

Obama clinches Democratic presidential nomination

Patrick Martin
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Senator Barack Obama won the Democratic Party's presidential nomination Tuesday as dozens of superdelegates—congressmen, senators, governors and party officials—rushed to endorse his candidacy on the final day of the primary campaign.

Obama split the last two primaries with Hillary Clinton, winning Montana and losing South Dakota, but the number of delegates at stake in those two lightly populated states—31—was dwarfed by the more than 200 uncommitted superdelegates who began to swing decisively to Obama as he approached the total of 2,118 delegates required for the nomination.

A joint statement issued Wednesday by four top Democratic Party leaders—party chairman Howard Dean, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Joe Manchin, chairman of the Democratic Governors Association—called on all still-uncommitted superdelegates to declare their presidential preference by Friday.

ABC News reported Wednesday evening that Clinton would officially drop out of the race and endorse Obama by that deadline. She deferred any such concession in her address to supporters Tuesday night after the polls closed in South Dakota.

The struggle for the Democratic presidential nomination was the most protracted in recent US history. Obama took a decisive lead among Democratic convention delegates in the last three weeks of February, when he won 11 consecutive primaries and caucuses. Clinton won nine of the final 14 primaries, but was unable to overcome the margin of more than 150 delegates that her opponent had accumulated.

Clinton entered the campaign with huge advantages over her half-dozen rivals, including far greater institutional and financial support, but proved to have been fatally weakened by her vote in October 2002 to authorize the war in Iraq. Her decision to give Bush the authority to invade Iraq reflected a double miscalculation: overestimating the power of American imperialism, and underestimating the degree of opposition to the war that would emerge among the American people.

Obama's campaign was not in any genuine sense an "antiwar" campaign, although he appealed to popular hostility to the war in Iraq and constantly linked Clinton and Bush with his refrain that Iraq was "a war that should never have been authorized and never been waged."

The Illinois senator represents a section of the American ruling elite that has concluded that the invasion and conquest of Iraq was a strategic debacle and that a significant change in posture and personnel is required to salvage the interests of American imperialism in the Middle East and internationally. These layers do not oppose military action as such, but regard the Bush administration's single-minded focus on winning a military victory in Iraq as unwise and ultimately disastrous.

Long before Obama became a household name, filling stadiums and attracting small contributions by the millions over the Internet, his candidacy had attracted the support of a significant section of the Democratic foreign policy establishment, including figures like former Carter national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and former Clinton national security adviser Anthony Lake.

They were drawn to Obama not so much by his critique of the Bush administration—which was not particularly vigorous, even by the toothless standards of the congressional Democrats—as by the symbolic effect that the election of the first African-American president would have in terms of reviving illusions, both internationally and within the United States, in the democratic pretensions of American capitalism.

With Obama's nomination effectively secured, the American media has now gone into overdrive to peddle such illusions. The television networks have devoted endless hours to glorifying the great achievement of American democracy in nominating an African-American to lead the presidential ticket of one of the two major bourgeois parties for the first time in US history.

There is no doubt that such illusions are currently widespread, and not only among minority workers and young people of all racial backgrounds, who are genuinely appalled by the outgoing Bush-Cheney administration's eight-year record of war, reaction and social decay.

But the significance of Obama's nomination, as well as his election on November 4, should that occur, cannot be judged on the basis of such superficial considerations as skin color. Despite the incessant claims of the media and of their Democratic Party supporters and apologists, Obama no more represents the interests of black and minority people than Hillary Clinton represents the interests of all women.

Both Obama and Clinton are political representatives of the American ruling elite, the small financial aristocracy which controls all the economic and political levers within US society, including the two officially recognized "major" parties and the mass media.

Obama is a fervent defender of the profit system and has the backing of some of the wealthiest individuals—including billionaire investor Warren Buffett, who this year became the single richest man in America, surpassing Bill Gates of Microsoft.

Like Senator Obama, Mr. Buffett is an intelligent man, and he is not backing the Illinois Democrat because he seeks a radical transformation in American society. He supports Obama because he recognizes, as do the more thoughtful sections of the ruling elite, that at least a significant cosmetic change is required in American political life to forestall an upheaval from below.

The Obama nomination is not the product of a popular insurgency against the Democratic Party establishment or of a mass movement from below, as some of Obama's more self-deluded supporters on the liberal left now proclaim. The role of the masses in the Obama campaign is best demonstrated by the rallies like that held Tuesday night in St. Paul, Minnesota—the people serve as extras in a well-developed, highly skillful marketing campaign. The purpose of this campaign is to refurbish American capitalist politics without touching its rotten foundations.

Obama is a willing and, to a relatively high degree, conscious instrument of this campaign. This was clearly demonstrated in both the circumstances—starting with the flag pin on his lapel, once the subject of media attention—and the content of his speech Tuesday night declaring

himself the victor in the struggle for the Democratic presidential nomination.

Obama attacked his presumptive Republican opponent, Senator John McCain, over his “stay-the-course” policy in Iraq, but he couched his critique of the war in nationalistic terms. The Bush-McCain policy, he said, “asks everything of our brave men and women in uniform and nothing of Iraqi politicians,” as though it was Iraq exploiting the United States, and not the reverse. He cited the cost of the war for the American people, but not the far greater cost inflicted upon the Iraqi population by the American invasion and occupation, which has virtually destroyed Iraq as a functioning society.

At the same time, the Democratic candidate further parsed his supposed commitment to bring an end to the war, declaring—in implicit rejection of any rapid pullout of troops—“I won’t stand here and pretend that there are many good options left in Iraq.” He added, “We must be as careful getting out of Iraq as we were careless getting in, but start leaving we must.” At some points in the campaign, Obama has suggested that all US combat troops would be pulled out in his first year in the White House. This has been whittled down to a vague pledge to “start leaving,” a formulation that opens the door to an occupation of essentially indefinite duration.

Any US troops pulled out of Iraq would be available for military operations in other parts of the world, he made clear, particularly in Afghanistan, where he said, “It’s time to refocus our efforts.”

He asserted the goal of reviving the world standing and position of the United States: “We must once again have the courage and the conviction to lead the free world. That is the legacy of Roosevelt and Truman and Kennedy.” In other words, the Democratic presidents who led the United States in World War II, the Korean War and the early stages of Vietnam.

Obama continued this emphasis on revived and renewed American militarism in his speech Wednesday morning to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the principal pro-Israel lobby in Washington. He declared that he would never negotiate with Hamas and other Islamic and nationalist groups that refuse to recognize the state of Israel.

“There is no room at the negotiating table for terrorist organizations,” he said, adding, “Contrary to the claims of some, I have no interest in sitting down with our adversaries just for the sake of talking.”

He criticized the Bush administration and Senator McCain on the grounds that the war in Iraq had strengthened Iran, the most formidable opponent of Israel in the Middle East. While repeating his support for diplomatic engagement with Iran, he said, “I will always keep the threat of military action on the table to defend our security and our ally Israel.”

Press reports indicated that the 7,000 people attending the AIPAC conference gave Obama a far warmer reception than McCain, who addressed the same gathering two days earlier. Obama prostrated himself before the Zionist lobby, saying, “Israel’s security is sacrosanct. It is non-negotiable.”

Any Mideast peace agreement, he said, must “preserve Israel’s identity as a Jewish state, with secure, recognized and defensible borders. Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided.”

As for Iran, the *Toronto Globe & Mail* correspondent at the AIPAC meeting commented, “Sen. Obama seemed almost as hawkish as Sen. McCain or current President George W. Bush.”

Obama told AIPAC, “The danger from Iran is grave, it is real, and my goal will be to eliminate this threat.” He added, in language that was vague but undeniably ominous, “I will do everything in my power—everything, everything—to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.”

An Obama presidency would not represent a fundamental break with the politics of American imperialism, but rather its continuation in a new form. The first black president will prove as determined to uphold the interests of the US ruling elite as the first black secretary of state, Colin

Powell, and his successor Condoleezza Rice, who is also African-American.

It is not skin color, but class position, which is the decisive political criterion. It is necessary to reiterate this fundamental Marxist truth under conditions in which all manner of left liberals will seek to reinforce illusions in Obama and, through him, in the Democratic Party and the profit system as a whole.

Typical in this regard is the latest editorial in the *Nation*, hailing the outcome of the primary campaign as “a historic moment for Obama, for the Democratic party and for the American experiment. For the first time since the founding of the republic, a major party has nominated an African-American man for the presidency.”

The editorial gushed about “the most remarkable fact of this race: That in a country where women and most African Americans were denied the right to vote in 1908, a woman and an African-American man split the highest-ever turnout in a presidential nomination contest in 2008... For most of its history, America has been an incomplete democracy. But, for the past five months, it has struggled to deliver on the promise of a more perfect union.”

The magazine concluded with a paean to the Democratic Party, the party that for a century defended slavery and racial apartheid in the South: “History will record that the Democratic party, which in the middle passage of the 20th century committed more freely and more fully than the Republican party to freedom’s cause and the struggle to shatter those glass ceilings, began to harvest the fruits of its past commitments in the first months of 2008.”

The truth is that the Democratic Party and the Republican Party are both instruments of the American ruling elite, whose differences are tactical rather than fundamental.

Driving an Obama administration will be the ongoing and ever-deepening crisis of American and world capitalism, and the efforts of the US ruling elite to defend its world position and its dominance at home by every possible means—from the honeyed words of the Democratic presidential candidate to police-state spying and war.



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