

The Democrats' New Fake Populism

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It would have been hilarious were it not so nauseating. One could only [watch the recent "New Populism" conference](#) with pity-induced discomfort, as stale Democratic politicians did their awkward best to adjust themselves to the fad of "populism."

A boring litany of Democratic politicians — or those closely associated — gave bland speeches that aroused little enthusiasm among a very friendly audience of Washington D.C. politicians. It felt like an amateur recital in front of family and friends, in the hopes that practicing populism with an audience would better prepare them for the real thing.

The organizers of the conference, The Campaign For America's Future, ensured that real populism would be absent from the program. The group is a Democratic Party ally that essentially functions as a party think tank.

The two co-founders of Campaign for America's Future are Robert Borosage — who works closely with the progressive caucus of the Democratic Party — and Robert Hickey, who works with Health Care for America Now, an organization that prioritized campaigning for Obamacare. On the Board of Directors is the notorious liberal Van Jones, no doubt carefully chosen for his non-threatening elitist politics.

The "new populism" seems to mistakenly believe that if Democrats merely advocate for a couple of "popular" ideas — as opposed to their usual unpopular policies that they actually implement — that they can suddenly transform themselves into "populists."

The unofficial and uninspiring leader of this grouping, Senator Elizabeth Warren, summarized the "radical" populist platform of these reborn Democrat revolutionaries, doing her drab best to inject life into a zombie political party:

"We believe that Wall Street needs stronger rules and tougher enforcement, and we're willing to fight for it."

"We believe no one should work full-time and live in poverty, and that means raising the minimum wage — and we're willing to fight for it."

"We believe people should retire with dignity, and that means strengthening Social Security — and we're willing to fight for it."

"We believe that a kid should have a chance to go to college without getting crushed by debt — and we're willing to fight for it."

It's true that 90 percent of Americans would agree with Warren, but the devil is in her lack of details. Warren's popular platform falls incredibly flat because there are no concrete demands to inspire people, just generalizations. This important omission didn't happen by

mistake.

The Democrats simply do not want a new populist movement; rather, their opportunistic goal is to win elections by simply being more popular than the Republicans. Any of Warren's above ideas — if they ever enter the halls of Congress as a bill — would be sufficiently watered down long before any elated response could be reached from the broader population.

How might Warren transform her ideas if she actually wanted a populist response? Some examples might be:

1) – Jail the bankers who crashed the economy. Tax Wall Street earnings at 90% and nationalize any bank that is “too big to fail” in order to bring them under control.

2) – Raise the national minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

3) – Expand Social Security by lowering the retirement age to 60, to be paid for by expanding payroll taxes to higher earners — who currently pay no Medicare and Social Security taxes on income over \$110,000.

4) – Free university education — to be paid for by taxing the rich and corporations. Eliminate crushing student debt.

Such demands would be much more likely to inspire people than what the “populist” Democrats are offering, and inspiration is the missing populist ingredient that the Democrats are organically incapable of provoking.

What's preventing the Democrats from becoming inspirational? They know all too well that by venturing too far to the left they could easily instigate a real mass movement. And such a movement is not easily controlled and would inevitably demand much more than the corporate-minded Democrats are willing to concede, which, at this point, is virtually nothing aside from musty rhetoric.

Unlike the Republican's populist turn to the right that created the now-defunct Tea Party, a true left turn would mean have the potential to rejuvenate the millions' strong labor movement, while engaging tens of millions more into active political life, driving people to participate in mass marches, rallies, labor strikes and other forms of mass action.

This was what happened during the “old populism” in U.S. history, which the Democrats are taking their trendy namesake from. The populist movement of the late 1800's was a genuine mass movement of workers and farmers, which briefly aligned in an independent political party, the People's Party, also known as the populists.

The populist movement that included strike waves and local rural rebellions had nothing to do with the lifeless politics of the Democratic Party, and threatened the very foundation of America corporate power. The Democrats are keenly aware of this type of real populist “threat,” and they are willing to do anything to stop it.

For example, the Occupy movement proved that the Democrats fear real left populism much more than they fear far-right populism. We now know that the Obama administration worked with numerous Democratic Party mayors and governors across the nation [to](#)

[undermine and destroy the Occupy movement](#) through mass arrests, police violence and surveillance. And because Occupy succeeded in changing the national conversation about income inequality, the Democrats were forced to engage with the rhetoric of the movement they dismembered, and now use the plagiarized language as proof of their “populism.”

Aside from Elizabeth Warren, the other rock star of the “new populism” conference was the nominally-independent “socialist” Bernie Sanders, who essentially functions in Congress as a Democrat. Sanders’ politics fits in perfectly with the rest of the progressive caucus Democrats, which is why he was invited to the conference. Sanders can perhaps outdo Warren when it comes to anti-corporate-speak; but like Warren he keeps his solutions vague and his movement building aspirations negligible.

If by chance Sanders chooses to run for president as an Independent — as many radicals are hoping — his fake populist politics and empty rhetoric are unlikely to drastically change, limiting any chance that a “movement” may emerge.

It’s doubtful that many people have been fooled by the “left turn” of the Democratic Party. But on a deeper level the politics of “lesser evilism” still haunts labor and community groups, and keeping these groups within the orbit of the Democratic Party is the ultimate purpose of this new, more radical speechifying. Until these groups organize themselves independently and create their own working class political party, the above politics of “populist” farce is guaranteed to continue.

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<http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/23911-what-is-the-new-populism>

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/29/fbi-coordinated-crackdown-occupy>

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