

Lessons of the Alabama election

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14 December 2017

Media pundits and Democratic Party leaders are hailing the outcome of the special election in Alabama to fill a seat in the US Senate—with Democrat Doug Jones narrowly defeating the ultra-right Republican Roy Moore—as a political “miracle.”

“Thank you, Alabama,” gushed the *Washington Post*, for choosing “to spare the nation the indignity of seating an accused child molester in the U.S. Senate.” The editorial concluded: “Thanks to Alabama, Americans can wake up Wednesday morning feeling hopeful about the decency and dignity of their democracy.”

The *New York Times* sounded the same theme, headlining its editorial, “Roy Moore Loses, Sanity Reigns,” and hailing a “triumph for decency and common sense in a state that seemed for a time at risk of abandoning both...” Referring to the right-wing Democrat who defeated Moore, the *Times* declared that Alabamians had been correct in “choosing a candidate whose record was cause for pride, not shame, one who spent his career battling bigotry, not exploiting it.”

The spreading of editorial rose petals over the Alabama result should fool no one. A right-wing Democrat, operating with a nearly 10-1 financial advantage, has eked out a victory over a fascistic candidate, not by confronting and opposing Moore’s ultra-right pronouncements, let alone offering an alternative to defend working people. Instead, Jones owes his razor-thin margin to the unleashing over the past month of a barrage of allegations of sexual misconduct by Moore.

Following the defeat of Moore, the Democrats are doubling down on their strategy of opposing Trump based on anti-Russia hysteria and allegations of sexual misconduct, aimed primarily at mobilizing sections of the upper middle class. They are seeking to divert and suppress working class opposition to the Trump administration behind a politics that is compatible with the aims of the financial aristocracy and the military-intelligence apparatus.

Allegations of sexual misconduct by Moore were first reported by the *Washington Post* on November 9, with a

feature-length report on Moore’s approaches to a series of teenaged girls while he was a county prosecutor in his early 30s. This became the principal subject of the television advertising by the Jones campaign. In order to pursue this campaign against Moore more aggressively, the Democratic Party pushed out two major congressional figures of its own, Congressman John Conyers and Senator Al Franken, who were forced to resign over allegations of sexual misconduct during the final weeks of the Alabama election campaign.

While devoting endless attention to Moore’s alleged sexual misconduct, the Democratic campaign in Alabama made almost no reference to Moore’s ultra-right political views: his support for criminalizing homosexuality, his declaration that Muslims should be barred from Congress and other elective office, his support for sending the Army to attack immigrants on the US-Mexico border, his advocacy for what amounts to a theocracy, elevating the Bible above the US Constitution.

Even Moore’s comments during the final week of the campaign—painting a rosy picture of life in the slave South, the last time in American history, according to this bigot and ignoramus, when family values were honored—drew relatively little fire, although they undoubtedly gave an impetus to the turnout by African-American voters across the state.

In the wake of the Alabama result, both the national Democratic Party and its media allies are taking a victory lap, while declaring the results to be a vindication of the “#MeToo” campaign of allegations of sexual misconduct, frequently unsupported or disputed.

The *Post* claimed, in a news analysis, that the defeat of Roy Moore “marked a watershed moment for the national movement around the issue of sexual abuse,” and forecast that it would encourage a slew of female candidates running in 2018.

The next stage is the targeting of Trump, not for his tax cut for the multi-millionaires, planned budget cuts in vital social programs, attacks on the rights of immigrants and minorities, or militaristic threats of nuclear war against

North Korea, but for alleged offenses against more than a dozen women before he entered the White House.

The Democrats have legitimized the type of sexual witch-hunting that was deployed in the ultra-right effort to impeach President Bill Clinton in 1998-99. The Republicans will not be at all reluctant to respond in kind. All indications are that the 2018 election year will be dominated by mutual mudslinging so filthy that it will make the attack ads of previous years appear positively enlightened.

The tenor was set in testimony by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein on Wednesday, which was focused largely on the investigation of Robert Mueller into charges of Russian interference in the 2016 elections, but also included a lurid and detailed description by Democratic Congressman Luis Gutierrez, doing his best imitation of Kenneth Starr, of the charges of sexual misconduct raised against Trump during the election campaign.

Playing the role of political handmaidens for the Democratic Party will be pseudo-left groups like the International Socialist Organization. The ISO's online publication *Socialist Worker* moved with unusual speed to comment on the Alabama special election, hailing the victory by a right-wing Democrat, while declaring that "the big winner in this election is the women of #MeToo—who broke the silence about sexual harassment and assault committed by powerful men."

The ISO is an entirely uncritical cheerleader for the #MeToo campaign, which disregards all considerations of democratic rights and due process with its insistence that allegations must be believed, without investigation or critical appraisal of the evidence.

The commentary concludes: "This election was about far more than [sic] vote in Alabama for a Senate seat. It was a test of support for Republican monsters like Moore, their bigoted policies and the presidency of Donald Trump."

Socialist Worker employs no such political invective for a Democrat like Barack Obama, who oversaw the largest transfer of wealth in history from working people to the rich, while escalating the wars initiated under George W. Bush and launching his own, in Libya, Syria, Yemen and via drone warfare in a dozen countries. That is because the ISO operates as a political arm of the Democratic Party, using "left" rhetoric to oppose any movement by the working class to break out of the straitjacket of the corporate-controlled two-party system.

The first year of the Trump administration has seen

mass opposition from working people to its ultra-right agenda, expressed in demonstrations, opinion polls, and the initial stirrings of mass social struggles. But this shift to the left in the working class can find no expression in the US political system, dominated by two parties that are both instruments of the corporate elite.

The Trump administration is deeply unpopular, the Republican Congress even more so. There has been a significant shift to the left in public opinion. But within the framework of capitalist politics, mass hostility to Trump has led to the election of right-wing Democrats: in the New Jersey and Virginia gubernatorial elections last month, the victory of a former Goldman Sachs banker and a conservative lieutenant governor who voted twice for George W. Bush; and now in the Alabama Senate race, the victory of Doug Jones, who ran as a law-and-order candidate and pledges to work with right-wing Republican Senator Richard Shelby and seek "common ground" with the Trump White House.

The last week of the Alabama election campaign coincided with the visit to that state by the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, who went to rural areas of the state where conditions are so abominable, in terms of water and sewage infrastructure, primitive housing, and poverty, that he said he had never seen as bad in any industrialized country.

These conditions are the joint responsibility of the two right-wing parties that hold all political offices in the United States and control local, state and national government. Living standards and social conditions continue to deteriorate under Democrats and Republicans alike. The working class must draw the necessary political conclusions, and take the road of independent political struggle against the capitalist system, building a new mass political party based on a socialist program.



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