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*Primary elections are the democratic process through which the two major American parties select their nominee for President of the United States, in view of the 8 November presidential election. Voters in each of the 50 States, D.C. and a number of Territories elect the delegates that will take part in their party's Convention, where the nominee will be formally appointed. In the Republican Party, the outsider Donald Trump has*

In his book *Conscience of a liberal*, Paul Krugman argued that the current exacerbated polarisation between the two major U.S. parties sinks its roots in the Republican Party's drift towards the extreme Right, taken hostage by the conservative movement. In Krugman's view, twenty-first century Republicans adopt positions reminiscent of their predecessors in the roaring Twenties, leaving the Democrats alone in the defence of the very same New Deal programmes and Institutions that every respectable Republicans (think of Eisenhower) would once have endorsed. The race between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States is a good opportunity to reappraise Krugman's theory.

The gap between the two platforms is remarkable. Sanders is openly inspired by the redistribution policies that led to the American Welfare State in the years between the Great Depression and the Sixties; like Bill and Obama, Hillary appears to believe that the era of Big Government is a thing of the past. Hillary tends to address traditionally underrepresented communities, especially ethnic minorities, trying to interpret their collective identities. Sanders instead only distinguishes between the richest 1% and the rest of the American population, deprived of the benefits of increased productivity in recent decades, hit hard by deindustrialisation, deprived of the social advances awarded to previous generations and without any real representation in the democratic process. Although it is commonly believed that Sanders's "radical" stances may perhaps galvanise progressive voters in a few areas of the country, for the same reason it would frighten the silent majority in America, prompting it to support the Republican candidate. The unspoken assumption on which the whole point rests is that winning independent votes is key to winning an election, therefore the ideal candidate is the one with a moderate, tendentially "centrist" platform. It makes sense, doesn't it? And yet, all available data suggests that none of these allegedly self-evident truths so dear to political pundits has any actual link to reality.

First, Sanders is no radical. Noam Chomsky was

# USA 2016: MOVING TO THE LEFT IS THE KEY TO WIN THE PRESIDENCY

DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL  
PRIMARIES: CLINTON,  
SANDERS AND  
THE MISTAKEN CONSCIENCE  
OF AMERICAN LIBERALISM

BY MARIELLA PALAZZOLO

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*defeated early favourites such as Jebb Bush and Marco Rubio, being now the only candidate formally in the race. The outcome of the Democratic Primary is still uncertain. 74-year-old Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders has forced Hillary Clinton into an open race: he carried 20 States and approximately 1,500 pledged delegates vs. the former first lady's 1,770. 475 more pledged delegates are at stake in*

*the upcoming primary election in California (7 June). But the behaviour of the 714 non-elected super-delegates, representing the party's establishment, will most likely be decisive: they will only vote at the party's Convention in Philadelphia on 25-28 July.*

absolutely right when he pointed out that:

Sanders may use the word socialist, but he is in fact a New Dealer.

A public single-payer healthcare system, free college education, federal minimum wage raised from the current \$7.25 to \$15 an hour, firewall between commercial and investment banking, public investments in infrastructure to create jobs are, in fact, proposals that go in the direction of completing and updating the economic policy programme implemented by Democratic Administrations from the Roosevelt years down to the Johnson years. And the increase in the tax burden on high personal incomes and corporate incomes to finance the expansion in public spending under Sanders' platform would be a pale reflection of the tax increases implemented under Eisenhower, when the marginal tax rate was as high as 90%! Second, Clinton is no moderate. Just look at how she made fun of Sanders's plans for free healthcare and education in a debate:

My late father used to say: "if someone promises you something for free, read the fine print".

Is there any one-liner that better summarises the kind of common-sense argument on which Conservatives have based their success? When Johnson put forward his plan for Government-funded healthcare for the elderly (Medicare), didn't Goldwater and Reagan oppose it by warning Americans about the hidden risks (the "fine print"?) of the "soup kitchen" of Welfare State, such as inefficient bureaucracy, rising deficits, rising taxes, departure from free market and individual responsibility? In 1964, Goldwater lost to Johnson in a landslide and Medicare was eventually signed into Law. However, sixteen years later Reagan was elected President and a further thirty-six years later Johnson's party is on its way to appoint a nominee whose positions on the Welfare State resemble those of Goldwater, with just a little less emphasis and a little more cynicism. Meanwhile, throughout his entire political career Sanders – Roosevelt and Johnson's legitimate heir – has run as an Independent and almost the whole party establishment has opposed his participation in

the Democratic primaries. Krugman was probably wrong. Political polarisation is only a misleading definition for ideological confrontation on issues with no impact on the distributional conflict.

The Democratic Party and the candidate supported by its establishment stand for a model of economic development based on the intermediation of private finance rather than Government spending, on the expansion of private debt rather than on the growth of labour incomes. You may call it neo-liberalism if you wish: as a matter of fact, Conservatism has captured both parties, and it's no accident that Hillary was called "the Conservative hope" in an article recently published in the Wall Street Journal. The problem is, conservative hold on American voters is not as strong. Hillary Clinton may lose, like Goldwater; and her defeat would be a real upset, given that her Republican opponent will most likely be the outsider Donald Trump. Polls suggest a statistical tie between Clinton and Trump in terms of popular votes. Moreover, Trump leads by 4 points in Ohio and trails Clinton by just 1 point in both Florida and Pennsylvania; in 2012, Romney would have won the election if he had carried those three States. The very same polls also indicate that Sanders would lead Trump by 15 points nationally, and would carry all the three swing States, thanks to the overwhelming support he enjoys from Independent voters. Isn't this a paradox? No, it isn't. Independent voters are not "moderate": they simply belong to neither party. With both parties way on the right of the political spectrum, it is easy to explain why independent voters find themselves to the left of the Democratic Party. The Democrats have built their hegemony in twentieth-century America thanks to their social democrat receipt to address the (First) Great Depression (Reagan was right by the way: call it "liberal" if you wish, it makes no difference); if they go on sticking to Conservative wisdom in response to the Second Great Depression, it is easy to predict that an impoverished and hopeless middle class will sooner or later warm to the charms of whoever exploits its anti-establishment anger... so why not Trump?