

Democratic National Committee chooses a chairman from the party establishment

Tom Hall
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Thomas Perez, secretary of labor under Obama and the candidate of the bulk of the Democratic Party establishment, was elected chairman of the Democratic National Committee at a DNC meeting in Atlanta, Georgia Saturday.

Perez defeated his main challenger, Representative Keith Ellison of Minnesota, by 235-200 on the second ballot, after falling one vote short of a first-ballot victory. The close vote revealed tensions within the Democratic Party in the wake of the crushing defeat of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, and the dismal position of the party in Congress, governorships and state legislatures, where the Obama presidency coincided with drastic losses in lower-level offices.

While only 39 of the DNC's 447 members backed Sanders last year against Clinton, Ellison's total was five times as large. This reflects both a shift in the composition of the committee, as well as a decision by sections of the party establishment, personified by Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, to bring Sanders, a former independent, more directly into the party leadership.

Former DNC Chair Howard Dean also gave his endorsement to Ellison, along with numerous congressional Democrats and union officials. Ellison also had the backing of the Democratic Socialists of America and other groups, including pseudo-left organizations that orbit around the Democratic Party and seek to give it a "left" face.

In the end, however, the assembled delegates went for Perez, a candidate with firmer establishment credentials who enjoyed the open support of former Vice President Joe Biden and the tacit backing of Obama himself.

Immediately after his victory, Perez nominated Ellison as party vice-chairman, which was approved by a voice vote of the DNC members, in a bid to paper

over the divisions between former Sanders and former Clinton supporters on the committee.

For all the factional divisions between Sanders and Clinton backers and recriminations over the loss of the presidential election, there was virtually no discussion of policy or program during the campaign for the DNC chairmanship.

During a Democratic leadership debate last Wednesday on CNN, political questions were hardly discussed at all. Instead, nine-tenths of the proceedings revolved around technical aspects of electioneering, and how to repair the party's image. The remaining one-tenth was reserved for endorsements of imperialist foreign policy and bellicose threats against Russia.

Ellison, when pressed by the CNN moderator, declared his support for the US alliance with Israel as a cornerstone of foreign policy in the Middle East, in an effort to counter the whispering campaign against him because of his Muslim faith.

When the topic changed to the unsubstantiated allegations that Russia was responsible for last year's hacking of Democratic Party emails, the candidates took turns denouncing Russia and Trump as a Russian agent.

The candidates did not even hint that the party's election debacle last November might have had something to do with the fact that eight years of austerity and war under Obama had engendered mass disillusionment and anger. Instead, they blamed their losses on a combination of insufficiently vigorous campaigning and Russian interference.

While the candidates engaged in hand-wringing over the loss of public faith in the integrity of the Democrats' primary process, they studiously avoided mentioning the content of leaked Democratic Party emails which demonstrated that the DNC colluded with

Clinton to discredit Sanders' campaign. This is all the more remarkable because the revelations forced the resignation of the previous DNC chair, Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schulz.

The entire proceedings on Saturday were a political fraud. Despite the attempts to provide the election with a pseudo-popular gloss through a televised leadership debate, the affair really attested to the insular, upper-class character of the Democratic Party.

The Democratic Party is a party of American imperialism, which is hostile to and distant from the working class, and whose real constituency consists of Wall Street, the CIA and the military, along with a narrow layer of the upper-middle class mobilized largely on the basis of an appeal to identity politics. As if to drive the point home, the DNC voted down a measure to reinstate a ban on campaign contributions from corporate lobbyists only hours before Saturdays' leadership vote.

The day after his election, Perez got down to brass tacks, appearing on Sunday morning talk shows to denounce Russia and call for an investigation into Russian "rigging" of the general election. "What we need to be looking at is whether this election was rigged by Donald Trump and his buddy Vladimir Putin," Perez told CNN.

Even more revealing was the appearance of Bernie Sanders on CNN's "State of the Union" program, praising as Perez as "a very, very good secretary of labor," and adding that he "has a real opportunity on his hands. And I hope he seizes it."

Sanders continued, "We have got to open up the party to working people, to young people, and make it crystal clear that the Democratic Party is going to take on Wall Street, it's going to take on the greed of the pharmaceutical industry, it's going to take on corporate America that is shutting down plants in this country and moving our jobs abroad."

In other words, Sanders reiterated his 2016 posture of presenting the Democratic Party as the only alternative to the Republicans, while at the same time suggesting a possible agreement with the Trump administration on the basis of economic nationalism.

When CNN host Jake Tapper showed him a clip of Steve Bannon, the fascistic chief strategist for the Trump White House, speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference last Thursday, and hailing

Trump's decision to pull out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal, Sanders said nothing at all about Bannon's ultra-right record as the CEO of Breitbart News, where he formed close ties with neo-Nazis and anti-Semites in the alt-right.

Instead, Sanders tried to outflank Trump and Bannon as an economic nationalist, declaring that he had been hostile to trade deals like NAFTA long before Trump, and adding, "the devil is in the details as to what Trump is going to do. What we need is a fair trade policy, not an unfettered free trade policy."

This only underscores that there will be no genuine opposition to the fascistic agenda of the Trump administration from any section of the Democratic Party.



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