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May 18, 2015: Where Is the Democratic Party Leadership on Trade?

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Title: Where Is the Democratic Party Leadership on Trade?

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5/18/2015—I thought pandering to the base was a Republican Party monopoly. Apparently not. Specifically, where is Paul Krugman on the Trans-Pacific Partnership—the Trade Deal? In his op-eds, Krugman is pro-free trade. But he has been mostly silent on the opposition in the Senate by Democrats to the TPP. I had thought that Krugman was afraid to say he supports the deal because Democratic Party sentiment is against it. Turns out, if you read his blog, he mildly opposes the deal and does not think it that important. He says it is not really a trade deal. But there is a larger point here. The New York Times today ran a story about a closed refrigerator plant in Galesburg, Illinois that Barack Obama had noted in his 2004 Democratic National Convention speech. It's still closed. The workers are still out of work or underemployed. In other words, the argument is not just over this trade deal, but still over the NAFTA. On this issue, Krugman originally supported free trade, rather strongly, but in the telling by William Greider in the Nation in 2013, Krugman has since pulled back in his support. Look, I don't know about trade. I assume that it is generally a very good thing. And even closed factories in the US would probably have closed anyway, free trade or no. But I can be persuaded by a real debate. But what is needed is that real debate within the Democratic Party—and we are not having it. Right now, there is less discussion of the trade issue in the Democratic Party than over global warming in the Republican Party. Why am I reading about trade in Krugman's blog and not in his columns? It ought to be possible to decide whether the NAFTA was overall a good thing for America or not. This absence of discussion is more indication of the sickness within our political life than the partisan gridlock in Washington.