

The Political World After Trump's Win

The Democratic Party's long sojourn into corporate-friendly politics – and neglect of its old working-class base – has led to the shocking result of an erratic and untested outsider becoming President. But is there a route back, asks Joe Lauria.

By Joe Lauria

A new political force in America was unleashed on Tuesday and how the Democratic Party reacts to it could determine its future as a major party. Millions of discontented Americans who have lost out to the computerization and the globalization of the economy – and who have been disproportionately called on to fight America's "regime change" wars – have made clear that they aren't going to take it anymore. And any party or politician going forward better listen or they will be tossed out, too, including Donald Trump if he doesn't deliver.

This election has struck what should be a fatal blow to the Clintons' Democratic Leadership Council movement. Bill Clinton moved the Democratic Party to the center-right at about the same time that Tony Blair did with the British Labour Party. Both parties cut many of their traditional ties to labor unions in the 1990s to embrace the economic neoliberalism of their 1980s predecessors Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher: welfare reform, deregulation of the financial sector and "free trade."

The effect on workers across the old industrial belts has been devastating. Millions have been pushed out of a middle-class lifestyle. They have seen their plants close and jobs shipped to cheap labor markets overseas. Or they have lost out to robotics.

They've also seen the economy shift from production to financial speculation. And they've seen the greatest transfer of wealth in decades to the obscenely rich. Wealthy liberals who've benefited from this shift often act as if they are morally superior to the system's "losers" who hear Hillary Clinton put them in a "basket of deplorables."

On Tuesday, these downwardly mobile workers spoke out, giving Trump the votes he needed in the Rust Belt states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin to put him over the top in the Electoral College (although Clinton appears headed toward a plurality of the votes nationally.)

That someone as eminently unqualified (at least in the traditional sense) could flip the electoral map in this way was stunning. But is the Democratic Party

listening and can it adapt to reflect the interests of these Americans? The future of the party may depend on it.

For the past two decades, Democrats have relied on the support of these Rust Belt states as a bulwark for their national candidacies. These states voted twice for Barack Obama.

But many of these blue-collar workers were counting on a significant change to their circumstances, but Obama had failed to deliver that and Clinton only vaguely addressed their concerns with a variety of mostly small-bore policy ideas. Many of these voters judged that the Democrats couldn't or wouldn't deliver. So, they rudely slapped the party in the face.

Parallel political trends are playing out in Great Britain, where a discontented working class spearheaded the Brexit withdrawal from the European Union and where Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is fighting to dismantle Blair's so-called New Labour movement and trying to restore the Labour Party's historic ties to the working class.

Last week, we learned in a leaked speech that Bill Clinton gave last year that he denigrated Corbyn, saying Labour "went out and practically got a guy off the street to be the leader" of the party. "When people feel they've been shafted and they don't expect anything to happen anyway, they just want the maddest person in the room to represent them."

Bill Clinton's remarks were typical of the Democrats' smugness and their contempt for ordinary people. So there was some satisfaction in seeing the humiliation of these careerist and corporatist Democrats on Tuesday.

Now, the Democratic Party had better figure out how they can serve the interests of those blue-collar workers or the party can expect more of the same. So far they are blaming everyone and everthing for having created this workers' backlash: sexism, the media, FBI Director James Comey (Clinton pinned it specifically on him), Vladimir Putin, Green Party candidate Jill Stein and even Clinton cheerleader Bernie Sanders (for "poisoning the youth vote").

A former Clinton operative speaking on Fox News said the day after an election loss is a time to engage in the "blame game." He said "everybody is being blamed but Secretary Clinton."

Pursuing Solutions

There are solutions to economic injustice but few in power pursue them because it's not in their self-interest. And politicians of any party act primarily on self-interest these days, which usually translates into the interests of their

wealthy financial backers and is thus inimical to real democracy.

Without a sharp turn to the left to regain workers' support, the Democratic Party risks becoming totally irrelevant. A new batch of Democratic Party leaders committed to workers must emerge. They have four years to prepare.

Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren tarnished themselves as leaders who can achieve this by supporting a center-right candidate in Hillary Clinton. They failed to acknowledge that Clinton was too alienated from many blue-collar workers (especially whites) who in the end abandoned the party to gamble on Trump.

Sanders, an independent who chose to run in the Democratic primaries, had been offered the top of the Green Party ticket. The party's presidential nominee Jill Stein, who was willing to give up that spot, said he never answered her. Had they run together they might have gotten the 15 percent in the polls to enter the debates where Sanders would have been a lofty alternative to Clinton and Trump – though had Trump still won on Nov. 8, Sanders surely would have been denounced as a “sore loser” and blamed for “dividing the anti-Trump vote.”

As it turned out, the Democrats managed to lose the White House to Trump on their own. Though the Democratic leadership won't admit it, they now know that Sanders was running the right campaign to defend workers' interests and would have been the right messenger to carry that message. However, to protect their own privileged class interests and those of their donors, establishment Democrats left the country open to the dangerous victory of Donald Trump.

Rust Belt working-class voters can't be blamed for the choices they were given. Without Sanders – and with the Democrats offering one more establishment candidate – these alienated voters instead sent a demagogue to the White House, clinging to the hope that he might keep some of his promises: to end ruinous trade deals, bring back manufacturing jobs to the U.S., create jobs by rebuilding the infrastructure, avoid new wars and clean the D.C. swamp of corruption.

Judging by the people being mentioned for his Cabinet, it's already looking dodgy: the usual cast of right-wing Republicans – the likes of Newt Gingrich and Rudy Giuliani – who have been part of the problem going back decades.

Yet, if Trump fails to fulfill his promises to improve the economy for common Americans, the voters he so skillfully riled up might well send him packing in 2020 unless, of course, the Democrats put up another corporate choice.

That leaves the notoriously difficult path for a third party that could represent the interests of ordinary Americans. But that possibility showed

little traction in 2016, with marginal vote totals for both the Libertarian and Green parties.

Media Also Repudiated

On the positive side, this election became a repudiation not only of the Democratic Party insiders, but also of establishment Republicans, Wall Street, celebrity culture (with famous people flocking to Clinton) and the mainstream news media.

The shock to the American political system also is prompting admissions one would never have imagined hearing. On Fox News the morning after the election, a group of personalities (calling themselves “journalists”) were suddenly talking about class in America, a normally taboo subject.

One of them said journalists didn’t understand this election because none of them know anyone who makes less than \$60,000 a year. Apparently, these pampered performers don’t even mix with many members of their own profession. I can introduce them to plenty of journalists making less than that, let alone Rust Belt workers.

Will Rahn of CBS News accused the media of missing the story “after having spent months mocking the people who had a better sense of what was going on. This is all symptomatic of modern journalism’s great moral and intellectual failing: its unbearable smugness.”

Rahn said working-class people have “captured the imagination of journalists, who have come to talk about them like colonial administrators would talk about a primitive inland tribe that interferes with the construction of a jungle railway: *They must be pacified until history kills them off.*”

These are stunning admissions that would never have happened without this election result. But one wonders how long such introspection in the corporate media will last. After the mainstream media got the Iraq WMD story wrong and contributed to the disastrous 2003 invasion, there were a few halfhearted *mea culpas* but very little accountability.

For instance, Washington Post editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt, who repeatedly wrote as flat fact that Iraq was hiding WMD and who mocked the few dissenting voices trying to warn Americans about the flimsiness of the evidence, is still the editorial-page editor of The Washington Post.

So, not surprisingly – with almost none of the “star journalists” suffering any career setbacks – the corporate media was soon joining more propaganda campaigns for more wars, which are mostly fought by young working-class men and women who

actually do suffer.

The difference now is that this new political force of fed-up voters – who “came out of nowhere” as far as the Democrats and the media were concerned although these voters were staring them in the face – might now force a re-evaluation. That’s because these voters are likely still to be there four years from now.

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