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Hillary and Tim Kaine: a Match Made on Wall Street

By Eric Draitser
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Earlier this week, Bernie Sanders warned that Hillary Clinton’s eventual vice presidential pick must not be someone from the milieu of Wall Street and Corporate America. And while Sanders is still fighting to win the Democratic Party nomination in what many have argued is a rigged system with a foregone conclusion, it appears that Sanders is also intent on influencing the course of the Clinton campaign and the party itself.

In a thinly veiled demand that Clinton embrace the core principles of the Sanders campaign in order to secure the support of Sanders’s political base, the insurgent Democratic candidate hoped aloud “that the vice-presidential candidate will not be from Wall Street, will be somebody who has a history of standing up and fighting for working families, taking on the drug

companies...taking on Wall Street, taking on corporate America, and fighting for a government that works for all of us, not just the 1%.”

And while that description may sound positive for its sheer idealism, it does not seem to account for the fact that banks and corporations effectively own both major parties, and that nearly every top Democrat is in various ways connected to the very same entities. In any event, it is useful still to examine a few of the potential Clinton running mates in order to assess just what sort of forces are going to be put in motion to help deliver a Clinton presidency.

The Actors on the Playbill

Beltway pundits are fond of remarking that Tim Kaine, the underwhelming centrist Democrat senator (and former Governor) from Virginia, is at the top of the list for Clinton. He’s safe. He’s experienced. He’s safe. He’s a Democratic Party loyalist with experience fundraising. Oh, and did I mention that he’s safe? Such is the general tenor of the conversation around Kaine, a politician with a long track record and a mostly forgettable personality known more to DC insiders than to the general voting public.

What could be better for Hillary Clinton, perhaps the least liked Democratic (presumptive) nominee in decades, than to have a party establishment insider who represents the status quo as her running mate in an election year that will undoubtedly be remembered for the ostensibly anti-establishment candidates and rhetoric on display throughout?

To be fair, Kaine does represent Virginia, a swing state that is crucial for Donald Trump, and which could spell victory for Clinton should she carry it. And of course, Kaine can also posture as “tough on Wall Street” from his days as DNC Chairman and party mouthpiece during the passage of the so-called “Wall Street reform” bill. Despite nothing substantive coming out of the bill, Kaine is still able to cash in the political currency derived from that bill, and perhaps meekly shield Clinton from continued attacks vis-à-vis her connections to Wall Street.

Of course Kaine also comes with his own baggage, including his anti-abortion stance which earned him the ire of many pro-choice activists in Virginia when he was Governor. Considering the shameless droning from Clinton and her backers about being “the first woman president,” it would certainly raise serious questions – and open up an obvious angle of attack for Trump – were she to sport her feminism and focus on women’s reproductive rights by selecting a man with an anti-abortion record.

A look down the list of other potential choices reveals that Clinton truly has very little to choose from. Both Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Julian Castro, as well as Labor Secretary Tom Perez, have both had their names bandied around as Clinton seeks to solidify the Latino vote in an election where the Republican candidate has worked tirelessly to alienate that all-important demographic as much as possible. But of course, the obvious question to be asked in response to either of these potential selections would be “Who?” Neither Castro nor Perez is well known nationally, nor have either of them won major elections or really done anything of note in their tenure in Obama’s cabinet. Despite being Latinos, they are utterly forgettable, and unlikely to bring significant returns to Clinton.

While other names such as New Jersey junior senator Cory Booker, as well as Ohio senator Sherrod Brown, have been discussed, both men hail from states with Republican governors, meaning that were they to accept a VP slot, their senate vacancies would be likely filled by Republicans, a scenario that Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid has already said “Hell no!” to, vowing to “yell and scream to stop that.”

Who Else Is “Ready for Hillary”?

So that then leaves the two most interesting potential running mates: Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders himself. Warren, who conspicuously refused to endorse Clinton over Sanders, has tremendous upside for Clinton as she has been perhaps the Democratic Party’s most vehement opponent of Wall Street, having led many high profile attacks on the major banks in her tenure in the Senate. From a public relations branding perspective, she is essentially the female Bernie Sanders, a progressive Democrat who presents herself as an ally of working people and an enemy of bankers. For Clinton, Warren would also round out the “First Woman...” card, allowing the Clinton campaign to quite literally become a campaign about breaking the glass ceiling in US politics. The stump speeches almost write themselves.

Finally, there’s Mr. #FeelTheBern himself. His latest comments (mentioned above) certainly do have a subtext that implies his willingness to accept a running mate slot. Having fashioned himself as the champion of the middle class and threat to the Washington establishment, Bernie would provide much in the way of credibility to a lackluster Clinton campaign which has failed to excite even many ardent Democrats. Sanders would also guarantee a unified Democratic Party ticket, and provide much needed defense of Clinton’s left flank. In short, Sanders, like Warren, would give anti-Clinton progressives the pretext many of them need to justify their voting for the much-hated Clinton.

Never mind the fact that neither Sanders nor Warren would actually do anything to combat Wall Street finance capital as Vice President. Never mind the fact that no one on Wall Street is particularly scared of either politician being given the ceremonial power that comes with the Vice Presidency. These are just the kind of uncomfortable, but inescapable, facts that progressives must choose to ignore.

The difficulty for either Sanders or Warren is the marketing of their decision to left progressives, some of whom would see collaboration with Clinton and the Clinton political machine as a betrayal and a complete sell-out. However, aside from driving a some relatively small number of progressives to vote for Jill Stein and the Green Party (or stay home entirely), it is unlikely that the negative impact in the progressive base would amount to anything more than some hurt feelings followed by the usual acquiescence to the Democratic Party line.

If such an analysis sounds cynical and jaded, that’s because it is. Perhaps a better descriptor would be disdainful. Indeed, as someone who watched with bemused melancholy as progressives lined up to support Al Gore in 2000, John Kerry in 2004, and Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012, my position on support for ANY Democrat is the same as Harry Reid’s position on swing state senator VP picks: Hell no!

Indeed, the very notion of collaboration with a war criminal and Wall Street puppet such as Clinton is anathema to everything the left and “progressives” are supposed to stand for.

Of course, there is also the elephant (and donkey) in the room: both major parties are wholly owned subsidiaries of finance capital and the corporations that rule over us. This is the realization that millions of Americans have already made, and which millions more are making. This is the realization that keeps Democratic and Republican apparatchiks up at night. And this critical revelation is what Bernie, Liz, & Co. are there to suppress.