

# Democrats Rely on Blame-Shifting

By riding hatred of President Trump and spurring on the Russia-gate hysteria, Democrats hope to win in 2018 without a serious examination of why they lost support of key working- and middle-class voting blocs, says Andrew Spannaus.

By Andrew Spannaus

Victories in state-level elections in New Jersey and Virginia on Nov. 7 have buoyed Democratic hopes for an anti-Trump wave among the population that will lead to a big victory in next year's mid-term elections, and permanently damage President Trump heading towards 2020. Yet there is significant risk in hoping that anti-Trump sentiment will be enough for the Democrats to return to power.

The danger is that the considerable differences between the centrist faction, which for the most part controls the party structure, and the progressive wing of the party, will be swept under the rug in the name of unity, perpetuating the substantive problems that have alienated important sections of the population from the party.

The power of opposition to Trump has been on display from the very beginning: It was more than a bit ironic to see feminist protestors – properly exercising their right to protest against a President who has made many derogatory comments towards women – hold up signs defending the CIA during the Women's March on Inauguration Day.

Yes, in their zeal to oppose Trump, both the center and the far left have been willing to embrace the battle led by a limited but powerful grouping in the intelligence community to stop the President from his stated intention of improving relations with Vladimir Putin's Russia.

This has become such a *cause célèbre* that people who would normally look suspiciously at the motives of the CIA or other similar agencies seem unable to recognize that the basic "crime" Trump is accused of is favoring diplomacy with a country most of the institutions consider an enemy. With the media's help, it has apparently been decided that this President does not have the right to influence policy, if the majority of the establishment disagrees with his positions.

The major issue in the Democratic Party is obviously the economy. Sen. Bernie Sanders, officially an Independent from Vermont, won 43 percent of the vote in the 2016 Democratic primaries because he pushed a "populist," anti-system message that was heavily critical of globalization, Wall Street and trade deals

that have weakened the American middle class.

There were numerous similarities with the positions of Trump himself, although without the offensive language and scapegoating of various ethnic groups. Yet the Democratic élite did its best to ensure a Hillary Clinton victory, both legitimately based on the notion that Hillary would be the strongest candidate, and through actions that have led to accusations of a rigged nomination process.

### **A Deeper Problem**

The recent spat raised by the publication of Donna Brazile's new book *Hacks: The Inside Story of the Break-ins and Breakdowns That Put Donald Trump in the White House* (Hachette, November 2017) shows that the issue is still being fought out.

Indeed in October, Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez unveiled his picks for the party's Executive Committee, and many Sanders supporters immediately complained that their faction was being sidelined. One of the key removals was that of James Zogby, whose pro-Palestinian positions are clearly unappreciated by many higher-ups, who prefer to avoid criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In terms of economic policy, the question is whether the party will embrace the progressive message espoused by Sanders and Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts or maintain a centrist tone by avoiding positions considered "unrealistic" according to Washington veterans; many of these political operators fear losing their influence if the terms of the debate change.

Two of the major issues Sanders and Warren have been fighting for are incisive reforms regarding healthcare and the banking sector. In September, Sanders presented a bill for a single-payer health care system under the name of Medicare-for-All, and has been holding numerous public events on the issue, joined by Warren and various other Senators.

Policymakers and industry representatives tend to shudder at such "radical" proposals, but the political calculus is clearly that you need to set your sights high if you want to achieve anything at all. This proposition was proven – although negatively – by the numerous compromises made by Barack Obama in the first year of his presidency.

On financial reform, the key issue is the restoration of Glass-Steagall, the Depression-era law that separates commercial banks and investment banks, in order to protect the real economy from financial speculation. The law was officially repealed in 1999, at the end of Bill Clinton's administration, in the context of a gradual loosening of financial regulations that began in the 1980s.

The results are before our eyes: the crash of 2007-2008 – despite the weak attempts by Wall Street defenders to divert attention from deregulation as a cause for the crisis – and its political aftermath; this includes the election of Donald Trump, which certainly would not have happened if there had been a more effective response to the crisis, rather than bailing out the banks while imposing austerity and lower wages on the population.

### **Excuses, Excuses**

The Democratic Party platform adopted the call for Glass-Steagall in 2016 (as did the Republicans), although Clinton had repeatedly stated her opposition to the measure, claiming she would be really tough on Wall Street in other ways. Many people clearly didn't believe her; and taking hundreds of thousands of dollars from large banks for speeches exemplified the candidate's lack of credibility.

Why should workers in states such as Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania trust someone who was soft on Wall Street, and had trumpeted international trade deals for years?

This is the issue that the Democratic Party must tackle. To say that Hillary won the popular vote, and thus essentially the election, but was robbed by Russian interference or fake news on the Internet, means to ignore the fundamental problem. A realignment is underway of electoral politics throughout the Western world.

Profiling voters based on their ethnicity, gender or social group showed its limits in 2016, as people followed an anti-establishment instinct fomented by the economic difficulties associated with globalization.

There were other factors, but this protest vote was enough to swing the election despite Trump's obvious weaknesses as a candidate, so any notion of going back to old models should be recognized for what it would produce: a Pyrrhic victory in which the underlying problems before the country are not faced.

If the Democrats hope to ride an anti-Trump wave, they would do best to look below the surface and recognize the tectonic shifts taking place, that much of the political establishment seems to prefer to ignore.

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