

Democratic Party suffers debacle in gubernatorial elections

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The Democratic Party suffered an historic electoral debacle in the Virginia gubernatorial election yesterday, where Republican Glenn Youngkin led Democrat Terry McAuliffe by a 51 to 48 percent margin, with over 95 percent of precincts reporting as of midnight. The 90,000-vote margin will be difficult for Democrats to make up in precincts that remain to be counted.

Democrats also suffered a substantial collapse of support in New Jersey, where Republican Jack Ciattarelli held a threadbare, late-night lead over Democratic incumbent Phil Murphy with three-quarters of ballots counted. Since most outstanding votes are from Democratic-controlled Newark, however, it is likely that Murphy will emerge victorious. Until recently neither election was considered particularly competitive, and both states voted for President Joe Biden by wide margins in 2020.

The elections in Virginia and New Jersey were the first major test of the Democratic Party's electoral support both since the 2020 presidential election and Trump's fascist coup attempt of January 6. The Democrats' defeat in Virginia is particularly significant, since the state is home to Charlottesville, where a fascist thug murdered protester Heather Heyer at the "Unite the Right" rally in 2017. Last year, far-right Trump supporters plotted to assassinate sitting Democratic Governor Ralph Northam over coronavirus restrictions.

Despite this, the Democrats made no warning of the danger posed by the far right, demobilizing opposition to Trump and preparing their own defeat. Throughout 2021, Joe Biden has repeated his desire for a "strong Republican Party." Evidently, the voters listened.

The dropoff in Democratic votes makes clear that the party's focus on racial and gender identity is being met

with either indifference or revulsion on the part of broad masses of voters.

Particularly in Virginia, Republicans capitalized on widespread hostility to efforts by Democrats to incorporate identity politics into school curricula. Republican candidate Youngkin whipped up Trump supporters on a right-wing basis by calling for censorship and even promoted attacks on Toni Morrison's 1987 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Beloved*. The Democrats have placed particular emphasis on race and gender politics in Virginia, a state which is critical to their national electoral strategy. In 2019, in the run-up to the 2020 election, a section of the Virginia Democratic Party attempted to oust Northam on the basis of allegations that he once dressed up in blackface, as well as Democratic Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax on the grounds of a sex scandal.

A clear warning must be made: The Democrats' emphasis on identity politics—promoted by the Democratic Socialists of America, *Jacobin* magazine and the pseudo-left—is opening the door for Trump, whose political fortunes were substantially strengthened by Tuesday's vote. Trump immediately issued a statement taking credit for the Republican victories and consolidating his control over the Republican Party.

Less than a year ago, the Democratic Party won the presidency and both houses of Congress by pledging to reverse Trump's criminal handling of the coronavirus pandemic and to provide immediate economic support for tens of millions of people.

Under Trump, at least 400,000 Americans died of COVID-19. But Biden has fulfilled his pledge that "nothing will fundamentally change," and another 350,000 people are dead as a result. Federal unemployment benefits have been cut, the eviction

moratorium has ended, and the Democratic Party's own senators are responsible for blocking legislation to increase spending on infrastructure and fund popular social programs. McAuliffe's racial appeals did not succeed in mobilizing minority voters, with 13 percent of African American voters and 31 percent of Latinos supporting the Republican candidate.

The collapse of voter support for the Democratic Party does not represent a rightward shift in the working class. The votes in New Jersey and Virginia took place as 10,000 John Deere workers voted 55 to 45 percent to reject a sellout contract agreed to by the Democratic Party-aligned United Auto Workers (UAW) at plants across the Midwest. In the course of the Virginia and New Jersey elections, the Democratic Party consciously refused to make any appeal to the militant mood among working people which has found expression in strikes and overwhelming contract rejections across the country.

The 2021 strike wave has firm roots in Virginia, where 3,000 autoworkers at Volvo Trucks went on two separate strikes earlier this year, rejecting three sellout agreements reached by the UAW. Democratic candidate Terry McAuliffe's efforts to posture as an ally of working people fell on deaf ears in Pulaski County, where the strike took place, and where only 30 percent of voters chose the Democratic ticket.

The Democratic Party placed heavy emphasis instead on appealing to affluent voters in the northern Virginia suburbs of Fairfax and Loudoun counties. But McAuliffe fared substantially worse in those counties than both Biden in 2020 and incumbent Democratic Governor Ralph Northam in 2017. This is in large part because Youngkin more effectively appealed to wealthier voters by calling for ending vaccine mandates and reducing any limitations on business functions implemented on health grounds.

McAuliffe adapted to Youngkin on the coronavirus, appearing on the eve of the election with American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten (salary \$500,000), a chief proponent of reopening schools. Largely because of the school reopening policy of Ralph Northam, the average number of newly confirmed cases in Virginia remains 10 times above the summer lows.

Municipal elections also took place throughout the country. In Buffalo, New York, Democratic Socialists

of America member India Walton, the only Democrat on the ballot, was overwhelmingly defeated by a write-in campaign organized by the Democratic Party and the unions in support of the incumbent Byron Brown. Walton had won the Democratic primary in June with 50.5 percent of the vote. The collapse of the DSA's campaign in Buffalo establishes once again that attempts to transform this 200-year-old party of capitalist reaction can only end in defeat.



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