosive over-regulation, about environmentalist obstructionism — nothing about any of the policies and practices that have hobbled New York economically for going on two generations now.

So no wonder the "democratic socialist" label resonates. No wonder people with a serious stake in New York City's economic health and well-being are growing increasingly nervous at the prospect of a de Blasio mayoralty.

Yes, Republican candidate Joe Lhota hasn't exactly been heavy on the detail, either. He promises to remedy this next week — and time will tell.

In a conventional mayoral race, all this vagueness could mean that the candidates understand the fundamental precariousness of New York City's long-term prospects. Finance and tourism are fine, as far as they go — but that's probably not far enough, and who wants to be the politician whose ill-considered rhetoric flips over the fiscal cart?

But this is not a conventional race. The Bill de Blasio who is coming into focus is not a conventional candidate. He needs to be pressed hard on his past beliefs, yes — but even harder on his current views.

Is he still — most charitable interpretation — a naïf who didn't understand what was really going on in Central America back in the day?

He embraced Marxism then — but, more critically, does he still believe that wealth can be consumed without first having been created? That jobs just pop up like mushrooms after a summer shower? That there really is pie in the sky?

Lhota needs to pin him down. New York needs some answers.

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