

# The significance of the Democratic Party debacle on November 2

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**3 November 2021**

The comprehensive defeat of the Democratic Party in Tuesday's off-year election marks a political watershed. The election of a Republican governor in Virginia, the first statewide Republican victory there in a dozen years, came despite a massive commitment of Democratic Party resources, including appearances by President Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, former president Barack Obama, and many other national party figures.

In New Jersey, Democratic Governor Phil Murphy appears to have survived a contest that was unexpectedly close for a state long dominated by the Democrats, but there was a bloodbath among state legislators. In one remarkable result, the Democratic president of the state senate, Stephen Sweeney, was defeated for reelection by a candidate who spent \$153 on his campaign. Sweeney is an international vice president of the ironworkers union, a position that likely contributed to his defeat in a heavily blue-collar district in south Jersey.

Both elections were held in states carried easily in 2020 by Joe Biden over then president Donald Trump. Biden won Virginia by 10 percentage points and New Jersey by 16 points. The swing against the Democrats was 12 points in Virginia and 15 points in New Jersey, with the bulk of the shift occurring in upscale suburban areas outside of New York City and Washington DC.

Economic issues certainly played a significant role in the Democrats' defeat. Voter turnout fell most heavily, compared to 2020, in working-class areas that had voted for Biden and saw little to show for it in terms of improvements in jobs, wages or social benefits. On the contrary, a sharp jump in inflation, particularly in the price of gas, the cost of used cars, food prices and rents—all of critical importance to lower-paid workers—contributed to disaffection from the party in power in Washington.

Biden's election victory was fueled by popular anger over Trump's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and his obvious disinterest in the massive toll of infection and death. But the new administration has continued the same policy of prioritizing corporate profits over human life. It forced through the reopening of schools and businesses despite the emergence of deadly new variants like Delta. By the end of this year, more Americans will have been killed by coronavirus under the

Biden administration than under Trump, despite mass vaccination.

The November 2 election is the first major contest between the two capitalist parties since the Republican president attempted a fascist coup to overturn the last election and keep himself in office. It is staggering that the Democrats were unable to make any appeal to popular anger over this attack on the Constitution and democratic rights. Democrat Terry McAuliffe constantly invoked Trump's name in the Virginia election, but never held him or the Republican Party responsible for the events of January 6.

The Democratic Party will respond to this political rout by moving violently to the right. Already, its leading spokesmen have declared that the defeats were caused by the party adopting too left-wing a policy in relation to social spending and taxes on the wealthy. One columnist declared that the big winners on Tuesday were senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, the two right-wing Democrats who have blocked Biden's "Build Back Better" social spending legislation.

For all intents and purposes, November 2 marks the end of the Biden presidency, at least in terms of domestic policies. Biden could not enact his signature social spending bill, or his promised reforms on voting rights, immigration and police violence, even before the election. Whatever now makes it through Congress will be only the remnant of a fig leaf, and only what the Republican Party decides to permit.

After Trump tried to remain in power through the January 6 attack on the US Capitol, Biden opposed any serious effort to investigate the coup attempt or punish those who sought to overthrow the American Constitution. He declared that he wanted to preserve a strong Republican Party. Now he has it. The fascist right, and Trump in particular, are the beneficiaries.

Without any prospects on the domestic front, it is highly likely that the Biden administration will seek to improve its position through renewed imperialist aggression overseas. The Obama-Biden administration, after its electoral rout in the 2010 congressional elections, launched wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen. Even greater dangers face the international working class from an American government that is stoking confrontations with Iran and nuclear-armed China and Russia.

The outcome of the November 2 vote was a defeat, not

merely of an administration, but of the entire political framework of the Democratic Party, its social orientation over many decades. The Democratic Party has always been a capitalist party, but it once made an appeal to the working class on the basis of its economic interests. This period is long since gone.

Instead, it has sought to forge a political constituency in sections of the upper middle class through appeals based on the promotion of racial and gender identity politics. The Democratic Party is now inseparable from an obsessive focus on issues of race and gender, including affirmative action, reparations for slavery, and the teaching of reactionary myths like “critical race theory” and the 1619 Project, concocted by the *New York Times* two years ago to deny the progressive nature of the American Revolution and the Civil War.

Under Biden, identity politics has been combined with an aggressive promotion of the trade unions—in other words, the privileged bureaucracies who are a sizeable section of the upper middle class in their own right. Biden has repeatedly declared himself to be the most pro-union president in history, endorsing efforts by the unions to organize Amazon, in order to create a new barrier against the struggles of Amazon workers.

The embrace of identity politics, as the SEP and the WSWs have repeatedly emphasized, splits the working class and strengthens political reaction. Thus, the obscene spectacle of ultra-right politicians—the political heirs of the Tories of 1776 and the slaveholders of 1861—stepping forward to posture as defenders of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. This Democratic Party policy made it possible for Republican Glenn Youngkin in Virginia to combine an endorsement by the fascist Donald Trump with claims to oppose “viewing everything through a lens of race.”

The role of the Democrats in strengthening reaction follows a definite historical pattern. For the past 30 years, every time the Democratic Party won full control of government—both houses of Congress and the White House—it proceeded to enact policies that alienated rather than benefited the working class, producing an electoral catastrophe as a consequence. Clinton’s victory in 1992 was followed by the Republican takeover of Congress under Newt Gingrich in 1994. Obama’s victory in 2008 led to the Republican capture of the House in 2010, then the Senate in 2014, and finally the victory of Trump in 2016. Biden’s victory in 2020 appears likely to produce a similar debacle.

The Democrats have written off large sections of the white working class, particularly in impoverished and deindustrialized regions of Appalachia and small-town America, where the trade unions Biden embraces are identified in the minds of workers with closed factories and betrayed strikes. The result is that in the former coal-mining towns of southwest Virginia, strongholds of working-class militancy only 40 years ago, Republican candidates now win as much as 90 percent of the vote.

The defeat of the Democrats on November 2, however much consternation it causes in the ranks of the pseudo-left apologists for this reactionary, imperialist party, is in no way a defeat for the working class. On the contrary, it coincides with the rising militancy and class consciousness among millions of workers—expressed so powerfully in the massive rejection votes for contracts promoted by the United Auto Workers and other bureaucratic shells still going by the name of “union.”

It is noteworthy that more than 10,000 workers on strike at John Deere voted to reject a sellout accepted by the UAW on the same day that the Democratic Party was comprehensively repudiated in the statewide elections in Virginia and New Jersey. There is a clear connection between the defeat of the union officialdom and the defeat of the political party to which these union leaders are tied by a thousand strings.

The working class must see the trade unions and the Democratic Party for what they are: obstacles and roadblocks to be cast aside, not vehicles for future struggles. It is necessary for workers to break free of the political straitjacket of the Democratic Party, whose objective role is to pave the way for a return to power of Trump and the fascists, in the elections of 2022 and 2024, if not even sooner.

The working class must build an independent political movement that repudiates all the divisions stoked and exploited by the ruling class—white vs. black, male vs. female, native-born vs. immigrant, American workers vs. their class brothers and sisters overseas—and unites all working people in a common struggle for their common social and class interests. Working people in every country have the same needs for decent jobs, wages that will support a family, protection from the COVID-19 pandemic, and an end to the threats of war and fascist violence.

To fight for these interests, workers need their own party, a revolutionary party that will speak the truth and lead the coming struggles without compromise. That party is the Socialist Equality Party in the United States, and our sister parties around the world, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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