

Republican reactionaries, CIA Democrats win primary nominations

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10 May 2018

Tuesday's Democratic and Republican primary elections in four states—Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia and North Carolina—confirmed the continued right-ward course in both major capitalist parties, which contrasts sharply to the growing militancy in the working class and the general alienation from both parties in the majority of the population.

In three of the states, not even one-fifth of those registered to vote chose to go to the polls: the turnout was 19 percent in Ohio, 18 percent in Indiana and 14 percent in North Carolina. The figure in West Virginia was only slightly higher, at 26 percent.

In Senate contests, the Republican Party chose nominees to challenge three incumbent Democrats: state attorney general Patrick Morrisey will oppose Senator Joe Manchin in West Virginia; Representative Jim Renacci will oppose Senator Sherrod Brown in Ohio; and millionaire businessman and former longtime Democrat Mike Braun will oppose Senator Joe Donnelly in Indiana.

Candidates for the Republican nominations campaigned as loyal hand-raisers for President Trump, seeking to ape his anti-foreigner demagoguery on both immigration and trade. In Indiana, Braun ran television ads demonizing immigrants and trade with China, but his two opponents for the nomination went even further in directly identifying themselves with Trump. Representative Todd Rokita campaigned in a “Make America Great Again” cap, while Representative Luke Messer called for Trump to get the Nobel Peace Prize.

The West Virginia Senate campaign was equally degrading, with Morrisey and Representative Evan Jenkins competing with former A. T. Massey coal boss and convicted criminal Don Blankenship, who poured \$3.5 million of his corporate fortune into ads which featured increasingly unhinged and racist diatribes.

In the week leading up to the vote, there was national media attention to Blankenship, amid claims that his

campaign was “surging,” although attendance at his campaign events was invariably poor. In the end, Blankenship finished a poor third, taking only 20 percent of the vote.

The results in West Virginia are particularly noteworthy given the vilification of that state in liberal publications like the *New York Times*, which sought to portray Trump's runaway victory there over Hillary Clinton as the product of racism and cultural backwardness in Appalachia.

Republican Party officials and Blankenship himself attributed his defeat to the last-minute intervention by President Trump, who tweeted to supporters on the weekend that Blankenship could not win the general election. There is no reason to believe that Trump had such an impact. A far more forceful intervention by Trump in the Republican primary in Alabama last year, when he travelled to the state and campaigned publicly for then Senator Luther Strange, failed to shift many voters, and Strange lost the primary to Roy Moore, who then lost the special election in December to Democrat Doug Jones.

Despite the incessant claims that West Virginia is a “red state,” supposedly proven by Trump's 42-point victory margin over Clinton in 2016, more people voted in the Democratic primary than in the hotly contested Republican primary, 160,000 to 136,000. The incumbent Democrat, Joe Manchin, defeated a relatively unknown challenger, Paula Jean Swearengen, by 70 percent to 30 percent.

The Democratic contest was significant because Swearengen was opposing Manchin as a self-proclaimed progressive, calling for Medicare for all and professing support to the strike by 30,000 teachers and other education workers that shut down schools statewide for nine days in March. Swearengen, who prominently displayed a photograph of herself with Bernie Sanders on

her web site, won 48,302 votes, more than the 47,571 votes for Morrissey, the winner of the Republican primary, and nearly double the 27,153 votes for Blankenship.

The fundraising disparity was equally remarkable: Manchin raised \$5 million and spent nearly \$1.4 million on the primary campaign, compared to only \$184,000 for Swearingin, an accounting clerk from a coal-mining family in southern West Virginia. In addition to the \$3.5 million from Blankenship, Morrissey spent \$1.3 million and Jenkins, who finished second, spent \$1.5 million. Swearingin spent less than \$5 for every vote she received, compared to Blankenship's \$130 per vote.

The national media has barely reported the vote for Swearingin. The *New York Times*, for example, wrote: "Also worrisome for Mr. Manchin were the number of Democratic voters who supported his primary opponent, who ran a nominal campaign. He lost about 30 percent of the vote and did even worse in some of the state's coal counties, which are full of the sort of ancestral Democrats he will need to hold onto in November."

The *Times* did not even name his opponent or explain that the votes Manchin lost were an indication of a shift to the left among sections of working people. This was already seen in the large vote for Sanders in the 2016 Democratic primary in West Virginia, which Sanders worked to divert behind the campaign of Hillary Clinton.

The left-ward movement of workers found a more genuine expression in the struggle waged by teachers and other school workers against the state government, despite the sabotage of the teachers' unions and the state Democratic Party establishment.

There was a similar shift away from the Republicans in the Third Congressional District, which comprises the southern third of West Virginia, including Huntington and Beckley. More than 57,000 voted in the Democratic primary compared to just over 37,000 in the Republican primary, which was a seven-candidate contest to choose a successor to incumbent Republican Jenkins, who chose to run for the US Senate seat.

State Senator Richard Ojeda won the Democratic nomination against token opposition. After spending more than two decades in the US Army Airborne, with repeated tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, Ojeda became an Army recruiter based in Beckley before winning a seat in the State Senate in 2016. He was heavily promoted by union leaders during the teachers' strike.

Ojeda is one of four candidates with military-intelligence backgrounds who won Democratic

congressional nominations on Tuesday.

In the Second Congressional District of West Virginia, former Clinton State Department official Talley Sergeant defeated another military-intelligence candidate, Aaron Scheinberg, a West Point graduate and Iraq War veteran. In the Seventh Congressional District of Ohio, Kenneth Harbaugh, a former Navy pilot who flew reconnaissance missions in the Middle East and against North Korea, spent \$457,000 to defeat a nominal opponent. Harbaugh has raised more money than the incumbent Republican, Representative Robert Gibbs.

In the 13th Congressional District of North Carolina, Marine Corps veteran Dan McCready, now a "green energy" multi-millionaire, won the Democratic nomination, while the incumbent Republican, Representative Robert Pittenger, was defeated in the primary by a Christian pastor, Mark Harris, who attacked him as insufficiently conservative. In that primary too, there was a higher turnout in an uncontested Democratic primary than in a tightly contested Republican primary.

The result of that primary is a general election contest between a millionaire Democrat who claims to have "found Jesus" during his military service in Iraq, where he had himself baptized in the waters of the Euphrates River, and a fundamentalist Christian preacher who made his name opposing gay marriage and abortion rights.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has highlighted the political significance of the emergence of an openly CIA-military wing of the Democratic Party, with dozens of candidates who come directly from the national security apparatus rather than from more traditional venues such as local and state government, business or legal circles.

The author also recommends

The CIA Democrats

[7 March 2018]



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