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European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

FEBRUARY 16, 2018

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18.02.2018

Had Hillary Won: What Now?



Suppose the polls had been right; suppose that what practically everybody believed would happen actually did happen.

Then Hillary Clinton, not Donald Trump, would be president of the United States, but the Senate, probably, and the House of Representatives, certainly, would have remained under Republican control.

In other words, had Hillary won, we would now have pretty much what we had when Barack Obama was president – but with the executive branch less competently led and

more packed with Clintonite (neoliberal, liberal imperialist, shoot-first-and-ask-questions-later) officials, and with a Congress run by obstinate Republican troglodytes running roughshod over feckless, slightly less retrograde Democrats.

Radical impulses would, of course, continue to stir throughout the general population but notwithstanding widespread and deep popular support, to even less avail than before.

A Clinton presidency wouldn't make the blood of high-minded people boil, the way the Trump presidency has done, though, for anyone with the courage to face reality squarely, it would be nearly as painful to endure.

That pain would be much less constructive than the pain that is now so widely felt. Instead of sparking anodyne "resistance," it would be drowned out in a sea of acquiescence.

In a word, Clinton's first term would be what a third Obama term would have been – ratcheted down a few notches in the squelched "hope" and "change" departments.

By being African American, Obama stirred up plenty of hope and change illusions, especially at first, in many, maybe most, sectors of the population. In other sectors, Obama's race brought barely suppressed prejudices and resentments out into the open.

Because it soon became clear – not to everybody, but to everybody not willfully blind – that, under Obama, little, if any, good would come, Obamaphilia eventually faded away; the racism and nativism Obama's election boosted proved more durable.

Hillary, on the other hand, was anything but a beacon of hope – except perhaps to those of her supporters whose highest priority was electing a woman president. Hardly anyone else ever expected much good to come from her calling the shots.

In comparison with Obama, she wasn't even good at what she did. Despite a constant barrage of public relations babble about how experienced and competent she is, this was widely understood, even if seldom conceded.

She hadn't been much of a First Lady or Senator; among other things, she helped set the cause of health insurance reform back a generation, and she supported the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars.

Then, as Secretary of State, she was at least partly responsible for devastating levels of disorder and mayhem throughout North Africa (Libya especially), the Greater Middle East (not just Syria), and elsewhere (Honduras, for example). But for her tenure at Foggy Bottom, there would be many fewer refugees in the world today.

It is therefore a good bet that were she president now, Obama would be sorely missed – notwithstanding his fondness for terrorizing civilians with weaponized drones, and for deporting Hispanics and others with a zeal exceeding George Bush’s.

Inasmuch as he did break a color line that seemed infrangible, it was impossible for persons of good will not to root for the man. That would be like not rooting for Jackie Robinson. But the fact remains: except in comparison to his rivals and to Trump, he was no prize.

Because it was clear to nearly everybody outside the Clinton propaganda circuit that, by 2016, there really was no “glass ceiling” holding women back, Hillary had nothing like that going for her.

There were and are plenty of people of all ages and genders who would have liked to see a woman elected president; the time for that is long past due. But, by the time Clinton became the Democratic standard bearer, hardly anyone could truly believe that patriarchal attitudes or rampant misogyny were significant factors standing in her way.

To be sure, the lingering effects of attitudes in place years ago have diminished the pool of plausible female candidates. But then so too did the idea that Clinton was somehow entitled to the office. Because that attitude was so deeply entrenched, few women wanted to cross her.

Nevertheless, there are women who, running on the Democratic line, could surely have defeated Trump. An obvious example is Elizabeth Warren.

I am not alone in thinking that had the Democratic National Committee not rigged the nomination process in Clinton’s favor, Bernie Sanders would have become the party’s nominee and then gone on to defeat Trump. Warren’s chances of winning the election were better still – precisely because, she is a woman.

Clinton’s problem was not her gender; it was her politics.

Even so, we would be a lot better off now had she won in 2016 — not just because the evil we know (too well!) is easier to deal with than the blooming buzzing confusion we ended up with instead, but also because, despite her Russophobia and fondness for “military solutions,” the likelihood that the United States would blunder into a nuclear Armageddon would now be significantly less.

Too bad therefore that she flubbed even more egregiously than those of us who saw through the public relations myths about her accomplishments and competence thought possible.

Needless to say, in the alternative universe that Democrats and their media flacks have concocted, they explain the election outcome differently. In their view, Hillary lost because “the Russians” subverted our democratic institutions.

Or was it because James Comey, then the Director of the FBI, tipped that election to Trump by refocusing attention on Clinton’s emails as Election Day approached?

One would think that it would faze Democratic confabulators that, shortly after the election was over, Comey rose to the top of Donald Trump’s shit list – and was unceremoniously fired. They really should get their story straight.

While they are sorting that out, they might also make an effort to be a tad less besotted with the FBI. It is, to say the least, unseemly, even for faux-progressives, to cozy up to the perennial scourge of every progressive tendency in the American body politic.

And it isn’t just the FBI – Democrats nowadays are smitten with the entire national security state apparatus, including the CIA and the NSA.

Democrats have always been that way to some extent, but, in the pre-Trump era, Republicans were generally the more gung ho of our two semi-established parties.

For decades, Cold War anti-Communist paranoia endeared the FBI and the others to wide swathes of the general public and to Republicans and Democrats alike. When a dearth of real world Communists made that story line impossible to maintain, “Islamic terrorists” were on hand to take their place.

These obsessions pair well with the right’s passion for law and order – in other words, for keeping the poor generally, and persons of color especially, down.

And so, being the more rightwing of the duopoly parties, Republicans, before Trump, were especially besotted with the forces of order – from local police (for whom, black lives don’t really matter) on up (or is it down?).

Democrats have never had any real quarrel with any of this, but, being the “nicer” and more reasonable of the duopoly parties, they were less inclined to go overboard.

It grieves me to say anything good about Donald Trump, but, to his credit, he did force Republicans onto a less unreasonable track – not in general, but towards Russia, a country with a nuclear arsenal so formidable that only maniacs would want to mess with it unnecessarily.

In all likelihood, Trump’s reasons are venal or otherwise nefarious, and have little if anything to do with common sense. But anything that holds back the Doomsday Clock is welcome.

It is likely, though, that, before long, Republicans will revert back to their old ways.

Indeed, this is already happening: witness Trump's new "defense strategy" – aimed at the old Cold War bugaboos, Russia and China.

The scare quotes are in order because there is no strategy there, and what Trump is proposing has nothing to do with defense. It has everything to do, however, with giving free rein to the Pentagon to squander monies that could be otherwise spent in socially useful ways, and with stuffing the pockets of death merchants ("defense contractors") and those who feed off the taxpayer money our political class throws their way.

Despite even this, Democrats remain the less odious duopoly party. On nearly all "issues," just about any Republican is worse than any Democrat; and the attitudes and instincts Republicans evince are more execrable by far.

It should be born in mind, however, that the Democratic Party is, if anything, even more responsible for Trump than the Republicans are.

Insofar as he has set political views and attitudes, they were forged in New York City, under the aegis of Democratic Party politicians. And the Clintonite (neoliberal) turn in the larger political culture created the conditions for the possibility of Trump, or someone like him, rising to national prominence.

Democrats pulled this off by malignly neglecting the working class – and therefore less well-off white voters, among others – and by euthanizing nascent left oppositions that showed promise of challenging the economic supremacy and political power of the so-called "donor class" and of capitalists generally.

Neoliberalism shifts power and resources from the state sector to private capital, it encourages the globalization of trade, and it facilitates the free flow of capital around the world.

Its nostrums are integral to a form of class struggle aimed at weakening working class opposition – largely, but not exclusively, by attacks on the labor movement.

The classical fascism of the interwar years took aim at workers' economic and political organizations too – more directly, through violent frontal assaults. Neoliberalism works more gently, through protracted wars of attrition. The consequences, however, are much the same.

The Clintons and Tony Blair and their counterparts in other countries make a show of their progressivism – limiting their efforts, however, to cultural issues that do not materially harm capitalists' interests.

Around election times, they even make nice with union leaders — because they need the resources and manpower they can still provide. But it is all a ruse, as workers and others know well.

Real fascists set out to intimidate workers' organizations; they liked bloodying noses. Neoliberals take aim at workers' power in such subtle but far-reaching ways that they often don't even realize that they have been had.

In the early days of the Regan era, Bertram Gross famously introduced the notion of "friendly fascism." The GOP used to be the friendly fascist's natural home. These days, however, Republicans are a lot nastier than they were in Reagan's time.

In recent years, the Tea Party and then Trump and the miscreants he has empowered have accentuated the GOP's racist, nativist, and authoritarian side. It is not a fascist party in the traditional sense, but the resemblances are more than a little worrisome.

And so, Reagan-style friendly fascism has largely disappeared from the Republican fold. But for what has taken its place, this would be a reason to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the spirit of the "Reagan revolution" lives on in the other duopoly party — where, thanks to the Clintons and others like them, efforts to keep "the donor class up" and everyone else down continue in a seemingly more benign way.

The electoral consequences are predictable. The kinds of working class people whom Trump derides — basically, everyone who is not white, male and straight — are, of course, more likely to vote for Democrats than Republicans. But they are more likely still not to vote at all.

Why would they when they have nothing to vote *for*?

And, in large (mainly rural) swathes of the country, white working class men and the women who stand by them will vote for anyone, even an obviously incompetent billionaire buffoon whose policies will do nothing for them materially, provided only that he channels their resentments at Clintonite policies and people.

However, malign neglect of an important segment of the working class is only partly responsible for Trump. The absence of a genuine left is of far greater importance.

The reasons for its absence are many, and go far beyond the Democratic Party. Even so, Democrats have a lot to answer for.

As it became increasingly clear that the Bush-Cheney wars launched after 9/11 were responsible for enormous harm to people and to geopolitical stability, a peace movement took shape that, by 2006, had become a force to be reckoned with.

At the same time, in anticipation of the 2008 election, the leadership of the Democratic Party did its best to keep dissent in bounds. Their aim was to get Hillary Clinton elected president, and they feared that political turbulence would upset their plans.

At the very least, with the House back under Democratic control in 2006, Democrats could have initiated impeachment proceedings against George Bush; they had more than ample grounds. Whether or not he would then have been removed from office, he and his subordinates would have been impeded to some extent from doing at least some of the harm they went on to do.

But Nancy Pelosi and her co-thinkers in Congress put the kibosh on that idea. Their efforts did not stifle the growing peace movement entirely, but it did take some of the wind out its sails.

When it turned out that Obama was a stronger candidate than Clinton, and that the nomination would go his way, leading Democrats adapted. Hillary was their favorite, but Obama had been thoroughly vetted for corporate-friendliness and passed all the tests with flying colors. That was good enough for them.

And so it fell to the Nobel laureate to put the peace movement definitively down, even as he continued – temporarily even escalating — the Bush-Cheney wars.

For too long and against too much contrary evidence, liberals took it for granted that Obama was on the side of the angels. They therefore let pass the murder and mayhem he was responsible for.

After eight years of that, what little semblance of a genuine left there had been within the Democratic Party's ambit found itself narcotized into oblivion.

An appetite for real opposition, even rebellion, existed within the general public; under the pressure of events it was growing all the time. But, with our debilitating duopoly party system in place, there was no political way out of the status quo.

Had Hillary won, that sad state of affairs would have continued, while the underlying maladies that Trump exploited for the benefit of himself and his class would have continued to fester.

And we would now likely be on the brink of even more appalling electoral outcomes than we suffered through in 2010 and 2014, and in 2016, when the Trump phenomenon defied all expectations.

Paradoxically, though, with Trump's victory, the prospects for a better mainstream politics actually improved. Trump is so manifestly unfit for the job he holds that his hold over the White House and the Republican Party actually harms the right more than it helps it.

His ever expanding docket of impeachable offenses and his crude misogyny are doing the work an organized left opposition would be doing, if only one existed — creating space for popular movements to develop.

It started with the Women's March, immediately after Inauguration Day, and has been growing ever since; with women – black, brown, and white – leading the surge.

With midterm elections looming, the danger of cooptation is great — Democrats, their media in tow, are working overtime to make that happen. But thanks to Trump, things have gone too far by now to be squelched entirely.

What Obama's victory did to the peace movement after 2008, a Hillary victory in 2016 would have done ten times over to the several (mainly woman-led) insurgencies that were beginning to take shape during the campaign.

With Trump in the White House, progressive women remain in the forefront of struggles to change the world for the better. With Clinton there instead, their best efforts would be swamped by anodyne campaigns led by well-meaning liberals of the kind that understandably rile up the Trump base.

All things considered, it would have been better (less catastrophically awful) had Hillary won. Even so, there is some reason to be grateful that she did not.