

Democratic Party demagoguery in South Carolina debate

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18 January 2016

Sunday's Democratic presidential debate in Charleston, South Carolina was an exercise in demagoguery and bad faith, with all three candidates—former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Senator Bernie Sanders and former Governor Martin O'Malley—using populist rhetoric to promote the false claim that the Democratic Party is a vehicle for opposing Wall Street and the domination of American society by the financial elite.

Led by Sanders, who calls himself a “socialist,” the candidates sought to outdo one another in painting themselves as opponents of social inequality. Their rhetoric was clearly a response to what they see as growing opposition to the political establishment and the capitalist system, particularly among workers and young people.

Earlier Sunday, “Meet the Press” moderator Chuck Todd noted in an interview with Hillary Clinton that “43 percent of likely Democratic caucus goers identified themselves as socialist,” while “only 38 percent of likely Democratic caucus goers identified themselves as capitalist”—a reality he suggested might cause Clinton to lose next month's Iowa caucus vote to Sanders.

The debate took place against the backdrop of a deepening economic crisis, following two weeks of massive losses on US stock exchanges and the announcement by Walmart that it will close 269 stores and slash 16,000 jobs.

Only hours before the debate, the British charity Oxfam released a study showing that the world's 62 richest people controlled more wealth last year than the bottom half of humanity, some 3.5 billion people. The report revealed that the wealth of these 62 people had increased by 44 percent since 2010—to \$1.76 trillion—while the wealth of the world's poorest half

had fallen by 41 percent.

The alienation of broad sections of the American population from the entire political establishment and the growth of anti-capitalist sentiment have manifested themselves in growing support for Sanders, who talks of a “political revolution” in the interests of the “middle class and working families.” Sanders has been gaining on Clinton in national polls and is within striking distance of defeating Clinton in both the Iowa Caucus on February 1 and the New Hampshire primary on February 9.

Sanders sought to take the offensive throughout Sunday's debate. He called for breaking up the biggest US banks and boasted that he did not accept money from Wall Street, unlike Hilary Clinton, who, he pointed out more than once, received \$600,000 in speaking fees from Goldman Sachs in a single year.

Clinton replied, “There's no daylight on the basic premise that there should be no bank too big to fail and no individual too powerful to jail.” Former Governor Martin O'Malley declared, “I have put forward a plan that would actually put cops back on the beat of Wall Street.”

Amid such denunciations of the subordination of the government to Wall Street, what none of the candidates cared to mention was the fact that the sitting president, who has spent the last seven years looking after the interests of the banks, is the leader of their own party. All three of the debaters repeatedly declared their support for Obama.

Even as the Treasury and Federal Reserve funneled trillions of dollars in virtually free cash to the banks and hedge funds, the Obama White House made the expansion of poverty-wage jobs the basis of its 2009 auto restructuring and supported the gutting of workers' pension benefits in the Detroit bankruptcy.

Under Obama, not a single Wall Street banker has been prosecuted for the criminal activities that triggered the 2008 financial meltdown and threw millions of workers into poverty.

But when asked about his relationship to the current president, Sanders declared, “In 2006, when I ran for the Senate, Senator Barack Obama was kind enough to campaign for me. In 2008, I did my best to see that he was elected, and in 2012, I worked as hard as I could to see that he was reelected.”

Sanders did not attempt to square this support for a pro-Wall Street president with his supposed socialist politics.

Later in the debate, Sanders reiterated his campaign call for a “political revolution” to rein in the “handful of billionaires who control economic and political life in this country.” But of what does this “political revolution” consist?

Sanders has repeatedly rejected any call for public ownership of industry, telling ABC News’ George Stephanopoulos that very morning that he opposed the nationalization of the oil companies or utilities.

Sanders’ “revolution” is nothing of the kind. It excludes any change in basic economic relations or even the party in power, which, as he himself admits, is dominated by the financial elite. He evidently wants the public to believe that like the Walls of Jericho, Wall Street will come tumbling down with one blast of hot air.

Beyond his rhetorical denunciations of the banks and invocations of “socialism,” what Sanders is proposing is nothing more than what was not so long ago considered run-of-the-mill liberal Democratic politics. But even his modest reform proposals will be dropped entirely if Sanders is elected president, just as Clinton and Obama broke their campaign pledges and countless other Democrats before them.

The real character of the candidates was revealed when they spoke on international affairs. All three accepted entirely and without question the framework and underlying premises of US foreign policy, dominated by military violence and war crimes around the world. Sanders called on “countries like Saudi Arabia”—abloodyssemi-feudaldictatorship—tointervene in Syria “with our support and the support of other major countries”—a further escalation of the US-led war that has already killed hundreds of thousands of people

and turned millions more into homeless refugees.

Despite the candidates’ populist blather, the reality underscored by the debate is that the Democratic Party is an imperialist, pro-war party whose aim is to defend and expand the wealth and power of the billionaire oligarchs who dominate American society.



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