

# Democratic Party faction calls 2016 election “train wreck,” proposes relationship with pseudo-left

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One year after the 2016 general election, the Democratic Party faces a crisis of historic proportions. Deep divisions are emerging from the party's efforts to respond to Hillary Clinton's electoral defeat.

At the end of October, a group of Democratic politicians associated with Bernie Sanders' campaign published a 34-page “autopsy” of the 2016 election. Calling the Democratic campaign a “train wreck,” the authors conclude that the party must respond to growing discontent since “many view the party as often in service to a rapacious oligarchy and increasingly out of touch with people in its own base.”

The authors lament the fact that “since Obama's victory in 2008, the Democratic Party has lost control of both houses of Congress and more than 1,000 state legislative seats. The GOP now controls the governorship as well as the entire legislature in 26 states.”

When viewed historically, the Democratic collapse is, in fact, extraordinary. Outside of the 1919-23 postwar Republican revival and the 1894 Democratic midterm disaster, the Democratic drop-off from 2008 to the present is unprecedented in the post-Civil War period.

After the 2008 elections, the Democratic Party won 60 of 100 US Senate seats and a 79-seat majority in the House of Representatives (257 to 178). On the state level, it held 29 of 50 governor's seats while also controlling both chambers of state legislatures in 27 states compared to 14 for Republicans, with 8 split. The party had a favorability rating of 62 percent compared to 31 percent unfavorable.

Nine years later, the Democrats have been swept from large majorities in both houses in Congress while, on the state level, Democratic losses are even more revealing. The party controls only 15 governor's seats and is a majority of both houses of state legislatures in just 14

states, all of which (with the exceptions of New Mexico and Illinois) are on the Pacific or Northeast coasts. Between California and New York there is not a single state with a Democratic governor and Democratic majorities in both state legislatures, and only 7 in total. This is the lowest level of state Democratic legislative control since at least the 1920s.

According to a CNN poll released on November 7, the Democratic Party is just as hated as Donald Trump, with a favorability rating of just 37 percent. Fifty-four percent of people view the party unfavorably, the worst showing for the Democrats since polling on party favorability began in 1992.

The “Democratic Autopsy” states that the historic drop-off in Democratic support in the working class and among youth threatens to transform the party into a permanent rump and open the way for the growth of independent opposition on the left. The authors warn that the Democrats will be obliterated if they do not appeal to populist sentiments: “We live in a time of unrest and justified cynicism towards those in power; Democrats will not win if they continue to bring a wonk knife to a populist gunfight.”

According to the authors of the Democratic Autopsy, the fundamental challenge for the party is how to present itself as left-wing and thereby prevent electoral collapse.

There are two components to accomplishing this task, they state. The first requirement is internal party reform of the primary process to eliminate the popular conception that the party is corrupt. In addition, the authors suggest that the party should hire more minority contractors and political staff, make changes to party financing rules to appear “anti-corporate,” and bring Sanders supporters into the official party machine. There is a definite fear, held not just by Sanders supporters (as evidenced by

former DNC interim head Donna Brazile's new book) that ongoing Clinton family domination of the party apparatus amounts to an electoral death sentence.

The second element of the party's proposed reorientation requires allying with the trade union and "social movement" apparatus, including elements of the pseudo-left.

The authors of the report warn of "numerous reports of deep cynicism among voters" during the campaign that "mirrored the vast discontent so unmistakably expressed in recent protests." The party apparatus recognized popular hostility among Flint residents to Clinton's campaign stop, for example, as well as the refusal of the mother of a victim of police violence to share a platform with the candidate.

The authors noted that Sanders' adoption of the Occupy Wall Street slogan "We are the 99 percent" yielded significant electoral results. They argue: "Democratic Party leaders at the DNC and throughout the country must build relationships with social movements on the basis of genuine cooperation and coalition building."

They explain, "The ebb and flow of social movements offer a rising tide in their own right that along the way can lift Democratic Party candidates—if the party is able to embrace the broad popular sentiment that the movements embody... [F]ailing to make genuine common cause with grassroots outlooks can undermine campaign enthusiasm, volunteers, online participation, recurring small-donor contributions, and turnout at election time."

Who are the forces with which this faction of the Democratic Party proposes to "build relationships?" This is further elaborated in the document. The report sees a key lesson in the "Fight for \$15" campaign, which it claimed "show[ed] the power of union activism teaming up with non-union advocates for workers... That growth would certainly help to expand the middle class and, with it, support for the party."

The Fight for \$15 is a coalition that involves trade union bureaucracies and "non-union advocates" including pseudo-left groups like Socialist Alternative, which has played a central role in the bureaucracies' campaign to bring service workers into the trade union fold.

The "Autopsy" document also explains that the Democrats will have to "build relationships" with groups that call themselves socialist:

"Young people are more and more rejecting capitalist politics," the report notes, criticizing the Democratic leadership for its "inability to tap into this sentiment." The authors are concerned that "young voters are moving

leftward but identify less with the nominally 'left' major party."

Popular opposition to war also threatens to break free of the Democratic Party stranglehold. The report acknowledges that former defense secretary Leon Panetta was interrupted with cries of "no more war" from younger delegates and adds, "While public support for ongoing war on many fronts has ebbed, the Democratic Party's top leadership has continued to avidly back it. This disconnect not only depresses enthusiasm and support—reflected in donations, volunteer energies, turnout and votes—from the party's traditional base; it also undermines Democratic capacities to draw in voters who identify as independent or have gravitated to another party."

The report does not, of course, propose that the party transform itself into an antiwar party, but rather mildly suggests that Democrats distinguish between unnecessary wars and "defense of our country."

The reader senses a nervous tone when the "Democratic Autopsy" references youth and workers who are gravitating to other parties, don't identify as Democrats, and are increasingly interested in socialism. The authors are concerned that the Democratic Party has lost sight of its fundamental modern role, dating back to the emergence of industrial and agricultural populism in the late 1800s, to subsume popular protest, nullify the elements that threaten private property and corporate profit, and sustain an electoral and political legitimacy by enacting certain limited reforms.

Representatives of the pseudo-left have long since championed an alliance with the "left wing" of the Democratic Party on this basis, justifying it with the need to gain access to "political space," etc. But the Democrats are now acknowledging what the real purpose of such a relationship would be: prop up one of the two parties of corporate rule at precisely the moment it is rightly reviled by the population and thereby block the growth of social opposition from developing in a revolutionary socialist direction.



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