

Democrats Have Met Their Long-Time Enemy And It Is Them – But It Might Be Changing (With An Important Lesson For People In Our Business)

Arthur Solomon

Many people assume that famed cartoonist Walt Kelly, created the phrase, “We have met the enemy and he is us” in a 1970 cartoon celebrating the first Earth Day. The phrase became popular in his Pogo comic strip and on an Earth Day poster in 1971.

But according to Encyclopedia.com and other sources, Kelly got the idea from **“WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY, AND THEY ARE OURS,”** when on 10 September 1813, after defeating the British fleet in the Battle of Lake Erie, Oliver Hazard Perry, commander of the American fleet, dispatched one of the most famous messages in military history to Maj. Gen. William Henry Harrison. It read: “Dear Gen’l: We have met the enemy, and they are ours, two ships, two brigs, one schooner and one sloop. Yours with great respect and esteem. H. Perry.



Now to the Democrats’ problems: **The enemies within.** Not the several movies with that title, but the centrist, conservative and progressive Democrats that in the past would rather have nothing if they can’t get what they want. Historical fact: Many of the ultra

conservative Democrats elected officials left the party decades ago and are now Republicans.)

But recent legislation which both progressive and centrist Democrats support provide a glimmer of hope that the enemies within have decided to accommodate each other for the good of their party, at least temporarily.

Another problem that the Democratic Party has to solve is the hanging on to power by the same old leaders instead of grooming younger members of Congress for leadership positions.

But as in any business, especially ours, people in power don't want to surrender their authority. So instead of admitting that time has past them on they hold on, in some cases mistakenly believing that only they have the answers, in others just not wanting to relinquish authority. Example: Look at the tragedy wrought by Ruth Bader Ginsburg's refusal to retire from the Supreme Court despite her severe illnesses. It led to one of the most conservative Supreme Courts since the 1920's. **More on this later.**

In our business people are promoted to positions of authority for various reasons, many of which are not about their public relations ability.

Some reasons are that "the person will be good at new client presentations," or "the individual will really crack the whip and get account people to work longer hours," or as I personally witnessed at Burson-Marsteller during my almost quarter of a century there, the individual was a drinking buddy of a top management person or would "jump out the window for the company if I told him to." I was once asked, not seriously I hope, if I would give my life for the advancement of the company." I replied, "Would you?" That ended the conversation.

There's an old joke about a certain ethnic group's military inadvertently shooting at each other by forming a circular

firing squad. Today, naming that ethnic group would be considered politically incorrect. So I'll not name it but you can guess the country because it borders Russia. As the son of a Polish immigrant, whose relatives suffered decades of anti-Semitism in that country, – Opps, sorry the cat's out of the bag – I have nothing against individual Polish people. Many, I am told befriended the Jews. Others have been family members in Europe that I never met. Still others that came to the U.S. fought, as their children did, in the American Army. However, I can't say good things about some of the Polish governments.

While the circular firing squad joke had been dead for years, it had gone the way of the five cents cigar – good riddance to smoking – the Democratic Party has revived it. It is in the news every day during the Biden administration as the actions of progressive and centrist Democrats have indeed been similar to forming a circular firing squad with the target being the Biden agenda.

The problem is that the PR strategy of the progressive and centrist Democrats has thus far only helped the Republicans. Only the mid-term elections will reveal if the damage done to the Democrats were repaired by their recent legislative victories.

In our business, what the centrist and progressive Democrats have done is equivalent to happenings in the agency world, where some agency people secretly hope that a major project will fail because it means those in charge of the project will not be viewed kindly by management, thus opening up a lane of advancement for others.

However not is all lost for the Democrats. In a July poll conducted by The New York Times and Siena College, 41 percent of registered voters said they preferred Democrats to control Congress, compared with 40 percent who preferred Republicans.

The big question is can the temporary accommodations between the progressive and centrist Democrats with the majority of their party hold?

Even if it does it will take a more superior public relations program than the Democrats have thus far had to convince voters that the party's wish list will benefit the voters. Thus far Democrats PR strategy has been as dull and repetitive as most PR agency strategies. (Don't believe me. Ask the editors, reporters and producers to level with you.)

Only the do-nothing Republicans has thus far saved the Democrats from total disaster, which still might happen if the progressives and centrists can't continue to do what's best for their party prior to the November mid-terms.

The overturning of Roe v Wade and the less than effective gun control legislation that the Republicans forced on the Democrats have given them a chance. Together with the January 6 Select Committee hearings they have given the Democrats an opening for victory in the mid-terms.

In order to take advantage of that opportunity the Democrats must propose and campaign on legislation that appeal to the entire spectrum of Americans, not just to those in the large urban areas. They must take into consideration the needs and beliefs of rural Americans, who have drifted away from the Democrats because of the party's neglect. They must stop catering to the progressive social Democrats wing of their party and not be afraid to criticize them when appropriate. They must acknowledge that the trashing of cities by hoodlums is wrong. They must support the police and also call them out when circumstances show that unnecessary force was used.

In addition, Democrats must begin promoting candidates from rural areas, not just from the big cities. They must begin, right now, having spokesperson who represent these rural areas. Their big city strategy has been a failure. If the

Democrats are the “Big Tent Party,” as they claim, they must they must include people from the rural areas.

(On July 5, on this website, I named several Democratic office holders that should be given a more prominent role in disseminating the party’s position. They represent the broad spectrum of American politics that is necessary for the party to be taking seriously in parts of America that has been abandoned by the big-city Democratic strategy for so many years.)

It’s time for the Democrats to swim or sink and realize that there’s more to the United States than the big cities on both coasts and in mid-America. Political victories in rural “small town” America still matters.

The Lesson For People In Our Business

Those of us who have been in the agency rodeo for a number of years know that there are many brass tarnished rings and few gold rings. Despite management’s team concept propaganda the gold ring is awarded mainly to aggressive practitioners who put their own advancement as their main goal and will do anything they are asked to do, including being the office spy and complaining to management about others lack of skill. PR people should remember that even your best agency friend is after the same gold ring that you want. Trust your mother and father, not your agency colleagues and certainly not the H.R. department.



About the Author: Arthur Solomon, a former journalist, was a senior VP/senior counselor at Burson-Marsteller, and was responsible for restructuring, managing and playing key roles in some of the most significant national and international sports and non-sports programs. He also traveled internationally as a media adviser to high-ranking government officials. He now is a frequent contributor to public relations publications, consults on public relations projects and was on the Seoul Peace Prize nominating committee. He has been a key player on Olympic marketing programs and also has worked at high-level positions directly for Olympic organizations. Early in his career he worked for a political a public relations agency, working on local, state and presidential campaigns.