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USA

What Kind of Opposition?

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Donald Trump's way to “drain the swamp” is evident: Put the swamp creatures in the cabinet. But one example in particular, the appointment and confirmation of Commerce Secretary Wilbur L. Ross, Jr., shows as much about the opposition as it does about Trump.

Ross is indeed a special piece of work. As reported by the Washington Post, Ross was “(d)ubbed the ‘king of bankruptcy’ for his leveraged buyouts of battered companies in the steel, coal, textile and banking industries.” He “has generated a fortune of \$2.5 billion, ranking him among the wealthiest 250 people in America.” At the Rothschild investment bank, Ross “represented Trump’s failing Taj Mahal casino and helped forge a deal that allowed Trump to retain ownership. In the early 2000s, Ross purchased some of America’s largest steel mills, including Pennsylvania’s Bethlehem Steel and Cleveland’s LTV Corp. He later sold his steel conglomerate to India’s Mittal Steel, helping to form what is now the world’s largest steel company.”

In his confirmation hearings, Ross was asked about “his business ties to Russian shareholders while serving on the board of directors of a Cypriot bank.

“Some critics have condemn(ed) Ross for taking over troubled companies and shipping jobs overseas, while his supporters claim he saved the companies from going under and preserved American jobs in the process. Trump has [praised Ross as a savvy businessman and one of the most valuable advisers in his administration.](#)

Then the “relatively uncontroversial” nomination of this billionaire job destroyer and exporter, murky Russian connections and all, was approved by a Senate vote of 72-27. Since there are 52 Republican Senators, that means 20 Democratic Senators voted to confirm Ross “which says a lot about the ultimate quality of the opposition the Democrats can be expected to provide.

To be sure, the congressional Democrats unanimously opposed the Ryan-Trump “repeal and replace Obamacare” scheme, which crashed and burned thanks to the ultra-right tea-party “Freedom Caucus” and the absurdist shambles of Paul Ryan’s improvisations as he tried to line up Republican votes. And Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch is such an extreme ideologue that the Senate Democrats attempted to filibuster his confirmation.

And yes, all the Democrats voted against Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, along with the Republicans Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski, forcing vice-president Pence to break a 50-50 tie in her favor. Because teachers’ unions demanded that they block the confirmation of this avowed destroyer of public education, that’s where Democrats took a stand “not overly troubled by the attacks on public schools and educators already ramped up under president Obama’s Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

Yet even Ben Carson, who’s as qualified to run Housing and Urban Development as the editors of this journal are to perform complex neurosurgery, scraped up six Democratic votes in his 58-41 confirmation.

There’s all manner of Democratic sound and fury at the real, although still unproven, possibility that Trump campaign operatives were playing footsie with those nasty Russians during the election. That’s a kind of opposition, although not necessarily of a particularly progressive type. (The United States of course never interferes in other countries’ elections, except for the 50 or so times when it did.) And no one knows whether the investigations of purported “collusion” are more likely to produce a damp squib or a political explosion.

When it comes to imperialism, there's been next to no criticism from the Democrats – and frankly, not much even from Bernie Sanders – of Trump's expanding U.S. special forces and ground troops in the Middle East. As we discuss elsewhere in this issue, these escalations are more in continuity than a break with the Obama administration's strategic policies. Mostly they've expressed dismay over Trump's tweeting and bleating disrespect of NATO – again, not exactly the most “progressive” opposition.

Grassroots Resistance and the Democrats

So what's going on here? The Democrats are certainly parliamentary opponents of the Trump and Republican menace, but beyond those tactics do they represent a meaningful opposition?

Popular resistance exploded against the Republican and Trump agenda – on the Muslim travel ban, on immigration raids and deportation, on the drive to kill the Affordable Care Act, on the threat to wipe out what's left of women's reproductive rights and access to legal and safe abortion – from the fantastic January 21 Women's March and airport mobilizations to local demonstrations and protests all across the country. Rightwing legislators' “town hall” meetings were deluged with angry constituents demanding the preservation of health care.

The Democrats of course cannot ignore these developments, which picked up where the previous Occupy movement left off. The Democratic Party naturally seeks to ride the wave of this popular anger. It's entirely capable of being (relatively) liberal, when pressed by social movements, on critically important issues like abortion, LGBT rights, and opposing the pure vicious cruelty of Trump's war on immigrants and Muslims.

Some Democratic heavyweights, particularly the Congressional Black Caucus and Latino representatives like Luis Gutiérrez, are outspoken on issues like the Muslim travel ban and immigration raids. Along with grassroots outrage, this places some limits on how far the Trump gang can go. For their own survival, Democrats have to try to prevent the wave of racist voter suppression and gerrymandering tactics sweeping across Republican-controlled state legislatures. They're also opposed to the most extreme and lunatic rightwing moves to cut taxes on the super-rich and let climate change run amok.

But the Democratic Party itself is a party of Wall Street and corporate capital as much as the GOP – which matters when it comes to core issues of the economy that ruling elites really care about. That's why the Obama-Clinton party “center” pulled out all the stops to prevent the election of Bernie Sanders supporter Keith Ellison as Democratic National Committee chair. It's why Sanders himself never had a chance of winning the presidential nomination.

It's why the Democratic and Republican leadership have worked together on poisonous “free trade” deals, from NAFTA to the World Trade Organization to the now-dead Trans Pacific Partnership, which are less about trade than about expanding corporate power over the entire globe at working people's expense.

No Answers to Offer

Most important, the reality of the Democratic Party – where its funding comes from and where its class loyalties lie – is why it ultimately has nothing to say to a huge sector of Donald Trump's voting base. Although the core of that base are the affluent and rightwing business and white-supremacist elements, as we've discussed in previous issues of <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4898> what made the narrow difference in the Electoral College was a big share of the working-class vote in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.

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It's foolish to ignore or dismiss the fact that a very substantial minority of working-class voters are drawn to Trump's "Make America Great Again" message, as false and cynical as his promises are. These are people who would be victims of the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, the dismantling of Medicaid for low-paid workers, the wipeout of miners' pensions and the destruction of vitally important federal programs proposed under Trump's horrific budget blueprint.

But it's not enough to wistfully hope that Trump's head will explode after some "Saturday Night Live" episode, or that Russiagate will lead to rapid impeachment (and if it did, what then?). Hoping for this administration to self-destruct might be a Democratic strategy, but certainly not one for a progressive left.

Yet what else do the Democrats have to offer? Take another look at health care. Even though the Affordable Care Act is not about to "implode and explode" as Trump blathers, its shortcomings are unfolding in a slow-motion crisis as insurance companies withdraw from participation in the Obamacare exchanges.

It doesn't take a policy genius to understand that the failures of the health care system cry out for single-payer insurance, guaranteed "Medicare for All." That's actually the only effective way to cut through the tangle of inequities, bureaucratic entanglements and rising costs that have plagued Obamacare from the outset, and that left tens of millions uninsured under the hemorrhaging private insurance system.

But when the Democrats had majorities in Congress and the Obama White House, the leadership wouldn't even allow debate on single-payer, or even the soft-substitute "public option" alongside the private insurance industry. That's not because these options are unpopular; it's because they are popular — and entirely unacceptable to the insurance industry on which the Democrats relied to shape the Affordable Care Act.

Those are the interests that dictated the limits of what was "acceptable and practical." Yes, the delivery of health care under the previous setup was so horrible that Obamacare, as flawed as it is, was an improvement. Turning back the clock would be a human disaster and public health nightmare — but rearguard actions aren't a viable answer.

Today, Bernie Sanders can fill arenas in "red" Republican states calling for single payer. Yet how many Democratic congresspeople will support the single payer bill he intends to introduce, even though it's one that could attract millions of Trump voters who think they hate "Obamacare" but like the coverage they have with the Affordable Care Act?

Building an Alternative

Trump's supposed budget blueprint is a chainsaw massacre of federal programs that are vital in many cases to his own voters. Some examples are discussed in a New York Times article (Saturday, March 18: A1), "Nerves Frayed As Cuts' Import Grows Clearer."

"I was a productive citizen. Don't make me feel worthless now," says a retired nurse in rural southern Ohio recovering from radiation therapy, who depends on a federal heating subsidy she receives through the nonprofit Highland County Community Action Organization. Eliminating that program would force her out of her home.

Wiping out the Appalachian Regional Commission would devastate 420 counties across 13 states, 399 of which voted for Trump. Killing the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative would reverse decades of cleanup work, bring the cyanobacteria toxic blooms back to spreading on Lake Erie, and possibly hasten the migration of Asian carp species into the Great Lakes (goodbye ecosystem). Gutting the National Institutes of Health budget would cripple ongoing research and practically stop new projects.

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Much of this extreme ideological “blueprint,” obviously, won’t become legislative reality, partly because so many Republican politicians’ constituents are directly impacted, and also because reducing the State Department budget by 37% and cutting (non-military) foreign aid to almost nothing would tremendously weaken imperialist “U.S. leadership.” And the Trump regime’s clout has been weakened by its health care debacle.

The very idea of killing off vital programs speaks volumes about the Trump-Republican notion of “rebuilding our infrastructure.” Billions for border walls and ecocidal pipelines; nothing for absolutely essential human services — a formula for Making America Third-Rate Again? Yet leading Democrats still talk about “working with President Trump on rebuilding infrastructure” — and yes, on anti-Chinese protectionism too. That’s why those 20 Democratic Senators voted for Wilbur Ross. But what would be expected from a party whose basic argument is that it can protect corporate power more effectively than the Trump gang?

To address the millions of Trump supporters whose lives are devastated by his government demands a different kind of politics, based on today’s movements of resistance with no regard for what corporate capital deems acceptable. That requires building an independent — and yes, socialist — left with uncompromising loyalty to the working class and oppressed people of the United States and the world, not to the liberal wing of capital or the Democratic Party.

[Against the Current](#)

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