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**Post-Trump era**

Trump may be out of office, but American politics seem more crisis laden than ever between the caretaker neoliberalism of the Democrats and the creeping totalitarianism of the Republicans. On the Democratic front, although the progressive Sanders-Warren-AOC wing of the party continues to push for liberal reforms, we’ve seen 'more of the same' establishment-friendly politics from the neoliberal Biden wing that’s dominated the party for decades. This will come as no shock to those of us who have lamented the plutocratic biases of the Democrats during the Obama years and before.

It shouldn’t come as a surprise that the Biden wing of the party has disappointed liberals. They campaigned on politically empowering the poor and people of color, on implementing a $15 minimum wage, on expanding access to health care through a public option, on providing relief on the student loan front, and combating the steadily intensifying climate crisis. Thus far, there has been little by way of delivery. The ‘For the People Act’, which is meant to combat Republican efforts to suppress voting among the poor and poor people of color, has passed the House by 220-210 votes, but remains stalled in the Senate by a few conservative Democratic holdouts – Senators Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema. The party hasn’t acted on passing a $15 minimum wage due to resistance from these senators and a few others who have also blocked action. Biden has refused to prioritize action on student loan debt relief, claiming he doesn’t have executive authority to grant it, and only calling for $10,000 in forgiveness for each federal borrower. On health care, Biden has proposed $200 billion to expand the Affordable Care Act’s subsidies, but failed to put forward as promised a proposal for a “public option,” and his opposition to Medicare for All is well known.

On foreign policy, the Biden administration delivered more of the same on Israel Palestine, granting continued military support for a settler colonial government that’s been conducting an illegal occupation for more than a half century, which is responsible for ethnic cleansing, maintaining an apartheid state, and pursues massive violence that has produced asymmetrical deaths in the latest round of the “conflict” (May 2021), with 12 Israeli civilians killed compared to 212 Palestinians – or an imbalance of more than 17:1. The US has continued its support for Israel’s settler colonialism over the decades, despite this asymmetry, with 87 percent of the deaths falling on the Palestinian side in the 2000s and 2010s. None of this seemed to matter much to the Democrats – Obama or Biden – who have continued to enable the bloodshed.

Perhaps the brightest spot (or the least depressing thing) one could point to for the Democrats is their willingness to act on climate change, as Biden’s 2022 budget proposal calls for $36 billion to combat global warming – up from $14 billion in 2021 – including a renewed emphasis on clean energy projects, climate change-related research, and on green improvements to US infrastructure that are geared toward cutting US carbon emissions in half by 2030. But even these changes fall short of the ambitious progressive ‘Green New Deal’ goals of Bernie Sanders and AOC, which aimed at achieving a carbon neutral economy by 2030, at a time when global warming is rapidly spiraling out of control and scientists are warning that a net zero global economy must be achieved “well before 2040” to maximize humanity’s chances for a sustainable future.

It’s a challenge to write about the Democratic Party from the left. It’s obviously the case that the Democrats are a neoliberal party, meaning that they produce policies that favor the wealthy, leaving the many and the poor behind. But this simple observation hardly counts as an insight after more than three decades of Clinton-Obama-Biden style neoliberalism, which has produced an endless stream of laments from left writers in an era of rising inequality and mass economic insecurity – both trends that are now widely documented by not-so-radical sources such as mainstream journalists and social scientists. If left intellectuals spend the next four years simply pointing out that Biden is a neoliberal, we will be in a very sorry position at the end of this administration. There was a place for this sort of commentary during the Obama years, when the afterglow of the first black President meant that the man with the silver tongue was able to pull the wool over liberals’ eyes with false promises of “hope” and “change.” Those promises went unfulfilled as Obama perfected the role of neoliberal caretaker-in-chief.

But much of the liberal-left base of the party became wise to the deception by the end of his 8 years in office. Turnout for Hillary Clinton and her uninspiring neoliberal brand of Democratic Party politics was low among young Americans, union households, low-income Americans, and black Americans, as exit polling indicated. Of particular note is the large decline in support among poorer Americans, 68 percent of which voted for Obama in 2008, and 63 percent of which voted for Obama in 2012, but of which only 53 percent voted for Clinton in 2016. In contrast, most Democratic voters were hardly starry-eyed when they cast ballots for Biden. According to Pew Research Center polling, 67 percent of those who said they planned to vote for Biden in June of 2020, and 63 percent in October, said that their ‘choice’ was more one ‘against Trump’ than it was one ‘for Biden’. And this sober take on ‘their’ candidate continued after the election, with a November 2020 Monmouth survey showing that only 57 percent of Biden’s own supporters said they were “happy” that “their choice won,” compared to 73 percent saying they were “happy that Trump lost.”

Left intellectuals shouldn’t spend the coming years beating a dead horse by simply repeating tired (albeit accurate) laments about how the Democrats are a neoliberal party. As the above statistics show, the party base knows that already. The question now is what Americans can do to force the party to act in ways to implement a political agenda that will help the American people as related to wages, health care, worker rights, the environment, voting rights, and other issues.

Excerpted: ‘Orwellian Hellscape v. Neoliberal Caretakers: American Politics in the “Post-Trump” Era’

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