

After the Election: Keeping Fighting

The Right, backed by a toxic flow of big money into politics and shameless efforts at voter suppression, tried to turn the 2012 election into a mandate for a regressive political agenda. The Republicans intended to overturn the modest gains of the president's first term and roll back progressive reforms dating back to the New Deal. Political circumstances—a weak economic recovery, a gerrymandered redistricting of the House of Representatives in many states, U.S. Senate contests for twice as many Democratic than Republican seats and a disillusioned progressive voting base—favored the right.

Despite these conditions, the tenuous voting coalition that had elected Obama in 2008 reassembled in sufficient—and in some instances increased—numbers to reelect the president, every Senatorial progressive incumbent, as well as add several new female progressive Senators to that chamber. Though the House remains in Republican hands, a few of the most rabid Tea Partiers lost their seats. Progressives made significant gains in many state elections. Referenda throughout the country on gay marriage, on curbing the power of big money in politics, and on preserving union rights, generally had positive results. Taken as a whole, the results were a narrow but decisive victory for progressives that more than exceeded expectations, demonstrating just how out of touch the Republicans are. Progressive voters and their organizations can be justly proud of their role in achieving this result.

However, we should find no reason for complacency. The national electorate remains sharply and almost evenly divided. While we applaud the steadfastness of African-American voters, the growing importance of a progressive Latino and Asian electorate, and the mobilization of female voters, we are concerned that across vast swatches of the country, a majority of white voters, in particular older males, voted for the preferred candidates of the 1 percent. Those states not only awarded their electoral votes to Romney; their statehouses and governors remain committed to austerity, gerrymandering election districts to favor Republicans and suppressing social movements. In lower-turnout non-presidential election years, the toxic flood of campaign cash, voter suppression and gerrymandering could keep this status quo. Moreover, to sustain the progressive coalition and ensure future victories the election has to lead to legislative accomplishments that favor the 99 percent. Passively sitting back to rely on demographic changes in the electorate would be a disastrous strategy.

While we note the tactical brilliance of the Democratic campaign in holding the line in crucial swing states, President Obama avoided any commitments to substantive change in the realm of economic policy or worker rights. The myriad and growing problems facing the working poor and the most vulnerable segments of the population were studiously ignored. The labor unions, feminist groups, communities of color and progressive organizations that provided the ground forces will have to mobilize strongly now to reap any real benefit for the people they represent.

The task is complicated because the next obstacles are entrenched within the core of the Democratic Party. On the day after the election, “moderate” neoliberal groups like the Third Way and the Concord Coalition started placing editorials in the liberal media calling for a

“Grand Bargain” that would cut “entitlements” in return for modest reforms in taxation. They appeal to a freshly-reelected President Obama whose cautious centrist instincts demand that he return to seeking “bi-partisanship” with Republicans.

The challenges are many, and the best way not to lose heart is to address them sequentially. First, we must resist the immediate blackmail of the “Fiscal Cliff,” that illegitimate offspring of the “Deficit Crisis” mania that paralyzed Washington in Obama’s first term. DSA will work together in local coalitions with the many organizations of the Coalition on Human Needs to defend the interests of the working poor and most vulnerable members of society.

DSA will also advance sensible demands that may not be those of all coalition members. Cutting military budgets and recognizing that military projects are ineffective at generating jobs are essential to right the economy. Medicare is best fixed by expanding it to cover all, young and old. A financial transactions tax (“Robin Hood Tax”) would go a long way toward reducing the deficit.

In 2013, DSA will help mobilize for an August March on Washington for Democracy and Equality, making use of its 50th Anniversary Other America materials in its preparation. We also support the call of Cornel West and Tavis Smiley for a White House Conference on ending poverty.

And, we will organize for the YDS campaign for Affordable and Accessible Higher Education and to support the Student Loan Forgiveness Act.

The election results firmly placed immigration reform on the national agenda; DSA reaffirms its support for comprehensive reform that welcomes and eases the path for millions of new citizens. We will actively take parts in campaigns to achieve it.

DSA cannot try to do everything that should be done, but we should strive to do a few things well. Part of our internal political education program, using GET UP (Grassroots Economics Training for Understanding and Power) materials, is to bring together our analytic and organizing skills so that we can better set and carry out our local and chapter priorities.

DSA is determined to use the breathing space won in the election campaign to refocus our resolve and strengthen our work for real social justice.

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