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Can Hillary Clinton placate the divided left?

Some on the left remain deeply conflicted about submitting to the depressing repetition of "lesser evilism".

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[Lauren Carasik](#)

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As Hillary Clinton made history as the [first woman nominee](#) of a major party, she entered the stage-managed convention spectacle nearly as unpopular as Republican Donald Trump.

The similarities ended there, amid conventions that presented a starkly contrasting view of the United States. Trump painted a foreboding and pessimistic picture, seeking to stoke the resentment of an enraged white working class and inflame fears, promising to be the law and order candidate.

The Democratic National Convention (DNC) struck themes once considered the province of the Republican Party - patriotism, American exceptionalism and unbounded optimism.

But whether Clinton will succeed in overcoming the widespread antipathy towards her and uniting her fractured party by bringing its left flank into the fold after a bruising primary battle remains to be seen.

A hard task ahead

Clinton didn't have an enviable task. She faced navigating the fine line between associating herself with the successes of the Obama administration and acknowledging those deeply angered and alienated by stagnating wages, a declining standard of living and roiled by fear.

She sought to appeal to those voters, court Republicans and independents put off by her bombastic rival, and appeal to progressive supporters of her primary rival, Bernie Sanders.

The convention projected the optics of diversity and tolerance, with the most powerful and riveting speech of the convention's last night [delivered by Khizr Khan](#), father of a fallen Muslim American soldier who died in Iraq protecting his men.

Waving a copy of the Constitution that he pulled from his jacket pocket, Khan offered a withering rebuke of Trump.

"In this document, look for the words 'liberty' and 'equal protection of law'," he goaded. "Have you ever been to Arlington Cemetery? Go look at the graves of brave patriots who died defending the United States of America - you will see all faiths, genders and ethnicities. You have sacrificed nothing and no one. We can't solve our problems by building walls and sowing division."

The symbolism of his son's sacrifice for the ideals Trump now threatens to extinguish electrified the arena and transcended party divisions, at least temporarily.

The shadow of Sanders

Sanders [toed the line](#), striving to bring his supporters into the party tent to defeat Trump, though many felt betrayed by his acquiescence.

Clinton acknowledged Sanders' unswerving and righteous focus on social and economic justice, assuring his supporters that she heard them.

Eager to offer more than a perfunctory nod, the nominee tacked noticeably to the left instead of towards the centre, as is common during a pivot to the general election, sounding more like a social democrat than a corporate one.

Many Sanders supporters lined up behind the nominee, however reluctantly. But [not all were](#) assuaged, demonstrating their discontent with a raucous first night of booing and ongoing protests that received scant press coverage.

The ragged disappointment of Sanders supporters was inflamed by [leaked DNC emails](#) they believe proved that the party establishment was invested in Clinton's victory and working against Sanders, confirming a rigged process that installed a reliable steward of the global economic order that privileges the elites and immiserates the masses at home and abroad.

By the time Clinton gave her [acceptance speech](#), the insurgency appeared more subdued, but still punctuated speeches with shouts that were quickly drowned out by counter-chants orchestrated by convention organisers.

As they see it, Clinton's ties to Wall Street belie her stated commitment to banking reform and the working class, and her connections to the military industrial complex and hawkish foreign policy evince her true ideological leanings.

Others decried a blind nationalism that erases the hardship of those who suffer at the hands of US policy outside the borders. It was not lost on critics that Khan gave his life in a war Clinton voted for, but later came to regret, which unleashed unspeakable suffering in Iraq.

Clinton v Trump

The convention seems unlikely to bridge the seemingly intractable schism between those who believe that Clinton - despite her flaws - will make a measurable difference for the most vulnerable, and those who believe the system is so irretrievably corrupted that only deep and immediate structural change will suffice.

It is axiomatic that there are real substantive differences between the candidates on policies that matter and most directly affect communities of colour, women, members of the LGBTI community and the poor.

And with the existential threat of climate change, the planet can ill-afford a president who blithely disregards science.

But some on the left who are sobered by the extraordinary threat of such an unhinged foe remain deeply conflicted about submitting to the depressing repetition of "lesser evilism" and its impediments to real change.

Between now and election day, vigorous debate about the width of the difference between the two candidates and the best way to dismantle the prevailing status quo will underscore the paucity of options within the two-party system.

As election day looms, the disaffected left will be faced with agonising calculations. Some in "safe" states whose electoral votes are not in play will sit out this ballot or vote for a third party.

If the race looks as tight as it is today, for those reluctantly committed to an anti-Trump vote for a candidate that betrays their ideals, Clinton may have made pulling the lever slightly more palatable.

No matter how its members vote, the movement Sanders ignited has been vindicated and irreversibly emboldened in its demand for a more equitable, inclusive and democratic future.

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