Twitter Thread by John Hayward



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One problem with the GOP's inability to understand or process populism is that it gets walloped by the all-populist all-the-time Democrats. Another problem is that when Republican populists do appear, they tend to be rather unfocused and undisciplined.

Political focus and discipline are very hard to come by. It takes a huge organization that spreads across both the political and private spheres to harness popularity and convert it into effective policy action. The Left spend decades building and refining its machinery.

The Left's machine spots populist talent early and begins guiding it toward politically productive ends. Detailed plans are made to move the country toward the populist's goals across multiple election cycles. Money and media influence is lined up to achieve concrete goals.

Achievable goals are important, because without them - and a serious political/financial/media machine dedicated to achieving them - populist crusades usually end in disappointment, resentment, and unfocused anger. "What was all of this FOR?" furious or dejected supporters ask.

Many of the Left's endless populist crusades seem kooky or utterly unrealistic at first, but they've got a serious political machine that usually manages to come away with SOMETHING to show for it. If nothing else, they end up with more power they can invest later.

There's something of a built-in advantage in being populist crusaders for statism and collectivism: it's pretty easy to come away from every battle with a bigger, richer central government. A whole lot of very powerful forces are ready to jump on any bandwagon that leads there.

On the other hand, populist crusades for republicanism, smaller government, and greater individual liberty have few powerful and influential patrons. Rarely does anyone with serious power or money see any profit in making the centralized State smaller.

That's one reason our media and political system gives left-wing populists unlimited credit for good intentions, even if their specific demands are unreasonable or downright destructive. The elite are always happy to ride a lefty populist train to at least the first station.

The GOP has no mechanism for absorbing populist energy, no scouts out there looking for talent and grooming it for greatness, no machine ready to make incremental gains. The GOP donor class LOATHES conservative populist goals, most notably border security.

So when a jolt of populist energy hits the GOP, it's like watching a surge of electricity hit some ancient, rusty machine and blow its cobwebbed transformers to pieces. It's a party accustomed to negotiating surrender, not leading happy warriors in a charge to take the next hill.

It would be wise for the GOP to begin building systems to detect and harmonize with popular energy, realizing their task is much harder because their best leadership prospects will tend to be outsiders and iconoclasts, and they don't have the media to help with mythmaking.

With hard work and careful engineering, maybe the next time a few gallons of high-octane populist fuel are dumped in its tank, the GOP could actually get somewhere instead of helplessly watching its engine burst into flames. /end