Why did Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party lose the 2016 election?

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In a public appearance Tuesday with CNN's Christiane Amanpour, 2016 Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton attributed her loss to Donald Trump last November to two main factors: misogyny within the electorate and Russian interference. She also placed emphasis on FBI Director James Comey's October announcement that the FBI was re-opening its investigation of her use of a private email account while she was secretary of state.

Misogyny "played a role," she said, claiming that "it would have been a really big deal" to elect the first woman president. She also blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin, claiming he "clearly interfered in our election, and it was designed to hurt me and help my opponent." As proof of Russian meddling, Clinton pointed to WikiLeaks' release of emails from Clinton aide John Podesta, which included transcripts of some of her paid speeches to Wall Street bankers.

Clinton's claims are belied by the facts. In a May 1 article titled "Why did Trump Win? New research by Democrats offers a worrisome answer," *Washington Post* columnist Greg Sargent cites poll data showing that Trump's election was the product of widespread economic hardship in the working class and popular opposition to the pro-corporate policies of the Democratic Party.

The poll, commissioned by the Democratic Party-linked firm Priorities USA, was conducted in the working class suburbs outside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Detroit, Michigan, as well as in Tampa, Florida. All three of these traditional "swing states" supported Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012, but swung for Trump in 2016. The poll targeted two types of voters: those who voted for Obama in 2012 but for Trump in 2016 ("Obama-Trump voters") and those who voted for Obama in 2012 but did not vote in 2016 ("drop-off voters").

The picture that emerges from the poll is of a working class that is under tremendous financial strain, is growing disillusioned with both parties, and is deeply opposed to cuts in social programs such as health care.

"A key commonality" of these voters is that "they are struggling economically," the pollsters conclude. Of Obama-Trump voters, 50 percent say their income is falling behind the cost of living and 31 percent say their income is just equal to rises in the cost of living. Conditions are even worse among drop-off voters. Forty-three percent say their income is falling behind the cost of living and 49 percent say their income is only staying even with the cost of living—that is, 92 percent are either falling behind or barely staying afloat.

In a confused and contradictory manner, Obama-Trump voters express the growth of social opposition to the political establishment from the left. According to these voters, the government's most important priorities should be protecting Social Security and Medicare (85 percent for both), creating good-paying jobs (84 percent) and providing everyone with access to affordable health care (80 percent).

The poll shows these voters' lowest priority is building a wall between the US and Mexico. They are *least* concerned that Trump will "be too close to Putin and won't stand up to Putin." They are substantially more concerned that Trump will involve the US in foreign wars and will put the interests of corporate executives ahead of working people.

Among drop-off voters, 87 percent support raising taxes on corporations, 89 percent support infrastructure spending, 79 percent support raising the minimum wage, 75 percent support raising taxes on the rich and 73 percent support paid family leave for child care. Drop-off voters are by far most concerned with the economy and access to health care. Only 6 percent say Russia is the most important issue, with 5 percent citing immigration and 2 percent citing terrorism/national security.

As their economic conditions deteriorate, those polled view the policies of the Democratic Party as favoring the wealthy. The *Washington Post's* Sargent notes, "One finding from the polling stands out: A shockingly large percentage of these Obama-Trump voters said Democrats' economic policies will favor the wealthy—twice the percentage that said the same about Trump. I was also permitted to view video of some focus group activity, which showed Obama-Trump voters offering sharp criticism of Democrats on the

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economy."

Sargent explained that when focus group respondents were asked what the Democratic Party stands for, they responded: "the one percent" and "the status quo." Among those who voted for Obama in 2012 but didn't vote in 2016, the most common reasons given for abstaining include: "It makes no difference," "I did not like either candidate," "I voted for Bernie Sanders in the primary; I couldn't support Clinton for the general election," and "I'm tired of voting for the lesser of two evils."

These poll results confirm what the *World Socialist Web Site* stressed in its initial analysis of the US election results: Clinton's loss was the product of mass abstention by workers—and particularly African American workers—in key industrial cities such as Cleveland, Detroit and Milwaukee, plus swings by all racial groups toward the Republican candidate in 2016 compared with 2012. Clinton's claim that she lost the election due to misogyny is refuted by the fact that exit polls show the Democratic Party lost the votes of over a million working class women from 2012 to 2016.

The American working class does not hate Hillary Clinton because of her gender, it hates her because she embodies, both personally and politically, everything rotten about American capitalism. More specifically, the dislike of Clinton expresses the growing perception that the Democratic Party is the most naked representative of the banks and corporations.

For the first half of the 20th century, the Democratic Party based its national presence on an alliance of sections of better-off professionals with Tammany Hall city machines in the North, segregationists across the former slave states in the South, and the trade union bureaucracies, first the American Federation of Labor and later including the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The Stalinist Communist Party played a critical role in bringing the mass strike movement of the 1930s and the industrial unions that arose out of it under the control of the Democratic Party. Even into the 1960s, the Democrats' domestic program was based on a series of mild social reforms—a partial cooptation of the platforms of the pre-Depression populist and progressive movements.

A key turning point came in the late 1960s, when the contradictions embedded in the party's anti-communist and pro-capitalist foundations burst into the open as President Lyndon Johnson drained resources intended for Great Society social programs to fund the war in Vietnam.

Deeply discredited by the disastrous impact of the war and the administration's crackdown on anti-war demonstrations and inner-city riots, the Democratic Party began to reorient itself toward a wealthy section of African-American and other racial minorities who benefited from the Democratic Party-backed civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s.

As the chasm between rich and poor widened in the subsequent decades, the Democrats began to abandon even the pretense of appealing to working class voters on the basis of a program of social reform. Increasingly tied to Wall Street and the military-intelligence agencies and increasingly unpopular within the working class, the Democratic Party sought to build a broader electoral base in the privileged upper-middle class, where the politics of race, gender and sexual preference dominate.

Clinton's presidential campaign represented the ugly culmination of this rightward trajectory. Her campaign married the military-intelligence apparatus and finance capital to the politics of racial and gender identity, while Clinton consciously ignored the economic struggles of the working class and opposed the demagogue Trump from the right on questions of war and state surveillance.

Figures like Bernie Sanders and his pseudo-left supporters play a most pathetic role in shoring up support for the Democratic Party. Speaking on his swing-state tour with Democratic Party Chairman and Clinton-confidante Thomas Perez, Sanders recently told a crowd that they had "come to the right place" to talk about "political revolution," and that "our job is to radically transform the Democratic Party."

What Sanders, Clinton and the entire political establishment fear most is that the growing opposition that found an initial and distorted reflection in the 2016 election will develop in a consciously left-wing, socialist direction.

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