Democratic Party turns a popular repudiation of Trump into a call for “moderation” and austerity

Patrick Martin
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Just days after the 2026 midterm elections delivered a major popular repudiation of inequality, war and attacks on democratic rights, the Democratic Party has launched a campaign to redefine the election as a mandate for austerity, accommodation with Trump and opposition to socialism.

The *New York Times*, speaking for the Democratic Party, set out the program in an editorial published Monday. Under the headline “This Winning Combination Is the Future of American Politics,” the *Times* claims that Democratic candidates won in states Trump carried in 2024 because “they ran as economic populists and cultural moderates.” This combination, it writes, “meets the moment, after years of disappointing laissez-faire economic policies and a decade of cultural excesses by the progressive left.”

The editorial praises Democratic candidates for adopting right-wing positions on what it calls “hot-button culture issues.” On immigration, it highlights candidates who attacked the Biden administration as lax on the border, including Texas Governor-elect Gina Hinojosa, who credited Trump for the fall in crossings.

But the assault on immigrants is not a “cultural” issue. It is the spearhead of the Trump administration’s war on the Constitution, including mass roundups and detention camps, deportations carried out in defiance of court orders, troops deployed in American cities and federal agents who have shot and killed citizens in Minneapolis. Its architect, Stephen Miller, took over as White House chief of staff the same morning the editorial appeared.

Nor is the epidemic of police violence a matter of “culture.” Yet the *Times* hails Democrats who embraced law-and-order demagogy and “well-funded police departments.” It applauds support for voter ID requirements, which disadvantage the poor and elderly and have been at the center of the administration’s efforts to delegitimize the elections.

The *Times*’ model candidate is Adam Hamilton, the Kansas senator-elect, whose campaign ad declared, “On one side, the far left pushes socialism and open borders.” The *Times* says this “captured the mood.” It praises another winner, Josh Turek in Iowa, for boasting that he voted with Republicans “more than 700 times.” The Democratic victors, it concludes, showed “an admirable pragmatism and a willingness to compromise that are central to maintaining democracy.”

The *Times* is giving systematic form to the line adopted by the entire Democratic leadership since the election: that the vote was a rejection of socialism and the left, and that the Democrats must “work with” Trump. Within hours of the results, House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries declared the party “ready, willing and able to find bipartisan common ground.” New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), spoke of “a place of shared purpose” with the president.

Just as significant is what the editorial does not say. Iran, Israel, Gaza, Venezuela, Ukraine and Russia never appear. The word “war” occurs only in a list of the causes of a decades-long national “malaise” and in Hamilton’s call to “stop the war on domestic energy projects.”

The *Times*’ silence is not indifference. On the war against Russia, the central question of foreign policy, its quarrel with Trump is that he has not been aggressive enough. When Trump struck a deal last

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month allowing the sale of Russian diesel, the newspaper's columnists denounced him. Thomas Friedman wrote, "Donald Trump, meet Neville Chamberlain." David French accused him of "throwing Vladimir Putin a lifeline." Such a program cannot be presented to an electorate that has just voted against war.

Nor does the editorial mention Miller's appointment or Trump's order that the Justice Department investigate Democrats who spoke of impeaching his officials. The administration is answering the vote by tightening its grip on the state and threatening its political opponents. The *Times* quotes Mary Peltola, who "leads her Senate race pending a final vote count" in Alaska, without a word about the suit to block certification of that race. It describes the Republicans as "a party that … has enabled corruption, lawbreaking and autocratic behavior," but its remedy is to hope that by 2028 they "return to being a normal political party." The word "impeachment" does not appear.

The editors' own figures expose the real situation. Three-quarters of Americans are dissatisfied with the direction of the country. Only 38 percent view the Republican Party favorably, and 39 percent the Democrats. Fifty-three percent say people with $100 billion or more "take more from society than they contribute." There is a growing recognition among working people that both parties defend the interests of the financial oligarchy.

The *Times* responds by drawing a line. It notes approvingly that candidates such as Michigan Senator-elect Abdul El-Sayed "said that they were not socialists" and "described themselves as capitalists who wanted to ensure that American capitalism delivered better results."

Its economic program is that of Wall Street and the Democratic Party leadership: the Democrats must "put the country on a sustainable fiscal path" and reduce "the alarming federal debt." That means a Democratic Congress working with Trump to carry out massive cuts in social spending, including the key entitlement programs.

The Democrats are already showing what this means. They have ruled out any moves to impeach Trump or otherwise take action against him, confining talk of impeachment to Trump's subordinates. The decision by Jeffries to go forward with a resolution to impeach Secretary of War Hegseth, initiated by Republican Thomas Massie, is a deliberate effort to avoid any such action against the criminal commander-in-chief, his boss, Donald Trump. It means targeting the monkey and not the organ grinder.

The Democrats' central difference with Trump is over Russia. This is the real content of the Democrats' offer to "work with" Trump: collaboration at home in exchange for a more aggressive war against Russia. For that they need the presidency and the military-intelligence apparatus intact.

Bernie Sanders provides the pseudo-left cover. On *Meet the Press* he endorsed Hamilton's call to put cooperation ahead of accountability, called Trump "a good politician" and said, "I'm not worried about Miller." Sanders and Senator Elizabeth Warren have already signaled their desire to reach agreement with Trump on intensifying his anti-China trade policy.

Contrary to the *Times*, the midterm vote was not a call for "moderation." It was an expression, within the straitjacket of the two-party system, of mass radicalization in the working class and among young people. As the WSWS wrote last week, "Popular sentiment is far to the left of the Democratic Party. Millions of people want an end to war, the defense of democratic rights and a radical improvement in their conditions of life."

The program of the Democratic Party—accommodation with Trump, fiscal austerity and preparation for an expanded war—will collide with those aspirations and develop in the form of the class struggle. Sanders, El-Sayed and the Democratic Socialists of America will seek to contain this movement within the Democratic Party and capitalist politics.

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