

NATIONAL REVIEW

Trump Returns to His Democratic Roots

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It has largely slipped under the radar screens of partisan hatred in Washington, but has anyone noticed that in the last couple of months Donald Trump has become . . . a Democrat? Of course, for most of his life, Trump was a Democrat, a faithful fundraiser for Chuck Schumer and Hilary Clinton, and comfortably liberal in most of his positions. But once he decided to run for president as a Republican, he underwent a total transformation, becoming an arch-conservative. And during his first year in office, he governed like a conservative Republican, slashing taxes and regulations, appointing conservative judges, and throwing money at the military.

Since January, though, President Trump has been returning to his Democratic roots. In the past two months, he has embraced a big-spending budget deal that funds nearly all the Democrats' top priorities and pushes deficits over \$1 trillion for as far as the eye can see. He also proposed a massive new infrastructure program. And now, he has embraced a trade policy right out of the Bernie Sanders playbook.

In fact, during the 2016 campaign, Bernie had explicitly called for tariffs on steel. Hillary Clinton had also adopted a remarkably anti-trade posture. Many people are rightly pointing out that Trump's rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership has left the United States dangerously isolated and economically disadvantaged in Asia, but they forget that Hillary too had campaigned on pulling out of the trade pact.

Indeed, while Trump's call for a trade war has shocked Republicans, it has been praised by Democrats, including extreme leftists such as Sherrod Brown.

For Democrats, of course, opposition to trade fits in with their worldview. Both Hillary and Bernie believed that government should manage the economy and pick winners and losers. Republicans, on the other hand, have at least argued in favor of free markets, the ability of Americans to buy and sell with whomever they choose. President Trump has now firmly

embraced the “government knows best” position. The regulation-cutting president now supports regulation of large segments of the economy, a move that will harm countless American industries that rely on affordable steel to manufacture products sold at home and abroad

Likewise, Republicans have long been nothing if not the anti-tax party. It is a staple of Republican campaigns — from local sheriff to presidential — to accuse their Democratic opponent of wanting to raise taxes, especially taxes on the middle class. But tariffs are nothing more than a tax — a tax that will hit the working poor and middle class the hardest. Some estimates suggest that steel tariffs, for example, could add as much as \$300 to the cost of a car. Worse, when Trump’s advisers dismiss the impact of these tax hikes on Americans, they sound suspiciously like Nancy Pelosi calling the benefits of Republican tax cuts “crumbs.”

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And it certainly seems hard to argue that Democrats are the party of special interests when President Trump tosses out policy proposals while meeting publicly with industry leaders and lobbyists. The last time steel tariffs were imposed, they cost 200,000 American jobs, according to some estimates. That’s more than the total number of jobs in the American steel industry. Republicans balked at Obama’s handouts to insurance companies; conservatives should treat Trump’s latest move on steel as no different.

Until recently, Trump supporters have been able to excuse his most egregious behavior by pointing to the conservative achievements of his first year in office. “At least he’s not Hillary” has been the almost reflexive response to his latest tweet or controversial comments. But conservative support for the “lesser of two evils” needn’t devolve into mindlessly adopting the leftist positions of the president. Fox News host Sean Hannity, who once voiced support for free markets, now praises the president for “making good on his campaign promise to rebuild American industry in the face of cheap and unregulated foreign goods.” That the president has enacted conservative priorities in his first year is no reason to praise the anti-free-market policies he is now promoting.

Democrats, of course, will have their own problem if Trump transforms into some sort of big-spending, high-taxing, pro-regulation Hillary-Sanders clone. Will they continue to “resist” if the Trump agenda becomes their own?

If nothing else, Trump’s latest moves are elevating Washington hypocrisy to Olympic levels.

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