

Send Out the Clowns

The Democratic also-rans exit, stage left

by Conrad Black



The hecatomb of unsuccessful Democratic candidates raises questions about the current viability of the Democrats that they will have to address in the next four years. It appears that the powers that be in that party were so fixated on the easy disposability of Trump that they gave little thought to making a serious race of it this year. They mixed their own Russian-collusion Kool-Aid, posted it down, and now are discovering that it was hemlock. The party elders apparently thought they had placated the Sanders faction by reserving superdelegates to a second ballot, which neither American political party has needed to hold at its convention for over 80 years. They should have had a clue that taking back the White House could be more of a challenge than they suspected when some of the more promising Democrats, such as Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio, didn't enter the race, and Senator Michael Bennett of Colorado didn't get any traction. As the Russian-collusion fraud collapsed, Trump managed the appointment of a serious attorney general, and the examination

of why a Clinton campaign hit-dossier was sold to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court as justification for conducting espionage on the Trump campaign and transition team got seriously underway. It became steadily more evident that 2020 was not going to be a spontaneous national draft of whomever the Democrats put up against the president.

Yet more than 20 people sought the nomination, and many generated considerable interest for a while. First there was Joe Biden. He bumbled and stumbled from the opening bell, and his wife Jill helpfully pointed out to an interviewer that the Democrats had to vote for him even if they had to “hold their noses” because the other candidates were so unacceptable. She was referring to Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, both hard-left extremists. And she formulated a conclusion that Michael Bloomberg arrived at also, some months later, after Biden had bombed so badly that Bloomberg didn’t think there was anyone to put up a serious race against Trump (who the Democrats had been repeating to themselves rhythmically for three years would be easy to defeat). When Biden faded, Warren surged into the lead in the late summer, but she hit a number of explosive fragmentation devices. Trump’s sarcastic references to her as “Pocahontas” highlighted her outright mendacity in falsely claiming to be of Native American descent and exploiting that canard to advance her academic career. Her robotic, schoolmarmish “I have a plan for that” in response to every policy question as she waved her hands like the back-rotors on helicopters wore thin, especially when she costed her brainwave (shared with Sanders) of depriving 180 million Americans of their present health-care arrangements. Replacing it with a government-directed system for everyone in the country would cost 52 trillion dollars.

With this, Warren started to sink beneath the waves, but she rendered the campaign and the country some service yet. Having destroyed her own chances (itself a salutary feat), she had a golden afterburner, an Indian summer to her campaign, by

savagely attacking Michael Bloomberg in his first debate, demanding to know if he would release women with whom he had signed agreements closing down their sexual-harassment lawsuits from their agreement not to disclose the details of their complaints. Bloomberg hemmed and hawed as his nascent campaign evaporated. In Bloomberg's second debate, she again attacked him like a banshee, accusing him of describing women as "fat broads" and demanding that someone's pregnancy be terminated, as close as Ms. Warren is likely to get to a pro-life statement (apart from her false claim that she was discriminated against as a schoolteacher because she was pregnant). She thus played a key role in killing off two of the leading contenders, herself and Bloomberg. It is also possible that her claim that Senator Sanders had once said to her that a woman would never be president damaged him, though evidently not fatally. (It is almost certainly another of her fabrications.)

But other candidates self-immolated spectacularly and regularly. Cory Booker told Iowans we had to attack global warming like "Americans conquered Normandy." (British and Canadians were a majority of the land forces on D-Day, where the objective was liberation, not the conquest of a French province, and provided most of the air and almost all the sea support; Americans should remember the country has had useful allies in good causes.) He never breasted the tape of 2 percent support and was reduced to asking retention as a viable candidate in the interests of "diversity," affirmative-action nominating. It didn't fly. Scores of times he erupted: "Politics be damned!" when announcing a major point of principle that meandered into a tired cliché or untrue truism. Kamala Harris looked like a serious contender at the start, a well-spoken senator from the largest state, a diverse woman, but her own father contradicted her claim to having been a potential beneficiary of school busing for racial balance in schools, and all she could ever do on any issue was call for "a conversation." There's a time to converse and a time to

act. She didn't fly.

Others were sillier: Beto O'Rourke, an instant candidate because he had received the greatest flood of donations in the history of U.S. congressional elections in a monumental effort to defeat Senator Ted Cruz, quickly revealed himself to a national audience as an arm-flapping airhead, sputtering false platitudes about global warming and, as his polls evaporated, announcing that, Second Amendment be damned, he would storm into people's homes like Robert Mueller's amphibious SWAT team arresting Roger Stone and seize America's guns. He didn't fly either, (though he suffered a minor skateboard injury). Other candidates had no reason or excuse to run and gained no, zero, support: For example, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, who enunciated the jurisprudential maxim that any woman claiming to have been sexually abused or harassed, even decades before and with no corroboration, should be automatically believed – conviction by denunciation; Robespierre and Stalin ride again. She said Bill Clinton, to whom she owed her political career, should have resigned as president when accused by various women of harassment. Bill de Blasio, mayor of New York, welcomed by Trump to the campaign as the “worst mayor in America and in New York's [400-year] history, the king of potholes, graft, nepotism, and incompetence,” made a cameo pass-through and gained absolutely no support.

Tom Steyer, a leftist billionaire (hedge fund), who apparently thought that if Trump could do it, he could, spent \$175 million of his own money but struck out in the primaries. Trump didn't use much of his money winning the Republican nomination in 2016; he had planned his campaign carefully and had been one of the most prominent people in the country for 30 years. Steyer's campaign was just egotism; it was absurd. Michael Bloomberg was obviously a good deal more serious. He spent \$550 million and made a somewhat respectable showing, and presumably got some sort of assurance from Biden that if he is elected he will offer Bloomberg the State Department,

which is what he was seeking four years ago from Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton. He was running essentially as an independent, endorsing policies similar to Trump's except on climate change, which he takes frightfully seriously, but offering a less tempestuous style. It was surprising that he was not stronger in the debates, but he gained enough votes not to be a ridiculous interloper like Steyer. For a man of his wealth and ambitions and age (78), it was worth a (last) try. The most irritating of the candidates was Eric Swallwell, the noisy little jack-in-the-box who was the earliest semi-presentable advocate of the impeachment of the president and who insinuated himself before cameras by always being beside or immediately behind the egregious Congressman Adam Schiff, tactician and manager of the impeachment. He didn't last to the caucuses and folded with commendable swiftness. The only one of the swarm of lesser candidates who had any impact was Andrew Yang, who made some interesting policy points and is considering a run for mayor of New York. (He would be a sizable improvement on de Blasio.)

Something must be said for Marianne Williamson, the fluent and amiable evangelical Christian. Though most of what she said was nonsense, she was a minor influence for civility. The same goes for Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, an outgoing Sandersite congresswoman, who was denounced, out of the blue, by Hillary Clinton, still the Lady Macbeth of the Democrats, as a "Russian asset." The 2020 Democrats are a party of kooks and retreads and charlatans, now reduced to hoping for a pandemic of the coronavirus to give them any room to attack the incumbent. In the terribly difficult year of 1968, with race and anti-war riots all over the country, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, and 200 to 400 draftees coming home dead every week from an unexplained, undeclared war in Vietnam being fought for an indefinite objective, Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Robert Kennedy, Nelson Rockefeller, Ronald Reagan, and Richard Nixon (along with Eugene McCarthy and George C. Wallace) were all, at some

point, running for president. All of the first group were qualified. The Republicans at least have a capable if idiosyncratic president who is a formidable candidate. As Joe Biden sweeps the primaries, it is a mystery how the Democrats have arrived at this cruel paucity of talent.

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