

Democratic Party regional forum in Detroit: An exercise in evasion and duplicity

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Contenders for chairperson of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and other national party offices attended a public forum at Wayne State University on Saturday as part of a series of four regional gatherings called by the DNC.

Held in the wake of mass protests that erupted following the inauguration of Donald Trump, whose administration has launched an unprecedented attack on democratic rights, the event drew relatively little interest or enthusiasm outside of party operatives and core supporters of the Democratic Party establishment. Attendance at the event, which drew only a few hundred people, was dominated by union officials and Democratic Party insiders.

On display was the demoralization and perplexity of this big business party in the face of growing social opposition to the Trump administration that it neither anticipated nor welcomed.

In his official greetings, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, who presides over the poorest big city in the United States, with an official unemployment rate near 10 percent, made no mention of the impending layoff of 1,300 workers at the General Motors Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly Plant in the city.

The two leading candidates for the post of DNC chairman addressed the meeting. Minnesota Congressman Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to Congress, is the favorite of the nominal “left” wing of the Democratic Party, headed up by former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren. Ellison has also received the endorsement of the AFL-CIO on the basis of his espousal of economic nationalism. The National Nurses United (NNU), which sold out the recent strike against Allina Health in Minnesota, sent a large contingent to lobby on behalf of Ellison at the Detroit forum.

Ellison has joined in the right-wing anti-Russian hysteria promoted by the Democratic leadership. He boycotted Trump’s inauguration in solidarity with Georgia Representative John Lewis on the grounds that Trump’s election was not “legitimate” because of alleged Russian hacking of DNC emails.

The other leading candidate for DNC chairperson, Tom Perez, who was labor secretary under Obama, also has considerable support within the party and trade union apparatus, including the endorsement of the United Food and Commercial Workers union. He reportedly has strong support as well within the building trades unions.

The predominant theme voiced by all speakers was “unity.” There was a general avoidance of any substantive discussion of policy issues. No one criticized the record of the Obama administration or the right-wing character of the Clinton campaign, outside of occasional talk of the need to “reconnect” with blue collar workers.

This included Ellison, whose candidacy is being touted by various pseudo-left groups as a sign that the Democratic Party is moving to the left. Ellison made only a fleeting reference to the working class and issues of “pensions” and “student debt” in his remarks. He avoided any comments on the presidential primary or general election campaigns.

In regard to the anti-Trump protests, the most Ellison could muster was a suggestion that Democratic Party supporters bring coffee to the demonstrators.

The “debate” among the DNC candidates focused on petty tactical prescriptions such as more effective voter registration and more support for local party organizations. There was no attempt to draw any broader conclusions from the Democratic Party election debacle or the implications of the policies of the Trump

administration.

Outside of baiting Trump for his alleged Russian ties, there was not a single reference to foreign policy questions. This is because both the Democrats and Republicans support a program of aggressive militarism overseas. The two terms of President Obama were marked by an escalation of US wars and the expansion of drone assassinations, including the murder of US citizens.

The most absurd moment came when the Reverend Wendell Anthony, chair of the Detroit chapter of the NAACP, spoke. He presented the Obama administration as the heir of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

No one was impolite enough to point out the obvious fact that while Roosevelt and Johnson, in the interests of defending capitalism, implemented policies expanding the social safety net, the Obama administration presided over cuts to those very programs and the greatest increase in social inequality in history.



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